

Disegno



IN FIVE DESIGNS

Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby

London

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"We're not at all concerned with a 'style' linking our work," says Jay Osgerby, describing his design practice with Edward Barber. "I'd rather there wasn't in fact. Just as long as the work stands up to scrutiny over time."

Barber and Osgerby's work is eclectic. Early projects from their studio, which formed in 1996, were characterised by a use of folded sheet material: a hangover from the pair's experience of architectural model making when studying architecture at the Royal College of Art. More recent work has seen the designers explore monolithic materials such as marble and steel. "Every time we start a project we always approach it like it's the first thing we've ever done," says Osgerby. "We challenge everything, and the result is that our projects are often aesthetically varied, even highly contrasting."

This year has been an important one for Barber and Osgerby. Having won the competition to design the London 2012 Olympic torch, the studio's design launched during the Summer Games to heavy media coverage and widespread acclaim. "We didn't sleep for 10 days when we made the final shortlist for the project," says Osgerby. "We just went at it hammer and tongs

to get ready." Now, Barber and Osgerby have launched a new marble version of their zen garden-inspired Tobi-Ishi table for the Italian manufacturer B&B Italia.

In spite of the studio's growing reputation and profile, Osgerby says that he and Barber remain wedded to the practices they developed when they first began working from Barber's flat in North Kensington in the mid-1990s. "For graduates today, it's easier to publish work; even unmakeable projects can be broadcast on the internet," he says. "But ultimately it's much harder for the work to stand out, simply because there's so much design out there. We tend to use models to evaluate and develop our projects. We never design on the screen because you lose a sense of space: the object is purely virtual and could be any scale."

Below, Osgerby talks Disegno through the five designs that made Barber Osgerby Studio's name:



Cappellini (1998), IMAGE Barber Osgerby Studio

Loop table

"Loop is architectural and was a byproduct of our architectural model making. At the time, we were working out of Edward's flat on the 22nd floor of Trellick Tower and all we had was white card, cutting boards, scalpels and glue. The use of plywood came out of that. Most of those early plywood pieces we're still really happy with, but once we started working with Giulio Cappellini he was really keen to develop Loop into a family of objects. At the time we felt that pushed it too far. The loop became a motif rather than an idea for a piece of furniture."



Flos (2007), IMAGE Barber Osgerby Studio

Tab light

"The idea behind Tab was that Anglepoise lamps aren't really used so much anymore. We felt there was a place for a new type of desk lamp. It looks like simple tubes and a folded piece of white card. When we flew out to Italy to meet Mr. Gandini, the CEO of Flos, for the first time, we were told he only had five minutes. We had some different projects to show him and, with the Tab light, his jacket came off and we had a four hour meeting. If a manufacturer is not convinced what you're proposing will work commercially, it's not going to happen. More often than not they're right."



Venini (2009), IMAGE Barber Osgerby Studio

Lanterne Marine vase

"The island of Murano where Venini is based is quite magical. It's the most medieval place you can imagine. There are buildings with furnaces blasting away, the Venice lagoon lapping up at the doorstep. Inside, men who have been working with glass for many years are drinking beer. It's like time travel going there and we knew we wanted to work with Venini. The colours of the vases are from Venini's library of colours and the intensity of the colour varies according to the weather. If it's a high pressure day you get brighter colours; on a low pressure day you get more washed out colours. From each vase you can tell what the weather was like on the day it was made. The inspiration for the vases came from the lanterns we saw on vessels around the lagoon, the metal frames representing protective cages around the glass."



Vitra (2011), IMAGE Barber Osgerby Studio

Tip Ton chair

"In 2008, we were approached by the Royal Society of Arts to consult on the furniture choice for an academy school they were building. They gave us a shortlist of furniture to choose from and we were surprised that things hadn't moved on since we were kids. So we designed the Tip Ton to fill that gap. Tip Ton offers two positions for the user and enables movement whilst sitting. The crazy thing is in the UK schools would rather spend as little as possible on a chair, and then have to replace it relatively frequently. The Tip Ton by contrast is bulletproof. It's been tested in schools, universities and the US penitentiary system and survived! It's almost indestructible, while also being really light weight."



London 2012 Olympics, IMAGE Barber Osgerby Studio

London 2012 Olympic Torch

"Until we went to Olympia for the lighting ceremony and the start of the relay, the torch was very much our design. Day by day it became everybody else's. 15 million people came onto the streets of Britain to welcome the torch through their local communities and it was regularly on the front page of the papers. We are very proud about the whole thing. It was so successful from a functional point of view as well as from an aesthetic point of view: we only had two flame outs in 9,700 torch relay legs. It's one of those projects where we nearly killed ourselves to win the commission and get it ready in time. It was such a thrill, every single day. The number of schools whose kids sent us drawings of the torch or their torch designs: it was like Blue Peter in the studio."

INTERVIEW Oli Stratford