

What Makes Design Pop?

THREE QUESTIONS FOR LISA ROBERTS



By DANIELLA OHAD

IN ADDITION TO HER ROLE AS A CONTEMPORARY DESIGN CONNOISSEUR, Lisa S. Roberts is an architect, graphic and product designer, collector, writer, speaker, and promoter. She is a trustee of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum and has been vice-chair of the National Design Awards. She's also a trustee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and a board member of Collab, which supports the museum's modern and contemporary design collections and is known for its annual awards, which have been given to such legends as Zaha Hadid, Marc Newson, and Maya Lin.

Within the nineteenth-century walls of her house in Philadelphia, Roberts has created a mini-museum of her comprehensive collection of contemporary design—from the singular to the everyday. Her first book, *Antiques of the Future*, published in 2006, put forth the contemporary objects she feels will one day be considered icons, those that best tell the story of our era. In accordance with this publication, Roberts hosted the TV program "My Design Life," where she began a journey of raising public awareness about design. In *DesignPOP*, just published by Rizzoli, Roberts continues with this mission. She seeks to illuminate twenty-first-century design, to teach us how to judge design, and to interpret the story of the design renaissance through such key themes as new materials and processes, sustainability, and social responsibility.

How would you define the design culture of today?

Rather than defining design culture, my mission is to interpret design to a broad audience—to get

people to see things they may not see, to point out features that increase understanding and appreciation for design—and to do this by taking a lot of the complexity out of the industry and simplifying it for people who are not in the design world. We all start with our personal taste but with knowledge, we get a better understanding of why something is good, why we should pay

attention to it. I want to help people gain that knowledge.

I surround myself with experts—curators, designers, manufacturers, and people in the press—getting their opinions and thoughts about design. I try to stay current with this rapidly changing field—learning about materials, manufacturing processes, and, most of all, technology. After I wrote my first book, people came up to me and said it was an eye-opener. They had never really noticed a lot of the objects they used every day. Now, they look with a more critical eye. Their design awareness, or design IQ, is elevated, so they seek out better design; and ultimately that means there is greater demand, which means more work for the industry.



What has had the greatest impact on design in the twenty-first century?

The single biggest influence on design in the twenty-first century emerged in the late twentieth century—and that was technology. Beginning with computer-aided design, technology has affected the development of new materials, new production processes, and even new types of products. Among new materials, for instance, there is carbon fiber, which is very strong and lightweight and led to Bertjan Pot and Marcel Wanders's Carbon chair. New production methods include 3-D printing, laser cutting, and CNC milling. Dirk Vander Kooij 3-D prints his plastic Chubby chair using an extrusion method.

A trend going forward is customization of mass-produced products. Designers are finding ways to individualize their designs. Look at François Brument's Vase #44—it's a 3-D printed vase whose shape is created by sound. The louder the noise the wider the vase—modulating one's voice creates different shapes.

How is the notion of "good design" different today from in the postwar years?

Good design in the mid-century referred to form and function. It also began the process of democratizing design, lowering the prices, and making well thought out design accessible to a mass audience. Toward the end of the twentieth century designers and architects began to design the most basic household objects, such as teakettles, lemon juicers, even toilet brushes.

But today, good design also includes sustainability and socially conscious design. Each replaceable filter in the Bobble water bottle by Karim Rashid saves three hundred bottles of water. Socially responsible designers can bring design to people who have not had access to it in the past. Yves Béhar stands at the forefront of this approach with his colorful eyeglasses for school children in Mexico, and his One Laptop per Child program that dispenses computers to children in developing nations around the world. Or look at Michael Graves, who after becoming a paraplegic devoted a good part of his practice to designing for people with disabilities. Here you have a world-renowned architect using the same level of design attention he gives to his buildings to designing a handrail for people who have a hard time getting in and out of a bathtub.

So good design goes beyond just the end product: it starts with how it is made, what materials are selected, but it ultimately depends on how it improves our lives.

DesignPOP by Lisa Roberts is published by Rizzoli.



Facing page:

Bertjan Pot and Marcel Wanders's Carbon chair, 2004, made of carbon fiber and resin, weighs less than three pounds.

Dirk Vander Kooij's Chubby chair, 2012, is created using a customized 3-D printer.

The Stitch chair by Adam Goodrum, 2008, folds up to a mere half-inch thick.

This page:

Yves Béhar designed the XO Laptop, 2007, by Fuseproject for the One Laptop per Child program.

The size and shape of François Brument's Vase #44, 2010, is determined by the volume of a voice.

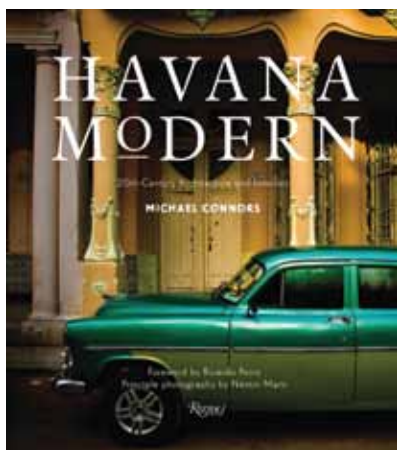
Wasara tableware by Shinichiro Ogata, 2008, resembles delicate porcelain but is made of sustainable materials—sugar cane fiber, bamboo, and reed pulp.

Each replaceable filter in Karim Rashid's Bobble, 2010, saves three hundred bottles of water.

Finding the Hidden Havana

By DANIELLE DEVINE

MICHAEL CONNORS'S EIGHTH BOOK ON THE CARIBBEAN, *Havana Modern: 20th-Century Architecture and Interiors*, presents a close look at previously unpublished houses and other buildings built in Havana from the early 1900s to 1965, with specially commissioned photography by Néstor Marti. The book is both intelligent and visually rich, and a valuable resource showcasing modernist architecture from Havana's artsy Vedado neighborhood and seaside streets of Miramar, to Central Havana and the stylish Country Club park area. Among the city's most indelible modern places are Porro's National Schools of Art, the renowned Bacardi building, Casa de Alfred von Schulthess by Richard Neutra, the stylish Habana Riviera Hotel, the Hotel Nacional de Cuba designed by McKim, Mead and White, and the world-famous Tropicana cabaret nightclub by architect Max Borges.



What inspired you to write this book?

My last book *The Splendor of Cuba* was successful, but I decided to go a step beyond colonial-era architecture, and I was amazed by what I found. I realized that Cuban architects of the modernist movement have never been evaluated and that their contributions to architecture deserved further study and documentation. This led me to seek out world-renowned Cuban-born architect Ricardo Porro, most famous for being the lead architect of Havana's National Schools of Art—he is the spirit and source of inspiration for *Havana Modern*. He is now eighty-eight and is one of the most interesting people I have met. I see him whenever I am in Paris. He reminds me of Buckminster Fuller.

Can you discuss the idea of "preservation by neglect"?

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I coined that phrase when I visited Cuba several years ago and started to examine the architecture. Right now, I'm sitting on Fourteenth Street in New York with beautiful new and old buildings. The original Penn Station was architecturally and historically significant, but in 1963 the city government allowed it to be torn down. That is not happening in Cuba, but not necessarily consciously. It is not happening because there is such neglect, especially of twentieth-century buildings. One of the reasons for writing this book is to heighten awareness and help in the conservation of early to mid-twentieth century architecture in Havana. I do not want to see it torn down, nor do 90 percent of the architects and people who are aware of the situation there.

There must have been some memorable experiences shooting with Néstor Marti. Can you discuss some of the highlights?

The Tropicana cabaret nightclub by architect Max Borges. Initially we approached them to take some pictures and they said they were sorry but they could not authorize the shoot. We told them about the book and eventu-

ally they invited us back to a show for some night shots. When we asked if we could return for a day shoot, they said absolutely no one was allowed in except the dancers; a couple of days later they gave us permission. There we were, watching them practice—I have never found a shot like it in the archives. We're bringing things to the public that up to this point were totally impossible. Néstor lives in Cuba and was familiar with many of the buildings and houses. When Cubans say no, they kind of respect each other and don't push. I was born in New York. Sometimes New Yorkers don't take no for an answer. Néstor was amazed, "I don't know how you do this Connors," he said to me. But it serves the Cubans; I am not taking pictures of children with no shoes, laundry in the courtyard, and buildings that are falling down. I am taking pictures of the beautiful parts of Cuba, the photography is not enhanced at all. The only time we edited was to remove some telephone wires. This is Cuba, this is beautiful Cuba, and that is what I like giving the people.

Havana Modern: 20th-Century Architecture and Interiors by Michael Connors, with a foreword by Ricardo Porro and principal photography by Néstor Marti, is published by Rizzoli.

