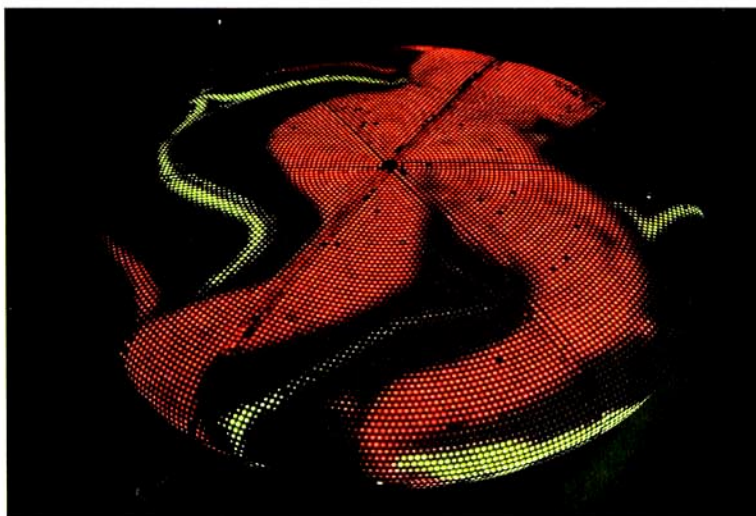




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DESIGN
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THE TALK



Fully formed: clockwise from top left, Ron Arad's Lo-Rez-Dolores-Tabula-Rasa table; Lolita chandelier for Swarovski; Oh Void 2 chair; and Rover Chair.

Design Revolutionary

FOR **RON ARAD**, IT'S ABOUT THE PROCESS, NOT THE PRODUCT.
ALEXANDRA LANGE REPORTS.

A few years ago DuPont, trolling for designers to appear in a show that would demonstrate the joys of its synthetic material Corian, approached the designer Ron Arad, and Arad turned them down flat: "I said, 'When you want to do a major project, come back.'" Playing hard to get worked. Arad, as it happened, had been experimenting with putting images inside an object — planting fiber optics in solid materials — and Corian turned out to be the perfect vehicle. "It becomes translucent, but you can cut it or carve it," he says. In this case, he carved Corian into three parts — a 32-foot-wide wall, a 16-foot column and an M & M-shaped table — for his Lo-Rez-Dolores-Tabula-Rasa. The three pieces look like blank surfaces when not in use, but when turned on, the images hug their curves without distortion but with a little pixelated mystery.

"It is a bit of a mad idea," he says, chuckling about the low resolution of the images, while "the rest of the world is working really hard to improve resolution." Arad, Israeli-born and London-based, has always been both a step ahead of and a step behind the rest of the design world. He's driven by the way things are made rather than the way things look. This shows up in Lo-Rez not only in the fuzzy images but also in the fact that the high-tech surfaces have to be handmade — each fiber threaded into the grid by hand.

In May, design enthusiasts will have the opportunity to judge the low-res effect for themselves, when Arad has his first major New York exhibition since 1987. Barry Friedman Ltd. has organized a two-part show: a retrospective uptown at its

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Screen saver: Arad gives even ordinary materials a new life. Here he's threaded Corian with fiber optics.

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gallery (May 5-June 24) and downtown at Phillips, de Pury & Company (May 2-June 10). Arad has also asked the British director Mike Figgis to create a film montage for the project that will appear on the Corian screens.

Accompanying the show will be a deluxe monograph featuring essays on Arad by devotees like Issey Miyake, Jean Nouvel and Reed Krakoff, the executive creative director of Coach (which is a cosponsor of the book and the exhibition). Krakoff has collected Arad's designs for years and in fact works at an elegant Arad paper honeycomb and carbon-fiber desk. "It is a piece of sculpture, but you can use it every day," Krakoff says. "It is covered with stacks of paper, markers, things from my kids."

Arad, 53, has come a long way from his ready-made-object beginnings in a Covent Garden warehouse. The earliest piece in the retrospective will be his 1981 Rover Chair: a leather seat from that popular British car, mounted between semicircular steel-pipe supports. Arad bought the seats from local junkyards, thinking they were better made than any chair he could devise. He sold the first examples to Jean Paul Gaultier, for £99 each.

Only a few of Arad's other pieces involve ready-made objects, including the just-the-way-it-sounds Concrete Stereo. He has also been inspired by classic, even fusty furniture shapes. His Victoria & Albert Chair (2001) looks like a cozy Deco-inflected club chair, but it comes in patinated steel. (At the palmbeach3 fair in January, Friedman sold five at \$18,500 each.) His Chair by Its Cover series surrounds iconic modern chairs with a stainless-steel cloak.

For Arad it's about the process. As the British architecture critic Deyan Sudjic has written, "Simple good taste . . . has become disturbingly empty." Arad's pieces are too aggressive, too funny, even too ugly to be simple. Says Arad, "I tend to go for different adjectives, like interesting or boring."

"If something is interesting, that's enough for me." ■