

# ICON

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BRAZIL

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INTERNATIONAL DESIGN,  
ARCHITECTURE & CULTURE

## FAVELA POP

A generation inspired by the Campana brothers forges its own unique style

## PRAÇA DAS ARTES

A cultural centre in São Paulo builds on a legacy of inviting brutalism

## DANIEL LIBESKIND

The New York architect is building his first South American project in Brazil

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We knock on the metal grill of a nondescript shuttered frontage in the Santa Cecilia district of São Paulo, a vibrant Italian neighbourhood full of supply shops, building stores and cantinas. The one-storey building is painted bright yellow and is connected to the grid by a messy umbilical cord of electrical wiring. A small door opens and, stooping through it, we enter the Campana brothers' studio. "This is their universe," gestures my guide Waldick Jatobá, creative director of Firma Casa, a design gallery for which Fernando and Humberto Campana designed a green facade of tropical foliage sprouting from 3,500 bent aluminium vases.

Inside there is a sweet smell of burning as welders work in a cloud of smoke on a bench for a Camper shoe store, a frame into which cheap plastic chairs will be inserted and then

buried in woven straw. Nailed to the wall above them are prototypes of the Coral chair, made from a messy continuous squiggle of red wire; Piranesi-like collages burst out of their frames; a leather alligator-print hammock is slung over a bannister. "I love coming here," Jatobá says. "There's this inspiration in the air."

In 1998, when their work was first exhibited at MoMA, the Campanas became internationally known for their brand of "favela pop". They take inspiration from Brazil's rich street culture

**Below left**  
Fernando  
Campana's  
office with  
Sushi table

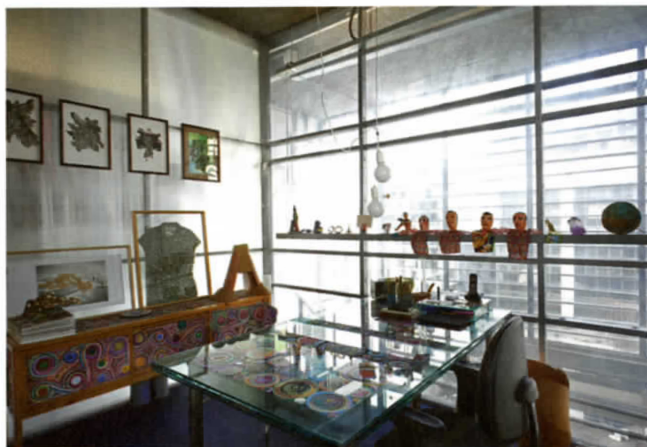
**Bottom**  
The Campana  
studio worksop

**Below right**  
Humberto's  
office with  
Vermelha  
chairs

and its shanty-towners' ingenious sense of making do, a form of homespun problem-solving that is referred to in Portuguese as "gambiarra". They define this as "spontaneous design – a way of living for a certain part of the Brazilian population". The brothers similarly push everyday, left-over or salvaged materials as far as they can – rag dolls, plastic tubing, discarded fruit crates – until a polished form becomes apparent, a process they compare to alchemy.

When I visit, the Campanas are in New York, where a solo show of their new work, Concepts, is opening that evening at the Friedman Benda gallery. This includes a series of chairs, screens and tables inspired by tennis rackets, their brass frames strung with gold nylon wire into which the scraps left over when wicker chairs are repaired are woven like broken spider's webs. Also featured are a wardrobe covered in fish scales and grass tufts, and glass shelves studded with generous chunks of amethyst.

In the studio, artisans are at work on other pieces intended for the interior of a hotel the brothers are designing in Phuket, Thailand. A proposed range of swing seats



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04  
Capote's  
tribute to the  
Panton chair

05  
Capote's stools  
made of  
shovels

06  
Cappote's  
table with  
hammer legs

07  
Capote's  
homage to the  
Tulip chair



one of ten students who participated in a museum show curated by the Campanas and went on to form a collective called No Tech to reflect the fact they make things by hand. "It is good to be influenced by them," Gay says. "I love their work – every time I see a new piece by them, I say, 'Wow, that's crazy!' They taught me to look at the things around me in different ways. The Campanas give the surprise – I also think my work does this, transforming the meaning of the object. We give a second life to things."

Gay has created hanging racks from tape measures, high-heeled shoes and meat tenderisers. She has fashioned a chair out of used inner tubes of tyres, a lamp out of a spool of yellow hosepipe, a tray out of lemon squeezers, a table out of metre rules and a light out of stacked funnels.

"My work is also about the memory of an object," she explains. "I give it another meaning, which people are amused by. I like to play with this thinking – to make people look at common things in new ways. Hopefully people will be inspired to reuse things in this way for themselves." However, she clarifies – showing me a table made of copper piping with neat bronze joins – her work is always well finished, unlike most Brazilian making do. "If you don't have polish, you can't sell it."

She is planning a field trip to the Amazon in October to study indigenous design and is working on a series of chairs made of interlaced multi-coloured car seatbelts, inspired by the patterns used in Indian woven baskets. "In Brazil, we don't have machines or easy access to technology," she says, "so we have

to create with fewer resources and more creativity."

"We are in shit here," she adds, matter of factly. "Our economy is in ruins, but we're used to living without stability. Brazilians find a way – they never give up."

Ana Neute, 27, and Rafael Chvaicer, 22, who work together in a studio near São Paulo's domestic airport, agree: "In Brazil we don't have a big industry, so we're free to experiment. We want to explore things, to do things by hand." They have created a series of box lamps that make a feature of the electric wires from which they are made. Looking at the tangle of multi-coloured cables inside these vitrines, one feels like a bomb disposal expert. The duo invoke the idea of *gambiarra* to describe their work, and acknowledge the Campanas' influence. "They explore materials that aren't design materials," they say, pointing to pendant lights they've made out of car headlights that are hung on swaths of silk like "medals for the home". Trained as architects, they also invoke Lina Bo Bardi. João Batista Vilanova Artigas and



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**GENERATION**

the heritage of the Campanas, they have their own language, materials, expression, somewhere between handicraft and design but with a sophisticated touch.

We walk from the Campanas' studio to a hardware store around the corner run by the parents of Leo Capote, 31, where the brothers still shop for materials. "They bought stuff from us," Capote explains. "When I commented that I liked design, they said I could train in the studio if I went to college." Capote apprenticed with the Campanas alongside studying for a degree in industrial design at the University of São Paulo. "It was fantastic, gorgeous, amazing," he says of the experience. "It was a time – 13 years ago – when they were not too famous. It was a small market, just starting to grow – they only had four people working for them. Now they have 13. They taught me how to change an idea into a final product."

In his parents' store, alongside the neatly arranged armies of screwdrivers, brushes and doorstops, a selection of Capote's work, created from these raw materials, is on display. A shovel, the object of Duchamp's first "readymade", is bent over, its handle contorted to form a stool; 12 trowels are arranged in a radial pattern to form a bowl.

"Everyday objects inspire me," he says. "I like to change the utility of an object. Every object can be other things." It is a lesson clearly learnt from the Campanas, but he adds his own brand of DIY-store wit – for example, he has positioned three hammers to create a base for a glass coffee table ("in case of emergency break glass") and welded together

hundreds of bolts to create homages to the Pantone and Tulip chairs.

Capote and his design partner Marcelo Stefanovicz, 34, have just moved into a studio nearby, behind a storefront not unlike the Campanas'. Stefanovicz, whose background is in cinema, specialises in lighting and fuses different shaped bulbs to create parasitic sculptural forms that are powered by old record players and projectors. "The first time I put a bulb by another it looked like a tumour – but not in a bad way," he says. "I found it beautiful – like you were growing lamps."

The ceiling of the entrance is hung with an installation they're working on together for a department store: a chandelier of criss-crossed neon tubes that will perforate over 100 white trainers hung on wires, to resemble shoes thrown over power lines.

**01**  
Gay's chair  
made of car  
tyres

**02**  
Gay's table  
made from  
metre rules

**03**  
Stefanovicz's  
parasitic,  
tumour lights

They have furnished the space with clever use of gambiarra. A bucket in a basketball hoop serves as a sink and the pipes leading to it zigzag down the wall; a chest of drawers has water valves for handles.

Carol Gay, 37, was also taught by the Campanas. A trainee architect, she signed up for extra classes with them at the Museum of Sculpture in 2000, a course she attended for almost two years. "They were just becoming very famous and busy," she tells me when we meet at the Emiliano, a boutique hotel furnished with the brothers' work. She is

IMAGES: MARCOS CIMARDI



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Everyone of my generation says when they make things with their hands people say it looks like the Campanas



Almeida, 35, in his house in a 1950s residential neighbourhood in the centre of São Paulo. It is decorated with design classics by Memphis and the Campanas, including one of their very first pieces – the Yanomami chair, from their Uncomfortable collection, in rusty iron and perforated with the meandering lines that the indigenous tribe after which the chair is named paint on their bodies.

"Huge!" he exclaims when asked about the influence of the brothers. "For me they invented Brazilian design. They were the first to look for the roots of Brazilian culture. As well as pop culture, Lina Bo Bardi influenced them a lot. Their way of thinking about design is very Italian – it's emotional. It catches your eye. It's not rational."

Almeida's own pieces, in their exploration of pattern, colour and materials, are also deliberately eye-catching. His one-off cabinet pieces, for example, are vivid 3D collages in painted canvas and plywood, and incorporate rope and other found objects. One, a surreal composition of magnifying glasses and red funnels, all painted in oxidised copper,

resembles one of Joseph Cornell's boxes.

"It's radical work – research projects," he says of these. "As a child I wanted to be a painter – I always had this kind of dream – and I wanted to make something completely pictorial, celebratory and experimental."

Almeida has created a series of chairs for Christian Lacroix, upholstered with fabric used in haute couture and brightly coloured climbing ropes, and he is developing the idea into a series of chairs for an exhibition of his furniture at the Afro-Brazil Museum in São Paulo.

"It's hard to make something uniquely Brazilian," he says of the melting pot that characterises the culture. His work is

very craft-oriented, like the Campana brothers, and he shares their interest in making an aesthetic of imperfections. But, like the rest of his contemporaries, he has a wider, eclectic frame of reference. He is as inspired, for example, by art deco, the Memphis group and Brazilian artists such as Tunga and Adriana Varejão.

"Everyone of my generation says that when they make things with their own hands people say it looks like the Campanas," he laughs. "Does all Japanese stuff look the same?"

Design Weekend São Paulo runs from 15 to 18 August 2013.

05 Almeida's Cornell-like cabinet

06 His Africa chair

07 A bench for Christian Lacroix

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