

# FINANCIAL TIMES

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## ‘I want to do it all as seriously as I can’

Reed Krakoff and Ron Arad talk about the frustration of being labeled and the joy of finding creative freedom



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Invention: Reed Krakoff (left) and Ron Arad at Krakoff's New York office

**Reed Krakoff** has been executive creative director of Coach since 1996 and is one of the driving forces behind its reinvention as a fashion brand. He launched his eponymous luxury label in 2010 – for which he has just been nominated for CFDA Accessory Designer of the Year – and is currently in charge of both houses. **Ron Arad** is the architect/artist/designer responsible for the Tel Aviv Opera, the Design Museum Holon, one-man shows at the Pompidou, Barbican and MoMA, and furniture such as the Bookworm shelf. They met in 2005.

### That chair ...

**RK:** I remember when we first met: it was when you had a show at the Barry

Krakoff, Reed and Ron Arad. “I want to do it all as seriously as I can.” *Financial Times*, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2012.

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Friedman Gallery and I produced the book. I had a piece of yours at that time called “box in four movements”, which is a metal box in four parts that can be unfolded into a chair. I’m very drawn to work that has to do with modern technology and new design ideas, and deals with the issue of what is art and what is design. I had never seen anything like that chair. So I wanted to meet you.

**RA:** That chair is funny; it’s like sitting on a tractor seat. Very supple.

**RK:** When we met I told you my very young daughter, who is now 16, loved it, because she could see herself reflected in it. You asked how old she was and I said “one year” and you said: “She can’t talk. How do you know what she thinks?” Sometimes when I meet people I don’t get much of their work from them but your work really reflects you. Even the names – like your show at the MoMA [in 2009], *No Discipline*, and the steel chairs: “the well-tempered chair”, “the bad-tempered chair”.

### **Categorisation**

**RA:** Some pieces are born with a name: others, it takes longer. I liked the show at Barry Friedman, though I felt it didn’t deal with this generally unresolved question of art and design and how the two relate. People in the art world are happy saying “I’m a designer” and architects are happy saying “I’m an artist” but I’m not allowed to be all of the above. If I do a sculpture it’s written about as “designed by Ron Arad” but if my friend [Antony Gormley](#) does one, no one ever says he “designed” it. I thought it would get easier to escape these kinds of distinctions, but no.

**RK:** That sort of categorising exists in every field. If you are an actor and try to be a director people get upset. Alexander Liberman was a great magazine art director and a great sculptor and painter, but his art was never taken seriously because he was labelled an “art director”. When I wanted to move from what was a more mass product, like Coach, to high fashion everyone told me: “Don’t take pictures, don’t do books; it will be confusing, just be a designer.” But then I thought, “It’s all those other things that actually make me me.”

**RA:** Frank Gehry told me he didn’t get taken seriously as an architect until he stopped designing furniture. I understand it: if you are doing these huge buildings it is difficult to accept that someone who isn’t an exclusive member of your club can do it too. Personally, I have no problem designing stuff for Vitra or Moroso that is made to be sold in shops, but I also like to do big projects or products that cause people in the bolshevik art world to be uncomfortable. But that’s a problem of their perception. I don’t want to stop doing anything. I want to do it all as seriously as I can, whether it’s industrial or a useless installation.

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## Creative freedom

**RK:** I find that freedom very inspiring. You don't even seem to care about commercial considerations at all. It's just what you want to make. And everything is a chance for an idea.



Sunglasses from Ron Arad's pq range

**RA:** I only make something if I think I can add something new. So, for example, I just made a new line of eyewear. It is at the Javits Center [in New York] now. It's called "pq" because when you write that you make spectacles. Anyway, this man bugged me for two years. I didn't want to do it, I wasn't interested, but he kept bugging me and then I thought: "OK. Here is the challenge: how do you free people from the tyranny of the hinge? How do you free them from the tyranny of the components?" And we did! We made them out of polyamide, which is the scientific name for nylon, and they can mould to your head.

**RK:** I have a sketch of yours of a product – a suitcase – that you made for me when we were sitting next to each other at a dinner. We started talking about what sort of project we could do together and you grabbed a place card and drew on it. I was impressed you drew so well, since you draw everything on screens at your office.

**RA:** I remember that case: it was the "follow me" suitcase. It was a suitcase that you charged up and then it would follow your phone in an airport so you didn't have to drag it.

**RK:** Like a dog.

**RA:** I want to revisit that. Can I borrow the sketch?

**RK:** You know, some people don't like talking about their work – I don't, partly because I am not that interested in talking about what I've been thinking about all day – but I'm very interested in other people's process. Like: how did you get to where you got with a piece? Where did it come from? It's why I love documentaries. I want to understand – not someone's life but why they do the things they do; what is the process that gets them there? It's about all the things you don't see when you see an end product. I find it really helps me when I get stuck on a creative issue.

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Reed Krakoff spring/summer 2012

## **Success**

**RA:** It's possible to invest a lot of time in getting a curve to be just the right curve, knowing that maybe just one out of 100 people will notice or understand that it is the right curve – but it then doesn't matter. The other day I was talking to the owner of Vitra and he said: "As an industrialist I'm interested in success but as a collector I'm interested in failure." When I do a product that is meant to be sold, I want lots of them to be sold, because that is the point. In the art world, though, success is measured not by how many of something you sell but how much the one thing sells for, and it's impossible, when your stuff goes to auction, not to look at it sideways to see what the price is.

**RK:** It's like being reviewed after a show. I try, just after the show, to sit down with my team, be honest about what I felt and share my thoughts no matter what anyone else says. But the next day you always read the reviews anyway. You want to know what other people think. You can't help it. Even if the goal is simply to be successful enough doing what you like to stay in business.

**RA:** Or do what you like and never have a job.

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