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How to Spend it

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THE CLOWN PRINCE OF DESIGN

CHANGE



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426 ceramic and plastic plants, bird and animal life, all inspired by a cactus garden he'd once seen in Lanzarote. The cacti were weird and wonderful, the animals like nothing you'd ever seen, the birds were delicate, and the whole gave an extraordinary glimpse into the mind of its creator.

This amorphous, plasticine, baroque style became Hayón's signature. If you deconstruct the ingredients you find that, apart from what one observer called "his fevered mind", there lies a combination of high-tech production techniques and handmade processes allied to a wild and eclectic choice of imagery. He doesn't see why designers – or manufacturers come to that – should have to choose. He loves them both. He also doesn't want to have to choose between modernism and historical styles – he feels free to pick and choose at will. Strange and elusive though the installation was [there was little there that could fit into your average terraced house], it revealed his genuine love of ceramics, of beauty, of fine craftsmanship. It also gave Hayón the chance to show his work in 360 degrees, to "create an entire scenario from start to finish. It was an opportunity to show some of my origins, and mix them up with several disciplines – 3-D, digital imagery, the freshness of the Mediterranean and baroque... why not?" It was there that ArtQuintess saw his work and found the enterprise and courage to commission the bath collection.

Since the Elle Decoration Award brought the bath collection to the attention of an international audience, Hayón has been inundated with commissions from galleries and manufacturers around the world. "A couple of years ago," he told me, "I had three main clients. Today I have more like 20." He's done a collection called Showtime (available at Mint and to order from Aram Store) for the Spanish company Ed Ediciones de Diseño, known as Ed, which aimed first to produce a collection of modular forms. What he came up with – a playful collection of multi-legged sideboards in lacquered wood – remained even the design company. "They were so shocked," says Hayón, "that all they could say was, 'What's that?' I told them it was the piece that would make their brand. It's your mirror, it's your cabinet, it's a place to put your plates – and it's modular."

The cabinet (pictured on previous page, top) is, of course, all of those but with its legs like a centipede, each of them in a different period and style, and its electric blue lacquer (though it also comes in white and black), it isn't like any cabinet any of us have seen before. Wherein lies its charm. The cabinet is indeed modular – it can be bought in one piece, two pieces, four or eight pieces. Customers can make it their own (it's that mass-customisation mazzini again) by choosing how many and which legs to have – it's usually shown with 12 but there's nothing to stop somebody having a more conventional four in the most conventional of shapes, or an extremely unconventional 24 in a whole variety of styles (art deco, Versailles, 1960s modernism, Louis XIV and so on).

Also in the Showtime collection are chairs, sofas, a table and some ceramic pots (available at Mint and Vessel) which are clearly in direct descent from the toys that Hayón made so successfully for the Japanese market. His aim was to create a collection of furniture sufficed by a single concept and he started with a chair for the garden. His inspiration, he says, was the classic MGM classics – that is, glassless, eucalyptus, fan. He shaped all the pieces by hand before creating moulds. Yet again he offers his customers choice – the plastic sofas, with their quilted leather backs and seats evocative reminiscent of chaise longue, can come in simple form or about £440 or they can be customised with real leather upholstery added by an artisan for from £2,800. In spite of being some sophisticated



The Mediterranean Digital Baroque exhibition, 2005. Above: Fungli lamps for Metalaris, from £29. Below: bath from the AQMaya Collection, from £1,150.

greater sophistication (he's rather bored with the notion of the democratisation of design) and this is clearly the direction he is heading in with his Fungli lamps for Metalaris (pictured above, available at Noel Henzinger), his huge mirrors for Palazzo of Italy, and a host of other products in the pipeline. His clients range from Coca-Cola, Fontvella Ducera Group, Toy2K to Metalaris and Adidas.

A great excitement at the moment is that he, this extraordinarily quirky, mould-breaking designer, has been asked to head up the creative team at Lladó,

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technology – for example, resin moulding for the chaise longue and the plastic chairs – he is emotionally deeply wedded to keeping an element of the human hand in the making process. "The digital world," he says, "allows us access to new tools but it places limitations on form. But this is never the case with handcrafted work." On top of that he loves the small defects, the signs of the human hand, that you find in hand-worked pieces. "I love the sophistication of defects."

one of Spain's most illustrious companies, whose figurines and ceramic pieces are found in almost every Spanish house of any size and which counts the Vatican and the Royal House of Spain among its customers. He is highly admired of the skills of its workers and sees it as his task to "give a new direction to this wonderful classical company". Bodo Sperlein, the ceramicist most known for his incredibly light and delicate bone-like forms, is already doing a collection for September.

And from September 23 to November 4, London's Aram Gallery is putting on an exhibition of Hayón's work (you can also check out some of his work on www.hayonstudio.com), the fourth in a series of exhibitions designed to explore the relationship between the creative impetus and commercial realities. Zeev Azam was attracted by Hayón's combination of "a sense of humour, a sense of history and of craftsmanship – having those three things altogether in one designer make his work very special". The excitement for Azam comes from seeing the work of someone who is at the beginning of what may very probably turn out to be a remarkable career. He's still only 31, and it's not yet clear what lies ahead. But it was his exuberance that first attracted Aram. "It's like watching the opening up of a really interesting talent. He reminds me a bit of Mariscal, the great Spanish graphic designer, and Philippe Starck in his youth. The wonderful blessing of being young, which shows up in all Hayón's work, is that you don't see the clouds – you just go in feet first and hope it works out. That's what I love about his work."

QUICK ON PROGRESS

Aram Store and Gallery, 101bury Lane, London WC2 (020-7537 750).

www.aramstore.com

EP Hart, Newham Terrace, Hercules Road, London SE1 (020-7902 5250), www.ephart.co.uk

Noel Henzinger, 67a Great Northfield Street, London W1 (020-7323 2360), www.noelhenzinger.net

Mint, 70 Wigmore Street, London W1 (020-7234 4400), www.vessel.com

Vessel, 104 Kensington Park Road, London W11 (020-7727 8001), www.vesselgallery.com



Jaime Hayón may only be 31, but his work exudes a confident contrariness that is wowing the design world. Lucía van der Post meets the Spanish master of mass customisation.



OWN PRINCE OF DESIGN

It's fair to say that unless you were an aficionado of cultish Japanese toys, until about a year ago you were unlikely to have heard of Jaime Hayón. Outside a tiny circle of design cognoscenti, very few had. A young Spanish designer who grew up in Madrid, he'd had his admirers, of course, and those in the know had been keeping an eye on him ever since he was made head of design at Benetton's Fabrica research centre at the startlingly young age of 24, but on the international scene he was largely unknown.

It wasn't until Hayón won an Elle Decoration International Design Award for his eccentric but very sale on bathrooms in 2005 that the wider world began to sit up and take notice. Here was somebody, it was clear, who had a creative imagination that was quite unlike anybody else's and, what's more, he wasn't afraid of using it. At a time when most bathrooms were heading towards the austere beautiful (think Agape, Starck) or the functionally efficient (Ideal Standard), Jaime Hayón gave us something voluptuous, theatrical and quirky. While almost everybody loved it, it left the design writers rather stumped for words. Few had seen anything quite like it, "Kinky baroque" or a "humorous ode to splendor and elegance" were just some of the phrases they came up with.

What was perhaps most remarkable about the bathroom collection was its incoherence, its joyousness and the fact that its designer took his inspiration fearlessly from wherever he found it. The curvy legs were clearly drawn from the furniture of Louis XIV, while also in the pieces are references to minimalism and to the organic shapes currently in the design ether. All of these are added into something that is new, fresh and, yes, modern. It was as if Hayón had never heard of "form follows function", "less is more" or all the other famous design dictates that loom somewhere in the heads of most designers. He was like a brilliant but uneducated talent, going where his instincts took him without fear or inhibition.

The ArtQuitect Collection (available at CP Hart) was produced for a little-known Spanish company called ArtQuitect. Hayón's designs put both himself

and ArtQuitect on the map. "Before I did this bathroom, ArtQuitect was almost unknown outside Spain. Now it sells all over the world and other designers and architects are clamouring to work for it," he tells me. "I'd had approaches from mainstream manufacturers but there was something about this little company, about the intelligence and openness of its owners, that made me want to go with them. They showed me some bathroom catalogues but they all had square white pieces with no identity and I wanted my bathroom to be unique, a place for fruit and flowers, for mirrors and lamps. Why not treat these pieces as furniture? And make pieces that can be used in any room of the house?"

"I wanted to put the joy back into bathing, to take a room usually hidden from the world and make it a pleasure to visit. This bath is, for me, a bath you don't want to get out of. The accessories – the champagne bucket, the abridor, the vase – are intended to make the moment last. So I introduced more explosive colours and shapes that were both modern and classic... I wanted to construct it like an art piece but I also had to find a strategy to make it a price."

Behind the endorsement, there also lay a very practical and charming notion. It was a collection that allowed great flexibility and, even better, it offered the buyer the chance to customise his bathroom with Hayón pieces ("mass-customisation" is the buzz word in design circles these days). Baskets, table supports, mirrors, lamps, towel rails and hangers could come in white, black, yellow, gold or platinum glazes, and the colours and finishes could be mixed at will. The mirrors and the vanity units, the lamps and cabinets could translate equally well into the living room or bedrooms. "I wanted to give people the chance to make it their bathroom – not anybody else's," he says today. "But also the coexistence of different techniques – of having some parts made by machine, others semi-elaborated and made by hand – was very important to me."

This was all an extension of the thinking that Hayón first explored in 2003 in an exhibition for David Gill, whose Fulham Road and Loughborough Street Galleries in London are a byword for innovating experimental work. There he'd made an installation which he called *Mediterranean Digital Baroque* – a collection of some



Left: vanity unit from the ArtQuitect Collection for ArtQuitect, from ELISEL. Left inset: the extraordinarily quirky Jaime Hayón, from multi-legged stoolhead, from ELISEL and vase, from ELISEL. From the Showtime collection by B.B. (above) quilted chair from the Showtime collection by B.B. from ELISEL.