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INTERIOR DESIGN SHOW VANCOUVER

TRENDS

Inspiration, support and 'room to breathe'

What influences shape West Coast design – and how are they reflected in the work of the region's top talent?

When designers Ben Barber, Patrick "Duffy" De Armas of Electric Coffin, and Charlotte Pommet and Elliot Kendall reflect on their processes, a few common threads emerge. They all get inspired by the natural world and love to spend time outdoors. They also value collaboration, thrive on community connections and are willing to push boundaries.

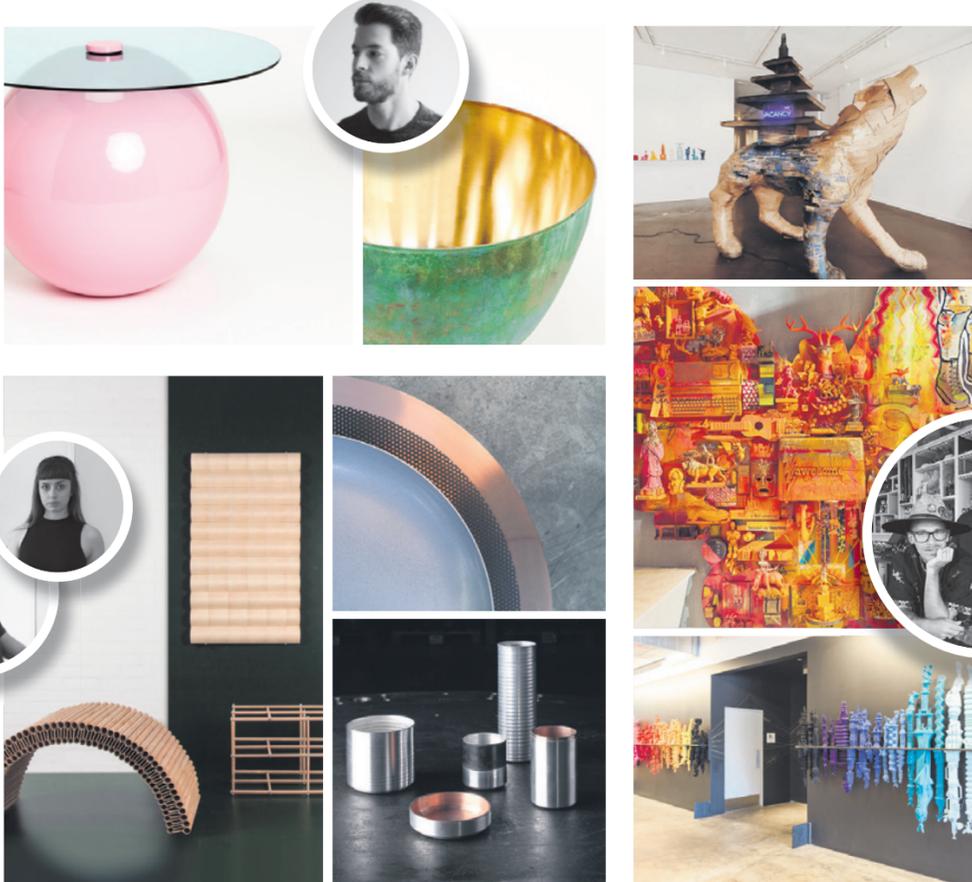
Barber, who was recently named a top Canadian product designer by design magazine AZURE, muses that the Pacific Northwest's less defined design history may allow him and his compatriots to experiment more and feel less constrained. The trained sculptor founded his Vancouver, B.C., studio in 2014 after studying at New York's Pratt Institute. What he loves about Vancouver is the easy access to the outdoors – and the resulting active lifestyle.

"Many artists are drawn by the West Coast's natural beauty, and this is reflected in the work," says Barber, who likes cycling, flyfishing, rock climbing and snowboarding. "All those activities are a way to relax, especially fly fishing; it's meditative. While it's difficult to pinpoint a direct correlation between my lifestyle and my work, I feel that a slower and more relaxed pace results in more distilled pieces."

Barber, whose design is known for a minimalist style paired with a vibrant palette that includes pale blue, pink and orange, says his ideas and visuals are already "flushed out" in his head before he sketches them on the computer. "From there, I start thinking about the actual physical constraints, about how the piece can be engineered and work in the world."

Barber likes to work with local manufacturers, and brings his sketches into a collaborative stage, where he engages with metal spinners, welders and wood manufacturers to test potential constraints and limitations that may have bearing on his designs. West Coast design, he believes, is in essence very collaborative. "The majority of local designers and craftsmen enjoy sharing ideas and brainstorming," he says. "It's a way to make your work better."

De Armas of Electric Coffin, a Seattle-based design studio, says collaboration is also central to his team's success.



A passion for collaboration and for pushing boundaries are among the common elements in the works of Ben Barber, Patrick "Duffy" De Armas of Electric Coffin, and Charlotte Pommet and Elliot Kendall (clockwise from top right), designers who have chosen the Pacific Northwest as their home. SUPPLIED

ABOUT



Interior Design Show (IDS) Vancouver – the Pacific platform for all things design – will be held from September 28 to October 1, 2017, to celebrate the West Coast's creative and collaborative energy.

For more information, visit vancouver.interiordesignshow.com.

"Everyone at Electric Coffin brings a unique perspective to the narrative," he explains. "This allows us to come up with some really dynamic results."

Electric Coffin's eclectic portfolio includes an installation at Amazon, a Future Machine Exhibition with the Bellevue Arts Museum and work for Facebook and Expedia. The design studio's clients value the team's ability to integrate elements from different areas like architecture, advertising and design, says De Armas. "We try to find ways to connect ideas or concepts that may seem disparate, but in actuality relate more than people assume."

Collaboration and the exchange of ideas also happen in the larger community, says De Armas. "Communities

tend to be tight-knit and supportive here, and that attracts a certain kind of talent. People are willing to help one another, and jive and collaborate."

A sense of openness and positivity is also reflected in the market, where the contribution of creative minds is valued and respected, says De Armas. "I don't think it's a coincidence that more and more Northwest designers are gaining national and international recognition. We have access to all these amazing resources, whether it's the nature – which is an important source

of inspiration – or the community and the support from businesses. There is a lot of growth. It's an exciting time to work in this region."

Among new talent attracted to the Pacific Northwest are Pommet and Kendall, who recently moved to Vancouver, B.C., after attending Design Academy Eindhoven in The Netherlands. The two designers have experience working with a wide range of materials, including metal, wood, ceramics, plastics and textiles. "We're not fixated on one sector and like to push boundaries. We get to know a process and then we push it further and discover new things," says Kendall, who returns to his West Coast roots (he grew up on Vancouver Island).

Pommet, who hails from France, adds, "We don't like to get comfortable with what we know."

An example of their work is a project called "Per Meter" – a collaboration with a German veneer mill. "[Veneer] is no longer so popular, but it's a very economical and environmentally friendly use of wood," Pommet explains. By thoroughly analyzing the properties of numerous species and grain, the duo developed prototype modules that achieve a unique balance of strength and volume, making them highly versatile and adaptable to a wide range of potential applications.

This quest for innovative uses of available resources is something that can be found throughout their portfolio, says Pommet. "We believe collaborating with industry is essential to a project."

They are excited to explore similar possibilities on the West Coast, where they have noticed a special focus on sustainability, says Kendall. "We're very self-driven and want to try out new things. We're looking to work with different industries to meet different wants and needs."

So far, the experience has been promising. "Since we arrived here, we felt so much inspiration, even just by looking at this city sitting in the midst of mountains and ocean," says Kendall, adding that they particularly enjoy "the room to breathe around us."

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PROFILE

Connecting design and industry through creativity

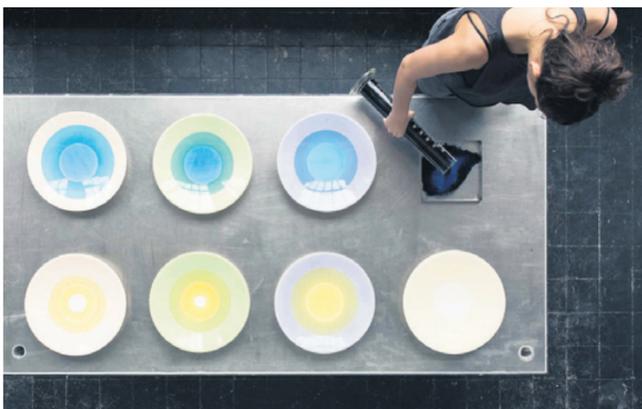
In searching for new approaches and processes, Renee Mennen and Stefanie van Keijsteren bring their own creativity but at the same time stay curious and receptive to outcomes that reflect the unique properties of the varied materials they work with. One of the common elements that can be discovered in the portfolio of the Eindhoven design duo RENS – which specializes in interior products and collections shaped by different materials and techniques – is a willingness to explore and embrace the unknown of a new process. Another one is a passion for collaboration.

"For us, the most interesting part is to find new connections to factories or brands and work together," says Mennen. "We always look for new ways to collaborate; for example, we did a project with DESSO, a carpets company."

For this collaboration, the designers turn out-of-date carpets into a collection called "Re-vive," explains Mennen. "To give carpets a second life, we dye them by hand. And every carpet looks different, depending on how the combination of materials reacts to the pigments."

The idea to extend the lifespan of available resources is not a new one for RENS, she adds, neither is the bold use of colour. The studio's Colour Traces collection uses a similar approach. In collaboration with Cor Unum, a ceramics company, the designers place ceramic objects in liquid pigment, and the colours soak into the material, forming patterns and leaving traces depending on the porosity of the material and the duration of the dye.

Mennen explains that over a course of time, the material gradually paints itself – tinted by the interplay of clay, dye and glaze – and transforms conventional plates into unique wall objects.



Ceramics and carpets are part of the portfolio of design duo RENS from The Netherlands. SUPPLIED

Creativity connects designers and industry, believes Mennen. "We are always looking for partnership opportunities for our research-based approach," she says. This way of creating is what appeals to RENS' customers and galleries.

"They know our story and how we work, and are attracted by our way of thinking and designing things," says Mennen. She adds that the duo is excited to participate in IDS Vancouver, which hosted a number of Eindhoven designers in 2016. "We heard a lot about Vancouver and look forward to connecting with West Coast designers and design lovers."



Olivia Alvarez, Imu Chan and Alek Rokosz of Vancouver architectural firm FSOARK with the model of the Tokyo Exchange at IDS Vancouver. SUPPLIED

INTERNATIONAL

At the intersection of cultures, function and design

Symbolizing "exchange," the Tokyo X signifies the coming together of Tokyo and Vancouver at this year's Interior Design Show (IDS) Vancouver. Situated on a 40-square-metre space, the overlapping structure inhabits an "island space, which is open on all sides – a very different way of experiencing a trade show exhibit," says Imu Chan, principal and creative director of Vancouver architectural firm FSOARK.

The concept was developed by Chan's team in collaboration with the Tokyo-based design studios we+ and Design for Industry, all of which are participating in the fourth installment of the exchange at IDS Vancouver. "We considered the type of products that will be presented in order to come up with an exhibition model that works best," says Chan. Curated by Design Milk, the exchange represents highlights of Tokyo's design scene, which is known for mixing ancient and modern, liberal and conservative, and east and west influences.

The resulting space reminds Chan of a gallery presentation, where visitors can walk up close to exhibits that are set off against "white space, which serves to highlight the purity of the pieces." The collaboration gave Chan an appreciation for how Japanese design combines "serving a utilitarian purpose and, at the same time, capturing the spirit behind the creation," he says. "This is something that is perhaps

ingrained in Japanese culture."

A similar approach is also reflected in FSOARK's work, he explains. "Architectural projects always have a functional element, but we like to ask, 'What more can we do?' And we don't mean 'more' in terms of quantity. In fact, we often aim to do less in quantity in order to let the quality shine." The key lies in exploring a project's latent potential that can inform function and design, says Chan. "Discovering a hidden intent gives our work its soul. It requires that we, as architects, are good listeners who aim to dig deeper."

Chan sees his team as "multidisciplinary thinkers and problem solvers, who gain efficiency in a focused approach to tackling challenges." This non-traditional strategy is reflected in FSOARK's portfolio, which includes projects from multi-family residences and custom homes to commercial interiors and public art installations, but especially embraces projects that transcend one traditional discipline or sector. Recent examples are Cartems Donuterie's new Kitsilano location and the Kaleido portable and ready-to-assemble furniture that was introduced for Places for People 2017, a City of Vancouver campaign.

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Interior Design Show Sept 28-Oct 1 2017 Vancouver



Let's Explore



Welcome to Walaland

Camille Walala's iconic and colourful designs are seen in venues and adorning buildings across London, Sydney, New York and beyond. See Camille on the Caesarstone Stage on Saturday, September 30.

Presented by ANN SACKS.

Explore

IDSVancouver.com #IDSLetsExplore

Vancouver Convention Centre West	Thurs Sept 28 Opening Night Party	Fri Sept 29 Miele Trade Day	Sat Sept 30 General Admission	Sun Oct 1 General Admission
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