

whitewall

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THE NEW LUXURY

GILBERT & GEORGE, LIU YE, CAMPANA BROTHERS, ALAN FAENA



Buffet Sushi in Brass, 2011.
© Fernando Laszlo.



BY KATY DONOGHUE, PHOTOGRAPHS BY GUSTAV IPOLITO AND GUI PAGANINI



When *Whitewall* first spoke with the design duo of Fernando and Humberto Campana, usually referred to as the Campana brothers, we were at Design Miami/. They had been named Designers of the Year by the fair and were lauded for their socially conscious and eco-friendly approach to design. They became famous for creating furniture with materials not typically used in the industry: stuffed animals, scrap wood, rope, wire, felt, and more otherwise-discarded stuff.

Lately, their socially conscious drive has pushed them beyond São Paulo into collaborating with artisans internationally who work in bronze, lacquer, bamboo, and glass. In September the

invest in sophisticated tools. So I started to create a kind of bridge between craft and design. What is important is to translate the universe where I live.

WW: *Fernando, you were an architect when your brother came to you and said he wanted to make design.*

FC: That was all so funny. I was graduating in 1983 and interning in the biennial of São Paulo. When I finished the internship in December, I did not have a job. So Humberto lent me a helping hand on delivering for Christmas. That was temporary. Little by

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Campana brothers were in Paris for the opening of the exhibition "Barroco Rococó" (their elaborate bronze collection) at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. That same month two suites they designed debuted at Hotel Lutetia. In October Humberto Campana was in China to launching the second Campanas' polo collection for Lacoste. This winter, "Maracatu," the travel object they designed for Louis Vuitton, will debut.

Humberto and Fernando spoke to us by phone about their process, the city of São Paulo, and how design has changed them.

WHITEWALL: *Growing up in Brazil, what was your idea of design?*

FERNANDO CAMPANA: We grew up in the countryside. We were 300 kilometers from São Paulo. It used to take five hours to get here. And there was a train to get to São Paulo. And the train was four hours. There was a movie theater there. And that was our window to the world, to civilization, to modernity. Because the owner of this theater was a lawyer and he was Italian. And he brought us to the city, and the Italian galleries. I saw *2001: A Space Odyssey* in 1968 and when I got out of the movie I went to the backyard of our house and started producing the ship. That was an exercise to translate the movies to our backyard in the most raw way.

HUMBERTO CAMPANA: I never was familiar with design. I come from a family that is bourgeois, that always had that heritage from my grandparents' old furniture. But I wasn't interested. I studied law for five years, then when I gave up I wanted to be a sculptor. I really wanted to work with my hands. And then little by little my brother came to give me a helping hand. He started giving functionality to my sculptures. And more and more the functionality started to approach design, but not the way the modernists were designing here in Brazil. I wanted to create a new language.

So I started looking at things we had already in the market because of necessity. Most of the time I didn't have money to

little I started giving my ideas to him, giving tips or opinions, and transforming the structure of the work into functional objects. And that was very generous. Suddenly we were partners, and that was fantastic.

WW: *What was the first functional object you did together?*

HC: The first functional object we made together was our Vermelha chair, the rope chair. That is what started to put us in the market. Especially in Milan, in Italy, when the company Edra started to produce the chair that was kind of impossible to produce in a serious industrial process.

WW: *Are you both attracted to the same kinds of materials?*

FC: We are completely different. He loves to do the hands-on design. I am more art direction. I like to see the project transform, to give concepts to the project.

HC: Well, the materials I think are very important to our work. Sometimes they bring the functionality and the final shape. One aspect of our work is that it collects elements that are often rejected, and we try to give nobility to them. We want to see the objects that are kind of refused by other designers. So those things interest us a lot.



What I think is important is to know the limits of the materials. I have a passion for materials, all kinds. I don't know why, but all our ideas seem to come from the material. But it's not something very casual, there's a kind of rationality to work with them. I kind of have a relationship with it for six months, one month, until I know what I want to do and what it can afford to me.

WW: *What is your design process? Are you sketching, making 3D models? Are you doing this at your studio?*

FC: I stay more at home. I do the sketch or drawings at home and go to the studio in the afternoon and make meetings with the people there and come back. I need more organization, and I really need space. I work at a big table. In between one project and another, I make a collage or a watercolor.

HC: Sometimes I go with my hands, and sometimes there is another artisan nearby that is more experienced so I start a dialogue with him in order to find the final solution for that material; sometimes it's by computer. I like the freedom not to get stuck in one kind of project, I like the freedom to work to investigate.

WW: *So for your Brazilian Baroque collection in Rome you worked with bronze. You've worked with bamboo from Taiwan, and glass in Murano. Those are local materials. What about those interests you?*

FC: We were invited to go to Rome, and it turned out to be something to collaborate with handcrafters.

HC: It's about looking at what already has worked. In Rome when we start working with these bronze artisans I went to see an atelier. Or in Taiwan with the bamboo, I wanted to challenge the artisans there in order find another way to work with bamboo. What I like to do is surprise the artisans. It's very positive for both sides. In the role of an artisan he never saw this way to work, and I haven't either in my own practice. I like these kinds of experiences. I guess with the maturity, working for almost 30 years, you start looking to other possibilities for your work to deepen the process.

WW: *Are there any other artisans you want to work with?*

HC: Yeah, we've just come back from China. That was amazing because I saw a lot of possibilities, of old techniques of lacquer or weaving. We were in the Philippines and Vietnam and China just to do research with local artisans. It was incredible — it was really something that I want to go into more. They have all this tradition. It was a very fertile trip to China.

FC: Beijing is very similar to São Paulo, but completely different. It has the spirit of the same thing that São Paulo has that we can't explain to people, a hidden thing. Hanoi is fantastic because of the tales about history. In Manila in the Philippines you have the social strength they have through the eye contact. I was so happy.

WW: *Did you find any new materials to work with?*

HC: I came up with a lot of ideas. I saw this paper, some sort of publicity for the year of the dragon in China. It is very gold and very red. I bought a lot of these papers back, and I'm covering all the walls of my house with these. Sometimes I like it, sometimes I hate it. It's very shiny. Now I have to finish it and live with it. I like to transform my house. I think it's important.

WW: *What does your studio look like? Is your home filled with the objects you've designed?*

HC: Yes, it's all my prototypes. All the experiences I put in my house and my studio. I think it's very important to live with this and prove they kind of work.

WW: *What about São Paulo? How is it different from Rio? Does São Paulo breed more creativity?*

HC: Yes, totally. Brazilian modernists were first here in São Paulo. Then we have the São Paulo biennial. So it is a fertile ground. The industries of artisans inspire lots of young architects, designers, fashion; most of them are based here in São Paulo. And there is a market of consumers here. Many galleries are open. It's very positive.

The city has changed in the past five years completely. New restaurants, new galleries, new artists, new designers.

WW: *You also recently completed interior design projects.*

HC: We did the Café Musée d'Orsay in Paris. It's something that interests me, to go to another scale. I'm learning quite a lot. I like to make bridges between disciplines. Our work is to visit other universes and come back more mature.

FC: Yes, after 30 years' work, I feel more mature and confident to do this. I don't want to follow a career in architecture or in interior design, but they asked us to work on a hotel. It was different — whenever you make a chair, or table, or lamp you can remove the legs; a house no, it's permanent.



WW: *So when you're designing an interior space, what kind of environment do you want to create?*

HC: First of all, I would like to create an environment where I could live. I would bring people a smile, to kind of bring them to an experience that they have lived in something happy.

WW: *Is there a type of environment you still dream of creating?*

FC: Yes, parks. Or a public gardens for São Paulo. If I can get to the community I would love to. I want to do more and more social projects.

WW: *How do you think design has changed you?*

FC: In terms of environment and educating people, I have become more political. Since people are more interested, you can talk more loudly.

HC: I never expected to be part of this. It doesn't change my interior soul. I still have the same roots. I'm based in the countryside. My family still lives there. I still go there. Enough points have changed that allow me to visit other countries to work with them. I didn't have the money to travel; now people invite me to go to visit or to work. I say thank you to God every day.

Opposite page, top:
New Hotel v 21, 2011

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Bottom: Fernando and Humberto
Campana's studio in São Paulo.
Photo by Gustavo Iguchi

This page: Fernando and Humberto
Campana's studio in São Paulo.
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