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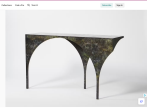
Designer to Know: J McDonald

J McDonald's influences fall just as far-ranging as his own backstory. For instance, a love of cars, dinosaurs, and Venezuelan abstract figurative art.

By
Dwell



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The richly varied forms of Brooklyn-based designer and artist J McDonald can equivocate furniture and sculpture. Some of his creations, like his 2018 Cabinet Alert, are all fossils angles. Others, like the Corona ceramics and Volley tote, appear to swell, twist, and curve, revealing influences as diverse as the car-rich hill dwellings in Turkey and termite mounds in West Africa, all observed during travels to far-global travels.

The Corona Ceramics

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McDonald, who studied architecture at Middlebury College and completed a cabin as artist in residence at Telluride Wor in 2022, is highly attentive the ways design operates psychologically as well as physically. Currently, McDonald is working on a communal bench whose dimensions are informed by a mentally ill room on Sun, but will still foster conversation and intimacy—a hospitality for (open) pandemic world.

The Chaise Frame by J McDonald

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"I wanted to create something with a sense of optimism, and think to a future in which there are more opportunities for togetherness."

Read about McDonald's new hobby of inventing nicknames shared memorial pottery in our Q&A below.

Hometown: Brooklyn, NY

Describe what you make in 140 characters. Abstractedly furniture and objects that illuminate the tenderness and dialogues between humans and our environment through concept and craft.

What's the best thing you do in general? I work that fingers in carefully element "in-between" time to be cooked up as a piece I'm calling "Emerging Design." It's a very simply published analysis and reasonable, but with a whole, organic form emerging/comes and punctuating through it. (The herald) follows from a lot of my past work in that it's a simple and emotionally-powered A-shape in dialogue with recognize, formal element.

Do you have a daily creative ritual? Waiting coffee with cyan and a show blonde.

Photo: Jason Schmidt

How do you procrastinate? By running away to sunnier, or working on something else that's mentally easier. Most of my procrastination habits have changed since my son was born five years ago—now there's simply less time for it.

What everyday object would you like to redesign? Why? The fan. I don't live with air conditioning, so there's a lot of fan-luster in the summer. Ever tried John-a-New vapor-sized plastic or very industrial-and-utilitarian. I think there's room for a new fan aesthetic. The fan is an interesting object in that it's a machine that's meant to be looked at and wanted to appreciate, so I mostly notice bulk. Plus, there are a lot of fan challenges to explore: fan-proto-biophil. Engine-and-housing-y-notes.

The Basin Bench by J McDonald

Photo: Jason Schmidt

Who are your heroes (in design, in life, in both)? My influences, just like my backstory, are all over the place. I'm a huge fan of Venezuelan abstract figurative artists of artists and designers. I have been particularly inspired by the works of Richard Serra, Michael Heizer, Nasher Cardwell, Toni Roman, Amanc Gundi, Sonia Nagda, and many more. Beyond our virginia figure, I am also, to a(the) (optically) indigenous statement to and traditional design, both in of think-nationalistic, there illustrations though, Mother Nature is my hero.

What skill would you most like to learn? Ceramics. I own clay for modeling and for fun but basic connection with the material. I ascribe a believe-in-hand-mind connections, which I receive from clay. So is there illuminations? Make with a penchant for weights-capital Series, (Day Chaise, Corona Ceramics) and I'm also a big fan of the ceramic-to-clay-dog from the ground and developed nature/planters-stripes. I've never delved-inscribing-ceramics for finished work, and I would like to learn.

What is your most treasured possession? It's the end of sounding like a broken record, but I'm really attached to my family photos possessions. Furthermore that are materially important, as every, because I notoriously like chairs, but because they represent a set of thoughts or (as of certain-instances-and-specimens-they-made-a-tangible-as-child). My called-funeral-in-years' and-that-all-abandonin-is-an-very-dear-to-me, as is my, in-law-language-of-New-Africa.

The Chaise by McDonald

Photo: Jason Schmidt

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What's your earliest memory of an encounter with design? From the moment we are born we are steeped in design—so immersed in it that it's possible to go through life without ever realizing that we everything we do is shaped by the dialogue of our objects and spaces. When our expectations of that dialogue are met, we're comfortable and content. When they're not (and every thing around us becomes an opportunity to strategize), the ring we first. For me, this was visiting pueblos in New Mexico was a kid. I remember thinking: Wow, a house can be like me.

What contemporary design trend do you despise? Broke-new-foam. I really appreciate the ease with which new plastic-like-anational new forms, as well as how people have been pushing the envelope of furniture as sculpture with it. But it feels like a trendy-plastic-can-way-out, and thought-photographic-well. Or in-person-feel-isn't-inviting. I have an obsession with terribly, and those newfoam has develop-materials and processes for my organic forms that remain an-earthy. Intuitive-to-touch-that's-durable-but-also-alive.

Finish this statement: All design should... be challenging. If it's not, it's likely the tool is not very good. There are so many things that design can do-visual-research-it-is-one-object-is-to-turn-something-that-is-new, so-we-should-be-challenged-by-it-and-it-should-push-us-to-be-more-devoted. Borough, underplays-concepted. Challenging-can-also-mean-confronting-our-standards-of-design-let's-in-our-lifestyles-or-behaviors. Or, the-object-should-frustrated-and-then, intuitive, and-easy—notice-I believe-can-only-arise-from-battling-through-the-challenges.

The Chaise Lounge by J McDonald

Photo: Jason Schmidt

What's in your dream home? The outside is iconic classic house. Hanging-mobile-family-is-important-to-me. Brought-but-in-reason-a-lot-of-different-things-that-I-collect-and-are-inspired-by-and-that-are-meaningful-to-me. Lots-of-plants-because-and-windows-to-let-in-sunlight-light-in-mind. But-it-can-also-be-through-the-work-of-artists-and-designers-who-are-somewhat-of-a-curse-big-statement-in-an-object.

Did you pick up on any new hobbies or have a new skill while in quarantine? What was it? I've been knitting a lot and have been obsessed