



Intrepid FOX

Helen Parton travelled to Yorkshire to meet British designer David Fox, whose work takes inspiration from everything from going for walks to his Nan and Antonio Citterio

There must be something in the water in south Yorkshire. Or in that famous tea or real ale. Either way, there's a lot of creativity in that part of the UK right now, from the seemingly unstoppable Arctic Monkeys to, in the field of contract furniture, 33-year-old designer David Fox.

As we roar off in the car from Doncaster train station, Fox manages to negotiate the town's multiple roadworks and simultaneously launch into his thoughts on working with Italian manufacturers and the presentation skills of graduate designers (asking my thoughts on both), before I've even had the chance to whip out my notebook. Hang on, I'm the one who's meant to be asking the questions here! By the time we've reached our destination on the town's rural outskirts, it's easy to believe him when he says, "In the early days, I would not take no for an answer." This is no sleight on Fox either – it makes a change from the slightly aloof Hoxton hipster or the self-satisfied Continental elder statesmen of design.

Born in 1974, the son of an engineer and an artist, Fox's artistic streak first became apparent as a teenage graffiti artist, but he subsequently found an avenue that channelled his creativity in a more mainstream fashion. "I had a really good teacher at school," he says. "He introduced me to automotive design, which was really weird and wonderful, and from there, when I was 15 or 16, I found my craft." He went on to study Industrial Design



at Teesside University, graduating in 1996. His first job in design started the following year, at Dewsbury-based bed manufacturer Jay-Be Ltd. It was, I get the impression, a bit of a baptism of fire. "I spent four years there as a designer. Initially, they didn't know what a designer did, they didn't know what a design brief was, but they knew that they needed a designer."

From there, Fox set up on his own in 2001, working on a variety of industrial and furniture design projects. I ask him about being based away from the maelstrom of London, and he says that financially it makes more sense to be based where he is and that inspirational, creative thinking and imagery is as easily accessible online anyway. ▶

Above: Smile chair by David Fox for Nomique is designed with a number of environments in mind, including corporate office projects

At this year's Design Prima, Fox's designs were very much in evidence. For Nomique, he designed the Smile chair, which was inspired by looking at an image of a ballerina poised in an elegant, controlled position. The brief was to ensure the upholstery remained as minimal as possible, but still retaining maximum comfort. "It's a very elegant design and many chairs that often look great sometimes perform poorly when it comes to the sit," says Fox. Like much of his work, he makes the initial approach seem so straightforward. "I just met (managing director) John Ravenhall and showed him some of my stuff - he liked it and it went from there." It's a similar story with Boss Design's Brian Murray, who was enthusing about Fox's Kruze chair when I met him at Prima, or Jonathan Hill of Connection. "Can you design tables?" he asked. I replied, "Yes". "Design me some tables then," he said. I liked the simplicity of the meeting, no messing, and straight to the point.

The result was a bar table that is still doing very well. More recently Fox designed the Kalm and Korus seating on display at Design Prima. "Kalm was influenced by an old reading chair of my Nanna's, which has great dimensions but was too fussy," Fox tells me. "I made a more modern design and took inspiration from the bits that were good. With Korus, I let myself go for a walk and choose my favourite shapes. There is an element of the 1970s, which is particularly appealing at the moment." More collaborations with Connection will be unveiled in time for 100% Design in September, and he is also currently working on collaborations with Knightsbridge Furniture, a range of brassware and a range of garden furniture. ▶



Kalm was influenced by an old reading chair of my Nanna's, which has great dimensions but was too fussy

Top right: Kalm seating by Fox for Connection is inspired by a chair of his grandmother's
Above: Kruze chair for Boss Design

I have been a designer and a design manager, doing everything from the concept to completion, and I'm very hands on

In terms of how Fox works, he says, "I often get inspired by everyday objects. Sometimes you can get inspired by something very ordinary." Part of his success as a designer he puts down to his ability to be, as he puts it, "a one stop shop." "The process is very important to my business. It's the reason I set it up. I have been a designer and design manager, doing everything from the concept to completion, and I'm very hands on."

Fox's frustration with Italian manufacturers stems, he says, from the fact that they are more used to dealing with designers who only input an idea or a concept and who aren't as concerned with the nuts and bolts of furniture making as he is. That's not to say he doesn't have time for some European heavyweights though. "In terms of gurus, it has to be Antonio Citterio. I like the fact that there's a reduction of detail in his work. A lot of designers are visually more eccentric than he is, but what he does equates to a timeless kind of design. And with Starck, I like the fact that he will do something interesting based on a classic design, as he did with the Louis Ghost chair for Kartell." In terms of his younger contemporaries, he is quick to praise both Stefan Bench, who was responsible for last year's Trace table for Naughtone, and Jonathan Prestwich (who you can find on page 83 writing about the future of technology).

Fox seems to have found his niche, working for UK manufacturers at a time when raising their game design-wise for products specified for workplaces, bars and hotels is very much on the agenda. He still thinks there's room for improvement though. "A lot of the industry is playing safe. We are seeing a lot of familiarity in the UK and also on a global scale. As designers and manufacturers we need to start pushing the boundaries and be a bit freer in our thinking. It would be interesting to see more experimentation in materials and shapes. On the plus side familiarity is selling well, but after time things will saturate, and society will want something new" ☒

075



Above: Fox's Edge 15 tub chairs for Edge Design
Below right: Korus chairs and tables for Connection