



DESIGNER TO WATCH

RUBEN VAN MIEGEN

Our Editor KATARINA DJORIC sits down for an exclusive interview with Dutch Designer RUBEN VAN MIEGEN to talk about his battle with dyslexia, philosophy behind his designs and a lumberjack career option.

What is your background and how did design become your passion?

I got my bachelor degree in Design at the Design Academy in Eindhoven. I graduated in 2012, so already 5 years and some months ago. I grew up in a very dynamic family. We moved several times because my father is an architect and wanted to put all of his new ideas in new family homes. My mother is an artist; she is active in the field of sculpturing in bronze and ceramics. I think my love for design comes from those two! They have an eye for beauty and raised their children from that perspective.

My brother and sister are creative but did not make a living out of it. I think my talent was developed by my handicap: I am quite dyslectic. From my point of view, I did not accelerate on reading and writing so I had some brain capacity left for doing other things. I loved to draw and build things in 3D. And I still do...

How would you describe your work? What is your design philosophy?

My work, like most Dutch Designers, tells a story and is quite heavy in researching. I really like to make a point with my designs. To do so, I often develop new materials. For example, in 2012 I made a machine that showed the difference of home breeding cattle or doing it on a large scale. By turning a wheel, time went by and differences became bigger. It was more a research project than furniture design. The essence was the story behind the machine; the machine was the communicator. I still do that with my furniture. My current project: Café 6116 tells the history of Persian carpets that are used as table runners. The essence is the story, the communicator is the dining table, coffee table and the floor tiles.

My work is best described as: design follows the material. This is because I work with new materials and every material

comes with possibilities and restrictions. These restrictions are there to overcome but that process takes many years. That is why my designs keep developing, I keep thinking of other ways to shape my materials. Rubbish sometimes plays a role in my designs but not a head part as it does with other designers. If I use waste, it is because I think it is useful and beautiful, not because I have the illusion that my design will take away all waste problems. Of course furniture design can help in awareness but my relative small quantity won't make a difference in the actual problem of waste.

My philosophy: every piece should tell a story. This story has sometimes to do with hidden beauty, history, and sometimes it is about social challenges. Without a story, a piece is only a piece, it does not have a soul.

What comes first – the materials or the design idea?

It depends. But I experience that in most cases, the material is strongly related to the design idea (like with my collection with Persian carpets). In that case it comes at the same time.

When starting a new project how do you begin the process? Do you traditionally start with sketches?

A filing of a story mostly catches me. Nowadays for example I am thinking about the purpose of different fences. Is it to keep something out or in? And what are the differences in designing? Things like that keep me thinking.

I usually start with choosing and testing materials. For example heating it, crushing it, put it into baths, colouring it etc. See what happens. If I find out something interesting, I start thinking about how to put it into a design. Then I start sketching and do more testing. Because the first tests are on little pieces but tests change if you need to make an entire piece chair of the material for example. It also takes new machines or new material to help in the production



sometimes. It is very costly but so much fun! The testing, the prototyping and the designing alternate all the time.

What is your favorite part of the process?

I cannot name a specific part. But a specific occasion is when a test comes out even more beautiful than expected. And sometimes, I make a mistake and I find a new way of making something else. This makes my way of designing the most beautiful way in my eyes. For example: I was heating rope in an oven. A phone call distracted me. When I returned to the oven, way later than planned, the rope was melted completely and because it was made out of different coloured strings, the colour effect was amazing. I would have never found out if I did not make the mistake of leaving the test room. Also I like the end phase of the process. When the story starts to form in words and images. Then I really feel that all falls into place and my story is ready to be told. I experience a great inner peace, silence in my head, in this phase. Until my next design idea of course!

Who are some of the other designers you admire?

I love the work of Maarten Baas, a Dutch Designer. I love the risks he takes and the way he presents himself. He is always faithful to his own ideas and I think he plans every step of his career carefully. Also I like Sabine Marcelis, another Dutch Designer. She has a recognisable handwriting and still surprises with every piece she makes.

I also really like the designs of Boca Do Lobo, a Portuguese brand for luxury design. They have a great Instagram feed! And the autonomous artist Joseph Klibansky.

What gets you excited these days?

That would be the new pieces in our collection Café 6116 which we showed last April in Milan during the Milan Design Week. We had an amazing room entirely dedicated to our collection Café 6116 and the golden age. We showed some masterpieces of Dutch Masters and the translation of these masters into our design.

All of the pieces from the collection are made out of used Persian carpets. This is why every piece is unique. The Dutch Masters already captured the Persian table runners in the 17th century pictures of aristocrats. More and more, they were seen in average households. Until about 1980, the Persian carpets disappeared from tables. My tables and tiles bring back this majestic product in households and put it back on a stage where it should be.

Specifically for the show in Milano, we made a dining table and coffee table with a high gloss bronze frame. It looks like solid gold and is so striking!

If you weren't a designer what would you be?

Wow, did not see that coming. I think I would be a lumberjack in Canada. I dreamed of a job as a lumberjack when I was a teen. But I never really considered it because it was obvious that I would work in the creative sector. I love the outdoors and love to work with my hands. Also, the nature of Canada was appealing. I have never been in Canada yet unfortunately.



If we are going to invest in two major pieces for the home, what should those be?

I think my advice would be to invest in good lighting. If you just need light, use indirect light, which does not ask for a specific design because you don't see the source. And do invest in statements; see a lamp as a sculptural addition to your room which interacts. I like them big and striking.

The second piece should be contemporary art on the wall. I love paintings and photos. Every house should have some art in it.

What is your dream project?

My new project! My hands start itching when I think about it.

Are you working on any special new designs or projects at the moment?

Yes! I am working on a furniture collection made out of straw rope. Entirely, no material for construction added. It will be more sculptural than I ever made and I will be working together with a hairstylist. It will be great. Hopefully I can show the collection in 2019 at the Milan Design Week. I am looking forward.

What advice would you give to young designers?

I think I would advise them my own learning: there is no room for average. Make sure you make a difference in everything you do. Getting out of your comfort zone is the only way to make it. Just do it!

Keep up with Ruben van Megen on www.rubenvanmegen.com.





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