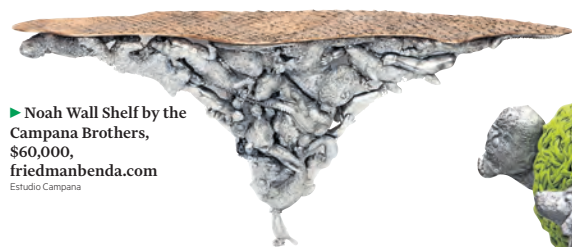


House&Home



► Noah Wall Shelf by the Campana Brothers, \$60,000, friedmanbenda.com
Estudio Campana

Place emphasis

Interiors | Designers and furniture makers are responding to their local traditions to define their voices in the global industry. *By Helen Chislett*



▲ Noah Bench by the Campana Brothers, \$125,000, friedmanbenda.com
Estudio Campana



► Ebb and Flow, by Joe Hogan, £6,500, scottish-gallery.co.uk



Joseph Walsh — Andrew Bradley

A renovated potato shed in rural Cork, a few miles from the southern Irish coast, with rain thundering down on the corrugated iron roof, may not seem an obvious place to explore directions in which art, design, craft and architecture are heading. Yet if politicians on both sides of the Brexit debate wanted a glimpse into the future, they would have done well to attend “Decoding Craftsmanship”, a seminar organised and hosted by furniture designer Joseph Walsh.

Ireland is of course staying in the EU, while the UK is committed to leaving. Putting that aside (at no point was the B-word mentioned), many of the issues touched on by speakers went to the heart of the deep emotions that Brexit has brought to the surface. Among the luminaries that Walsh had persuaded to his studio in Ireland, formerly his parents’ farm, were design star Humberto Campana

(Brazil), architect Gunther Schnell (Germany), architect Jorg Berchtold (Germany), furniture maker John Makepeace (England), furniture maker Gareth Neal (England) and materials guru Chris Lefteri (England). The Irish contingency was represented by architects Sheila O’Donnell and John



◀ Armchair of Thousand Eyes by the Campana Brothers for Fendi
Danielle La Malfa

Tuomey, master basket maker Joe Hogan, Peter Flynn of Arup, the engineering and design conglomerate, and Walsh himself.

During the one-day event, two themes emerged that seemed to unite speakers whether they were talking about a building or a basket: collaboration on the one hand; a sense of place on the other. Taking “place” first, this is a word that could be interpreted as an inward-looking marking of territory.

Yet, Campana says: “More and more, we need to find our identity. It is important to say where you come from, in order to be part of the global debate. If I started to make things like the British or the French do, I would no longer have a voice — this is why my brother, Fernando, and I are against the globalisation of mass-production. For 30 years, our work

has been about responding to our locality, to indigenous craft techniques and to the political situation we live within.”

The Campana Brothers’ exhibition, *Hybridism*, at Friedman Benda in New York, which closes this weekend, is a tribute to the São Paulo’s multidisciplinary studio practice of the last decade, linking cutting-edge design and an innovative reinterpretation of how materials can be used to Brazilian artisan culture.

“We like to rescue craft traditions that are disappearing,” says Campana, “to challenge ourselves to create another version of something that is very old.” The brothers also believe in social activism, investing, for example, in schemes to teach homeless men to how to make pots with clay brick, a class Humberto leads himself, with the results sold through their own Instituto Campana.

Walsh applauds designers such as the Campanas who have expressed such a strong sense of identity within their

work. “What makes O’Donnell and Tuomey such great architects, or Joe Hogan such a master of his craft, is the ability to dig deep into the Irish culture and explore its own unique sensibilities. It is a beautiful thing to find out who you are by where you are. The same goes for Gunther Schnell in Germany or John Makepeace in England, both legends in

their different ways.” Sometimes it takes years for a maker to appreciate fully how important that sense of place is to his or her work. “When I was younger,” says Walsh, “I made traditional pieces of furniture — farmhouse dressers and the like — but then I wanted to break with tradition because ‘break’ was the buzzword. But you can’t create anything good if all you are doing is breaking — you must learn to build on and to respect what went before, because that is what enables you do the work now.”

Hogan believes that respect of the past is crucial to the survival of certain techniques. “Craft traditions are so rooted in locality, whether it is the *coroza* shepherd’s cloak of north-west Spain or the oak swill baskets of Cumbria, but we risk losing them because they are labour-intensive and so not always financially viable.” The challenge to indigenous crafts is often the speed of making that huge multinational



▲ Undulate table by John Makepeace, POA, joannabird.com

Chislett, Helen, “Place Emphasis” *Financial Times Weekend*, October 14/15, 2017.

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▲ Serendipity Three chair, priced depending on choice of wood and leather finish, johnmakepeacefurniture.com



▶ Jack Cabinet by Gareth Neal, £23,400 Petr Krejci



◀ Trine chairs by John Makepeace, sarahmyerscough.com



▲ Sushi IV armchair by the Campana Brothers Calazans Estudio

retailers can offer, he says. “Cheap imported log baskets, made in China, are still handmade and yet sell for a third or less of mine because the person who made it is on a very low wage – but they will almost certainly fall apart in a few years. Had you bought one from a master maker such as David Drew back in the 1980s, the chances are that you would still be using it today – so if you divide the years of service, that makes the Drew basket much cheaper.” He also

refutes the idea that expressing locality means working in a vacuum. “Following indigenous traditions does not mean excluding other influences – it is about absorbing them over time. If you look at an object such as the Irish donkey creel [a traditional basket used as a pannier], it encapsulates a whole evolution of ideas matured over a very long time.”

For Makepeace, a maker whose designs are often seen as a continuation of the tradition of fine country house furniture, landscape seeps into design like osmosis. “Even the move from my home county of Warwickshire to Dorset in 1976 was significant to me [Dorset being where he founded the School for Craftsmen in Wood]. The landscape of Warwickshire was much grittier in comparison. Of course it is sub-conscious, this response to place, but it will always come through in the work”.

So is it time to embrace indigenous processes and cultural differences – in which case the popularity of Scandi design and the fashion for mid-20th-century, American classics may well

begin finally to decline? “As consumers, we increasingly live though the objects we consume rather than surrounding ourselves with objects that best support how we live,” says Walsh, “Scandinavian design, for example, consists largely of interpretations of objects fit for purpose within a culture that has been significantly shaped through time by a different geographical, environmental and political landscape.” While he stops short of overt criticism of the homogenising influence of Ikea, there is a sense that the tide may be about to turn on an aesthetic that bears little relation to other cultures it now dominates.

However, while there is a sense of looking inwards in the renewed search for local identity, this compulsion bears no relationship to the wall-building

politics of nationalism. The very reason why Walsh and his studio went to such pains to invite speakers of this calibre to a wind-swept corner of Cork – and indeed why those speakers gave up precious time to travel there – was a wider belief that connectivity and collaboration are increasingly important.



▲ Mulberry table, POA, johnmakepeacefurniture.com

“When I visited Humberto at the Estudio Campana, his work made so much more sense to me,” says Walsh, “because I was in Brazil and seeing the work in the context of Brazil. Yet my own work and my own sense of place was also informed by seeing his work in his world. I have met so many people on my travels that have inspired me that I wanted to share some of those influences with others”.

The work of Estudio Campana may seem at odds with the Joseph Walsh Studio – the one so full of wit and bravado, the other so controlled and balletic – yet Campana feels a strong affinity with Walsh’s ethos. “This century is about integration and collaboration – about helping one another in order to make a better living for everyone. As artists and designers, there has to be something behind what we do, whether rescuing craft traditions or rescuing lives. It is important to build bridges, not walls.”

Design classic
Meisterstück 149 fountain pen

Beloved by heads of state and businesspeople for its gravitas when signing on the dotted line, the Meisterstück 149 (German for “masterpiece”) has been accessorising rarefied desks since 1924. Distinctively chunky and cigar-like, the Meisterstück has always been a status item. In 1906 Hamburg banker Alfred Nehemias and Berlin engineer August Eberstein spotted the gap for upmarket writing tools. They produced an inaugural model, the Rouge et Noir, in 1909, made of matt ebonite, followed a year later by the pen that would give the company its name, the Montblanc.

While fountain pens once ruled the workplace, since the 1960s the cheaper ballpoint has been a remorseless rival, and in a recent survey less than half the British population said they handwrote anything in the course of a day.

Still assembled in Hamburg, the Meisterstück’s smooth body of resin, silver or lacquer is edged in precious metal, its hand-ground 18-carat gold nibs come with delicate rhodium inlays and its lid is tipped with a signature snowflake as a nod to the company’s alpine namesake. The most expensive is the limited-edition rhodium-coated Unicef Solitaire Skeleton, topped with a mother-of-pearl snowflake, for £7,600. The gold-coated 149 version costs £650.

Vintage models are popular with collectors and have an even more satisfying weightiness thanks to their heavier brass ink-filling mechanisms. Since 1930 the nibs have been engraved with the number 4810 (Mont Blanc’s height in metres) so if you find one without, you are either looking at something very rare or fake.

Olivia Williams

