

Tord Boontje:



A Floral Romance in High Tech

A design liege, a prescient alternative thinker and a treasurer of nature, Tord Boontje's work has an inscription of feral beauty and floral love. He believes in seeing through overgrown paths and finding influences from nature. Somewhere underneath the ordinary is where he finds his inspiration, his exploration and his mental state of tangible understanding. Somehow beauty is Tord Boontje's autograph.

Words: DANIEL SCHEFFLER
Images: © DESIGN INDABA; TORD BOONTJE



Tord Boontje spent his childhood making furniture and dens for his room and even jewellery, which he then sold to his classmates at school. With his mother being a textile designer and art teacher, Boontje found himself constantly nudged into a creative sphere. This young enthusiasm acted as a catalyst fuelling his desire to one day become a great designer.

Studying at Eindhoven in the Industrial Design Academy – revered as one of the world's top contemporary design schools – Boontje made a daring impression on his peers and lecturers. His studies here were followed by a Masters degree at London's Royal College of Art. Boontje lived and worked in London until 1995, after which he established Studio Boontje in Bourg-Argental, France.

His work lives gloriously in a

world context. Relevant to the times and with an understanding of modern living, Boontje translates his Dutch heritage and a feel of great bespoke vibrancy in his work through his packaging thereof, his website and his choice of retail.

Nature as the teacher, Boontje as the student and appreciative learner, Studio Boontje celebrates and glorifies technology and new property materials in a highly modern and advanced way, relating this relevance in a new decade of the 21st century. The Studio has won many awards, including a Red Dot and Elle Décor prize. Works released from it have also been exhibited in galleries and museums around the globe, including London's Victoria & Albert.

The Studio delivers work that holds the vivid and grand belief that modernism does not necessarily have to be minimal or minimalistic. Boontje and his team are also of the opinion

that a modern feel or contemporary design need not ignore or jilt tradition. In Boontje's design praxis – this loosely understood as design practice plus theory – technology does not relinquish nature, people or the finesse of human senses but rather leans in nature, dances with humans and possesses an understanding of technology.

While Boontje is permanently stationed at his studio in France, he spends whatever time possible traversing the globe for inspiration and influence. As a designer he believes it necessary to soak up as much as possible so as to create designs, things, items that can really survive out there in the world. He lists shopping, visiting museums and watching movies and sunrises as banal yet simple inspirations.

In his work, Boontje often stirs subcultural references with ancient traditional imagery. The elucidation of

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this chaos into true beauty is perhaps an indication of how this maestro craftily and succinctly delivers his thoughts and visions to the world. His claim to fame includes works entitled "Wednesday," "Happy Ever After" and "Icarus." His mythology-laden "Icarus" lampshade is based on the Greek narrative of Daedalus and Icarus, who carefully constructed wings of wax and feathers to escape the cruel and demonic Cretan King Minos. The lamp is a ruffling pinion of feathers representing the zestful attempt of Icarus combined with the foolish nature of his pride. It has a complete drop of 78cm and is sizable in tune with Icarus's ideals. With ethereal plumage the lamp is something of a dream-like exploration of exactly who Boontje is: a visionary who can take from the past, from heritage, and give modernity to it fluidly.

Earlier this year, at the Design Indaba held in Cape Town, Boontje discussed his love for the phenomenon of the physical world in a collective; including plants, landscapes, animals and other living species. While showcasing those works inspired by natural settings, Boontje spoke vibrantly about how the physical force governing all of mankind drives him to heights of creativity. He continued by arranging his life's work in a catalogue-like style of

appreciation in chronological book array, from his make-it-yourself style – such as the "rough and ready" chairs consisting of sticks and sewn together tapes and blankets – to simple, elegant pieces of furniture with a more personal note attached to them.

Boontje identifies his most rewarding project as the "Tranglass" production in Guatemala. Here, in a glass workshop he has set up, teams of local staff collect empty bottles from restaurants in the surrounding neighbourhoods to use as raw materials for decorative lamps and exotic crockery. The impact has been tremendous, assisting an otherwise struggling community.

Boontje is currently designing for American retailer Target, where his work has gravitated towards a wider appeal, so spilling over into mass production. He has even shot a Hollywood-filmed TV commercial that will air across the USA as an exposé on the partnership with Target. This, as well as working with another retailer, Habitat on the "Garland" light, has further bolstered Boontje's commercial appeal.

Boontje is a firm believer in optimism even when there is no sunshine, a trait that shines through all his work and philosophies. If your interest has been, visit www.tordboontje.com. ☼

Feel the **RHYTHM** of the **World**

Goblets gushing wine, stark starched tablecloths, polished solid silverware; old flavours, new flavours, oversized plates laded with fare from far and wide – filling more than just desires and the decadence of tastes. Tastes so diverse, so marvellous that they penetrate the skin... This is world music and it is a feast fit for kings.

Words: DANIEL SCHEFFLER
Images: © IMN; WORLD MUSIC NETWORK

Music from around the world exerts wide cross-cultural influence as styles naturally influence one another. In contemporary terms, world music has been marketed as a viable genre in itself. The academic study thereof, along with the musical genres and individual artists with which it has been associated, can be drawn to anthropology, musicology, folkloristics, performance studies and ethnomusicology.

The origins of the misty term "world music" possibly began in a capitalised sense in 1982, when World Music Day was served in France – it is

now an annual festival that takes place on 21 June each year. "World music" is used to describe all music that is not strictly from the west, though its life-force and power escaped this narrow and rather deep-seated prejudice by growing into the indulgent offering it is today.

From a marketing stance, Paul Simon's *Graceland* album in 1986 jolted attention in the press by him expressing his own sensibilities using sounds he'd fallen in love with while listening to South African artists like Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Savuka. Other projects, like the work of Peter Gabriel and Johnny Clegg, spurred even more vested interest into non-Western music and supplied the world with a smack of rapture. In the late eighties, music stores globally fussed over the scarcity of available world music and therefore did not measure it effectively. A strategy to support a crossover audience from jazz and classical music was necessary to collectively introduce the new listener to the market, thus teaching record stores how to "rack" or categorise the genre in the best fashion.

Even the name reflected some discouragement from record industry professionals, with suggestions to add words like "Tropical" or "Hot." These suggestions were thrown out excessively fast, however, as they suppressed the global feel and integrity of world music.

Through music magazine *NME*, a compilation cassette from various world music labels was compiled, including on the cover a duo colour execution to show the differentiation of world music. With press attention hotting up and a world music chart developing, the commercial and financial success of the genre was clear and tactile. So much so that in October 1987 "World Music Month" was designated, with thriving music festivals, effective radio airplay and successful press gigs.

Celebrations such as the California World Music Festival, Mali's Festival





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in the Desert and Malaysia's Rainforest World Music Festival started attracting hordes of fans eager to sample and experience new and crisp music influences from places they could perhaps barely pronounce. Word of mouth mounted. The likes of Bhunda Boys and Youssou N'Dour attended the festivities. Even South African township musicians and their signature beats started attracting positive press, both locally and internationally, alongside Koto music from Japan and Indian Raga music, all of which started working their way into homes across the globe.

Provoking new forms of creative expression and social mobilisation, South Africa's Pan African Space Station (PASS) is a 30-day music event that takes place during the month of September or roundabout each year, and culminates in a four-day, live African music festival. Now entering its third year, PASS takes place online through a freeform music radio station and across venues in Cape Town, so continuing its cross-cultural and cyber-spatial voyaging to bring together diverse pan-African sounds from ancient grooves to future hip-hop. Say event curators, "PASS embraces the lineages that shape music-making on, and from, this

continent. But we also try to challenge the stereotypes associated with music from Africa. This project isn't about connecting with one's roots; it's more about exploring African cosmopolitanism in this 21st century through music."

Musicians from culturally heterogeneous arenas and spaces have been recording music with the support of the people since the advent of sound recording and international air travel. This has birthed a stylistic mix and merry potion that involves visiting musicians and other countries in all the production. With the commercialisation of music through communication technology, sharing online and bounteous social media, the fear of musical homogeny and annihilation of traditional music-making practices is rife. Now even more importantly is the desire to reclaim and savour ethnic music and in doing so, protect its very nature.

Crossover music has developed from this flurry of fragrant sounds and delicious tones. In mainstream music today, artists such as Shakira, Buena Vista Social Club and Lucinda Williams have stretched out to a much broader fan base. World music has been influenced by hip-hop and pop, even heavy metal. Music radio stations and webcasting music channels play crossover Bhangra and Latin American jazz to enthusiasts across the globe.

World music delights in the vehement ability to revel in music; to switch on and allow for it to flow onto you, into you and through you. It allows for this to be shared and co-created by others: strangers at a festival or intimates right alongside you. World music takes the origins of notes, the nuances that may be indigenous, and serves it up as a banquet of aural indulgence. 🌟

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