INTERIOR DESIGN
JANUARY 2009

crosslines

the secret of his success

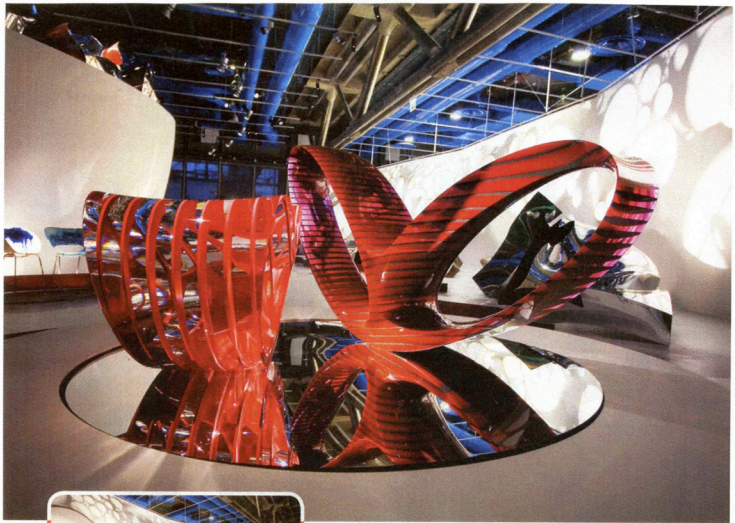
For Ron Arad, it's about wearing many, many different hats

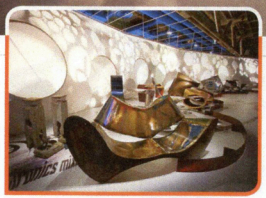
There are multidisciplinary designers, and then there's Ron Arad. Few have dominated disparate creative fields like this prolific, irreverent Israeli-born Londoner. Since making a splash in the 1980's by turning Rover 2000 seats into roving chairs, Arad has cheekily blurred the boundaries between design, technology, art, and craft.

Ron Arad Associates's architectural work includes the Duomo Hotel in Rimini, Italy; Yohji Yamamoto's Y's store in Tokyo; and the upcoming Holon Design Museum in Israel. As one of the world's most recognizable industrial designers, Arad has scored a string of hits for Alessi, Kartell, Moroso, and Vitra. He's also been called the "art world's favorite furniture designer."

His one-off and limited-edition art pieces transform Corian, Cor-Ten steel, and aeronautic aluminum into shapely curves. Besides commanding six-figure sums at auction and earning him solo shows at New York's Friedman Benda gallery and London's Timothy Taylor Gallery, these highly collectible objects figure in the permanent collections of the world's top museums. A major retrospective, now at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, will travel in August to New York's Museum of Modern Art.

From left: *Bodyguard, a sculpture in polished aluminum. The namesake founder of Ron Arad Associates*





From top: Oh Void 2 and Oh Void 1 in acrylic. "Ron Arad: No Discipline" at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

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You seem to be having quite a moment.

The Pompidou-MoMA show is a major thing, and I hope it's a peak for me. But it's all been a smooth ride. The crossover has been from studio pieces to industrial objects, which is exactly the opposite of the current trend—a short-lived one, I hope.

Do you see studio pieces as functional art, sculptural furniture, or something else entirely?

With some of the studio pieces in the form of chairs, you may try and sit on them in the gallery and find them comfortable, but they weren't designed for people in the market for a new chaise longue. It's a different set of criteria, and it's about different pleasures.

How are the studio pieces created?

For many of them, we borrow from the aircraft industry. We use a superplastic aluminum that's rich in magnesium and lets you polish the metal to an amazing mirrored finish that looks like stainless steel—it's very labor intensive. The aluminum is formed in London and cut, polished, and welded at my studio in Belgium.

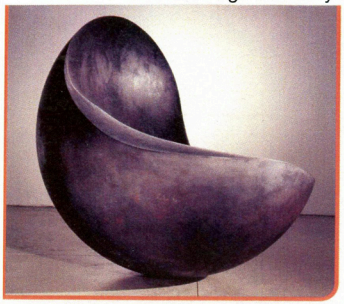
My Ping-Pong table is made of bronze and steel formed and welded together, which they say you shouldn't ever do. I ignored that.

How would you describe the evolution from older to newer pieces?

In the beginning, I enjoyed the limitations of doing only what I could do in my workshop in London. I started with found objects and readymades. Then I began brushing steel. As my skills developed, I couldn't pretend to be naive and primitive anymore. I'm a fast learner. I went to Italy to get some distance, starting a workshop there in 1994, and later expanded to the space in Belgium.

What have your biggest influences been?

Everything is an influence. What I hear and read. What I see when I look out the door of the studio. Even a car crashing into a lamppost. I don't have an affinity for or loyalty to any type of object or period of history.



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Do you distinguish between your furniture and objects and your architecture and interiors?

Obviously, there's a difference of scale, but the connections come from approaching things with the same eye. Architecture certainly involves more people and more negotiation. When I'm making the studio pieces, I don't have to negotiate anything with anyone.

Does working in one discipline influence the others?

Absolutely. The art influences the architecture and vice versa. The work we do—studying, sketching, making—is our own biggest source of inspiration, though I hate that word. It all works within its own orbit.

What do you think the Pompidou and MoMA exhibition will reveal about you?

People will see lots of different things from different periods, objects that have never "met" one another before—like siblings separated at birth, meeting for the first time. A lot of pieces will be in both exhibitions, but there will be some at MoMA that don't even exist yet, so the shows will be exactly the same yet completely different.

The biggest difference will be a major installation at MoMA, by far the most ambitious work in the exhibition. It's called *Cage Sans Frontières*, and it's a single piece made of cells of stainless and Cor-Ten steel, almost 120 feet long, 40 feet wide, and 16 feet tall. You won't know what's inside and what's outside.

—Raul Barreneche

COURTESY OF FRIEDMAN BENDA

From top: *Southern Hemisphere in patinated aluminum, issued in an edition of six. Bodyguard 3 (Orchid) in polished, tinted aluminum.*