



McKeough, Tim. "Legends at Work: Fernando and Humberto Campana," *Surface*. 2013.

**FRIEDMAN BENDA** 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001

**FRIEDMANBENDA.COM** TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760



McKeough, Tim. "Legends at Work: Fernando and Humberto Campana," *Surface*. 2013.

**FRIEDMAN BENDA** 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001

**FRIEDMANBENDA.COM** TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760



# Fernando and Humberto Campana

After years of working behind the scenes, these highly influential Brazilian brothers are ready to unveil their first major solo exhibit in the United States.

When chairs upholstered with loops of rope and tables haphazardly woven with colorful plastic string appeared in New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1998, plenty of people had questions. Was it functional furniture? Could it really be considered design? And just who were these designers, Fernando and Humberto Campana?

Before long, the world had its answers. Yes, they were legitimate pieces of furniture—they just happened to look unlike anything that had come before. The São Paulo-based brothers responsible, intent on repurposing humble materials and adopting traditional handicrafts, had brought Brazil's unbridled energy to an industry normally dominated by more subdued European talents. "We're very interested in these skills and traditions that are dying, like weaving, sewing by hand, and welding," Humberto says. "All these techniques that machines are taking over." Producing furniture and objects marked by chaotic forms and riotous color, the Campana brothers quickly smashed conventional notions of design while seducing a number of top-tier manufacturers and galleries, including Edra, Alessi, and Moss. Fifteen years later, they remain among the most closely watched provocateurs in the industry.

That's why the Campanas' upcoming exhibition at New York gallery Friedman Benda, titled "Concepts" and running June 5 to July 3, is so highly anticipated. The brothers' first major solo exhibition in the U.S., and first significant gallery show anywhere in five years, it will showcase no less than six new collections of furniture currently under development in the Campanas' studio and offer a window into their messy, experimental creative process. Although the brothers are releasing plenty of new work this year—including a bed collection for Edra; a product range with Baccarat; and interiors for the new Camper store in São Paulo, the Stedelijk Museum 's-Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands, and the Iniala Beach House in Thailand—the exhibition will provide early glimpses of the ideas they'll be pursuing in the years ahead. It also marks the 30th anniversary of the brothers' partnership.

The Campanas' latest work represents a thoughtful evolution of their thinking. A major part of their process involves reexamining materials and techniques they've used in the past while looking for new ways to push them. "We start by revisiting things we have worked with, and try to get closer to them and investigate deeper," says Humberto, 60, who originally studied law before teaming up with his brother to engage in more

creative pursuits. "It is like putting a magnifying lens on those concepts," adds Fernando, 52.

Their new Boca range, for instance, focuses on furniture made with overlapping pieces of cowhide, including a wall-mounted shelf, freestanding shelf, and table. "We had worked that way with leather, with the Leatherworks chair for Edra, but now we're going in a new direction," Humberto says. "We discovered that a more natural or more organic material"—hairy cowhide rather than smooth, processed leather—"gives it a sur-realist appeal."

The Fitas collection, which includes a buffet, table, and cabinet, takes the Campanas' Sushi chairs as its point of departure. But whereas the Sushi chairs are made from bunches of textiles and synthetic materials rolled into tight spirals, the pieces in the Fitas range reproduce those forms in bent metal.

Their Racket collection, comprising a chair and screen, builds on the brothers' longstanding interest in weaving. Inspired by the visual lightness of a tennis racket, the furniture pieces have irregularly shaped brass frames with nearly transparent nylon string woven onto them. Decorative details made of backing recovered from mass-produced cane chairs are then stitched in by hand.

Regardless of what materials they use, the brothers' way of working is more about continually experimenting than fine-tuning details by computer. Collaborating with local artisans both inside and outside their studio in the Santa Cecilia neighborhood of São Paulo, they hatch an idea, prototype it, and then critique the results before trying again. "First, we do one piece, build a prototype, but often don't like it," Humberto says. "So, we come back again with the same material and same technique," but with different design parameters. In this way, he adds, a project that starts out as a chair may soon give birth to other objects in the same family, such as a sofa, screen, or lamp.

While plenty of high-profile furniture designers who normally specialize in pieces for mass production have taken on gallery commissions, for which they purposely develop one-off pieces and limited editions, the Campana brothers work the other way around—they typically begin with one-of-a-kind creations before considering whether those pieces can be adapted for mass production. Some make the jump, while others are deemed unfeasible to manufacture in large quantities and remain studio-made editions. For instance, one sees the beginnings of their successful range of

McKeough, Tim. "Legends at Work: Fernando and Humberto Campana," *Surface*. 2013.

**FRIEDMAN BENDA** 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001  
**FRIEDMANBENDA.COM** TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760



McKeough, Tim. "Legends at Work: Fernando and Humberto Campana," *Surface*. 2013.

**FRIEDMAN BENDA** 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001

**FRIEDMANBENDA.COM** TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760





McKeough, Tim. "Legends at Work: Fernando and Humberto Campana," *Surface*. 2013.

**FRIEDMAN BENDA** 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001

**FRIEDMANBENDA.COM** TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

Blow Up accessories for Alessi, which were introduced in 2004 and include baskets that look like exploding clusters of stainless-steel sticks, as early as 1993, in a larger-scale screen the Campana brothers assembled from aluminum tubes and wire. "We are just interested in the freedom to work without the reality of industrialization," says Humberto, pointing out that such a process naturally gives rise to new discoveries, which can later become products made in partnership with manufacturers.

For Marc Benda, co-owner of Friedman Benda, the appeal of that process is clear. "Their work displays a lightness without being superficial, a sense of substance without rigor," he says, adding that the brothers' strong ties to Brazilian culture give their work a very different flavor from those of other designers. "The Campanas' use of materials and special attention to the surface versus the sculptural give them a perspective that differs from most European creators working today," he says. At the same time, he adds, their work is more developed than most designers' from that part of the world. "They are arguably the only creators of note from any emerging country in the southern hemisphere," Benda says. As such, they are "ambassadors of South American design."

The Campana brothers also have a history of trying to do good for their home country by engaging local residents and creating jobs. Past projects have included partnerships with Comunidade Solidária, a program that promotes and preserves local arts and crafts. "It's our effort to humanize design by rescuing the tradition of craftsmanship communities and positively impacting the links of the production chain," Fernando says. With "Concepts," they will present a new Alligator range made by women prisoners working with a São Paulo-based NGO. The range expands on the Campanas' 2004 Alligator chair, which featured a seat entirely covered with plush stuffed animals. "We are taking another look, but this time in leather," says Humberto, for a new sofa and chair. "It's important in our process to have the ability to work with our local communities," he adds. "It's important to get to the roots." ■

(OPPOSITE, FROM TOP) Two assistants at work on a study in the Campanas' studio. A worker assembles a Panda Banquete chair, made of stuffed animals, canvas, and stainless steel. (PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM LEFT) Racket screen prototype, made of brass and nylon. Racket chair prototype, made of brass, nylon, and natural fiber. (FIRST SPREAD) Humberto and Fernando Campana in Milan during Salone del Mobile in April.

McKeough, Tim. "Legends at Work: Fernando and Humberto Campana," *Surface*. 2013.

**FRIEDMAN BENDA** 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001  
**FRIEDMANBENDA.COM** TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760





McKeough, Tim. "Legends at Work: Fernando and Humberto Campana," *Surface*. 2013.

**FRIEDMAN BENDA** 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001

**FRIEDMANBENDA.COM** TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760