

DIZAJN DARLINGS

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Some of Poland's bright young things are heading up the international design scene with intriguing ideas that unite form and function in novel ways.

Whether it's a new interpretation of modernist themes, an eco-conscious nod towards organic materials and recycling or a futuristic spin on everyday objects, young Polish designers are at the forefront of a brave new world of innovation.



COURTESY OF KOMPOTT STUDIO

From Poor to Folk and Back to the Future

Much like Kantor and Grotowski's philosophies on "poor theatre" shaped the development of the Polish stage of the mid-20th Century, "poor design" is a major component of today's design scene. Dubbed a "baby genius" by critics, Wrocław-based artist Bartosz Mucha heads up the movement. Mucha takes his inspiration from "raw"



COURTESY OF MARCIN EBERT

everyday materials – paper, cloth, wood, rubber, plastic. His most famous piece is the award-winning "clothespin." The common household item sports a USB plug at one end, extending its functionality.

The purpose behind Mucha's objects has more of an ideological basis than an aesthetic one. He reinterprets everyday objects, giving them novel forms and often marrying so-called base materials with a lofty purpose – or vice-versa. The most striking example is the gold bar shoe brush – an accessory fit for royalty that raises the status of the shoe brush while dampening the glory of the gold standard. He's even got his own version of the mobile one-person

"disaster" shelter and a "do-it-yourself" lamp in a box.

Lamps and lighting are a popular theme among the "poor design" set. The Strawberry Kingdom design team (Dorota Kulawik and Jan Modzelewski) has created a lamp of its own which is based on a simple design scheme and basic materials. Fine workmanship and extended functionality offers users the ability to adapt the lamp to a particular space by adjusting one of the elements.

The object is simple and yet very elegant in its simplicity – the form is reminiscent of a slender tree with the lamp delicately balancing on its branches, with the freedom of the lamp's owner to adjust both its shape and the light it emits.



COURTESY OF MARCIN EBERT

Re-use and recycle

Lamps like the one by Marcin Ebert, made of insulation material, are part of a similar effort to find new solutions for existing products (the cheaper the better). This “termolampa” provides light and also insulated heat for extended functionality with a futuristic edge. Ebert’s also got a collection of tea lights whose soft golden light comes from the leaves that line the edge. Then there’s the painfully simple and yet aesthetically thrilling “half litre” lamp in a bottle from the Wzorowo design



COURTESY OF MARCIN EBERT

group. An ideal item for all of us who feel guilty each time we chuck perfectly useful glass containers. A glass water bottle is reinterpreted as a lamp, with the bulb sitting atop the rim and the lamp’s cord coiled up within the belly of the bottle.

Wzorowo’s Agnieszka Bar, Agnieszka Kajper and Karina Marusińska have also got a collection of lit-up jars filled with crushed glass that glow with a mysterious blue LED light. Of course, the team also produces more conventional household items in porcelain and glass – all of which are characterized by a remarkably astute

aesthetic and delicate form. In particular, Agnieszka Bar’s collection of sculpted glass items are wonderfully simple, yet special thanks to ergonomic touches that make them easy to handle and also refer to the flowing nature of glass in its malleable state, as well as that of the liquids they are meant to contain.

Something out of nothing

The genre of “poor” design extends beyond the tabletop, taking cues from basic, everyday objects like wooden milk crates for displaying and storing books and wood-chip chairs by Mucha to unidentifiable felt blobs that strangely resemble overgrown caterpillars but make for really comfortable seating. The latter item, called “chmura” (cloud), was presented by the Beza Projekt group at last year’s London Design Festival and met with a surprising degree of international interest.

Kompott – a design group made up of 4 talented individuals scattered between Warsaw, London and Madrid – has quite a fun project that plays with the notion of broken-down bookshelves. At first glance, its “6 Degree” bookshelf system seems to be on the verge of collapse, but the design is based on a precise maths system that guarantees it will stay upright. The flexible modules can be

arranged in a variety of ways – even as stools or side tables – while applying the simple law of gravity in keeping books in order. Kompott’s “plugless” (or, rather, drainless) sink is the most eco-minded of them all. Water accumulated in the sink has to be tipped out, making the user more aware of how much water he or she is using, just like back in the day.

Arts and crafts

The ideas behind these so-called “poor” designs may often appear more interesting than the resulting product, but simplicity is certainly a design virtue. Hence the world’s ongoing love affair with folk arts and crafts. Polish folk art is making a real comeback in a fresher guise. Far more interesting than those heavy stacks of Bolesławiec pottery, cheery ceramics and even throw rugs based on traditional folk designs are all the rage.

Marcin Ebert’s “Krakowianki” bells, Mikołaj Długosz’s “Spółem” mug collection and Bogdan Kosak’s beautiful “sentimental” housewares collection all hail back to the nostalgia of Polish design of centuries past or even fifties-era modernism. Moho’s DIA rugs refer back to Polish holiday traditions of cut-outs, embroidery and painting. Shops like Beetroot and N+U are a fine source for folk-inspired pieces – and they make good gifts.



COURTESY OF MIKOŁAJ DŁUGOSZ

Cosmic culture

And yet, the purpose of progress is to go forward, especially in the arts. The most vibrant characters on the Polish design scenes have workshops filled with space-age gadgets that seem more fitting on the moon than in your living room. And yet these pieces are positively fascinating.

The Kompott Studio jumps back on the scene with their innovative taka





» table, made of the Du Pont material Corian®. This piece presents an alternative to the flat surface of the table top. The taka surface is faceted with a number of polygonal shapes that give a new aesthetic to an age-old form – not to mention the indents keep round objects from falling to the floor. Tomek Rygalik's "tennis" chairs also serve a double function, with an unexpected twist. These chairs are meant for two types of recreation – both sport and relaxation – with a contemporary line and juicy colour scale.

Lamps are also key to this design category, with DBWT's (Daria Burlińska and Wojtek Traczyk) "onion" lamp putting a very organic twist on

innovation. Kafti's award-winning lamps, created by Monika Braunsch and Sonia Słaboń are just as fanciful, combining simple lines to create pleasing forms inspired by geometry and industrial elements. Ranging from the simple "berga" and "bubble gum" origami-style pieces to the awesome "cumulus" mass of crystal-clear light bulbs floating in the air, their output is as diverse as their fancy will take them.

Puff Buff's own rendition of a cumulation of glass PVC bubbles as a lighting scheme is slightly more elegant in form, with its "Queen's Chandelier. Quite reminiscent of a giant sea creature, it uses LED lightweight LED diodes and technology to create a lightweight system that is functional and fascinating. Puff Buff's blow-up chandelier is a pretty cool way to re-interpret Baroque design elements using innovative (and inexpensive) materials, using air as a major part of the structure.

The brand's Anna Siedlecka and Radek Achramowicz have been



COURTESY OF PUFF BUFF

frequent guests in London over the past year at the London Design Festival, the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Young Creative Poland exhibition. Young Creative Poland indeed, these kids are at the head of the design market. Their wares are available online or as part of commissioned collections for local retailers like Iker, Zoom, Magazyn Praga, Space Station, Red Onion and Comforty Living.

Designer Tomasz Augustyniak's Badu sofa is one of the latest items to arrive at Comforty, featuring a functional modular setup that allows the owner to arrange the components in various ways. Plus the innovative memory foam temporarily "adapts" to the shape of the sitter thanks to Nasa-devised technology.

Who knows what the future of design holds next? One thing's sure – Poland's designers will play a big part in uniting function with inspiring forms.

Check out these websites for more info on Polish design darlings:

agnieszkabar.pl
bezaprojekt.pl
ceramikakosak.pl
com4o.pl
dbwt.pl
iker.pl
kafti.com
lovekompott.com
mikalajdlugosz.com
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