

Creative Design Is Paying Off for Brazil

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Cariocas (the people in the city of Rio de Janeiro, located in the southeastern Brazilian state of the same name) needed a new model of electric fan. The need was pointed out by the company Spirit, from Rio de Janeiro.

The company studied the market and developed the Spirit ceiling fan. They created a pretty and functional product.

"The model has two blades, it is made of biodegradable plastic, has many color options and ventilates better than the old fans with four blades," explains Felipe Pech, director at the company.

Spirit is one of the examples of design evolution in Brazil. Since it was launched - in 2001 - it has won many prizes. The IF Design Award, in Germany, which is the Oscar of world design, the Casa Brasileira Museum award and the Ecodesign, in Brazil.

According to Pech, one of the product's secrets, apart from the innovative design and functionality, is that Spirit is within the mass design concept.

"It has an accessible cost, it is a product that has design, thought by a designer (Guto Índio da Costa), but that is also commercial," he explains.

Last year, the company produced 225,000 pieces. For this year the estimate is of 300,000 fans. In 2004, the first Spirit fans were shipped to Europe, about 1,000 pieces.

"We are testing the European market and making some adaptations in our product, mainly in the frequency part," states Pech.

The Arab market is being prospected by Spirit. "We have made contacts in the United Arab Emirates, in Egypt and Jordan," says Pech.

The same road Spirit is taking is followed by the sisters Cristina, Daniela and Manuela Zatti, owners of company Coza, from Caxias do Sul, in the southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Founded in 1983, as bottle opener factory, the company changed its direction in 1995, started working with textured polypropylene and investing more on design.

According to Cristina Zatti, the material's practicability makes it possible to work with colors and take to the consumer a good quality final product.

Currently the company is a leader in design in the plastic utilities sector in the country. They produce 12 million pieces per year, and put plastic in all parts of the house: from the kitchen, passing through the bedrooms, living room, bathroom and study and ending in the laundry.

Coza launches new products every six months, in other words, two collections per year. Always in harmony with the world tendencies.

In 2003, the company launched a new furnishings line of lamps. The Lynix model received the Houseware and Gift Design awards. Last year, Coza innovated once more: they placed differentiated materials together with the plastic, such

as porcelain.

In the pieces released in the beginning of the year, the novelty was on the design inspired in organic forms and the collection with polished finishings.

To develop the pieces, Coza has a Bureau of Design, coordinated by Cristina Zatti. Designers of national reference work for the company like Valter Bahcivanji, from São Paulo, the company OD Design, from Rio de Janeiro, and the designers Taciana Silva and Marcela Albuquerque, also from Rio.

After a break period in exports, to expand the industrial premises in the first semester last year, the company restarted external sales at the end of 2004.

Currently the company sells their products to Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Bolivia and Venezuela.

For the Living Room

Another sector that bets on design is the furniture sector, mainly living room furniture, like sofas and chairs. The designer Emerson Borges, from Curitiba, in the southern state of Paraná, is one of the strong names in this segment.

The Fólio chair, made by him for the company Ronconi, is on TV practically every day. The model was chosen by Globo (largest television network in Brazil) to be used in many shows, such as the news program Bom Dia Brasil (Good Morning Brazil).

According to Borges, this segment evolved a lot in Brazil in the last years.

"Until the 1990s the companies had no concerns over design. The sofas in the houses were of the last century. In 1999, some more contemporary models started showing up," he explains.

"Now, the sofas are straighter and the chairs more organic, which creates a pleasant dynamics in the living room. Its not the monotony of straight, nor the chaos of curve," he adds.

Strong Points

For the designer Giulio Simeone, director of the school Instituto Europeo di Design (IED) - traditional Italian design school that opened a branch in São Paulo this year -, the work on wood is one of the strong points in Brazil which should be used.

"Brazilians dominate wood very well, the industrial park is adequate and the production cost, including workforce, is a lot cheaper than in Europe," he stated.

Borges shares the same opinion and adds that the country's professionals are rediscovering wood.

"There are people developing products out of pinewood, which before was unthinkable," he says.

Borges also works in this line, of new woods, with leftovers that are not exported. He makes furniture with these leftovers.

To Improve

However, not all sectors are investing in design. For Simeone, the toy factories have to invest more.

"There are no more concerns over final touches and there are products that are even dangerous for the children," he states.

One of the reasons is that the Brazilian companies were scrapped at the end of the 1980s, with the economic opening. They lost competitiveness, became importers of products.

In spite of almost 20 years having passed, the sector still hasn't woken up to the importance of design. Another sector that needs investments, according to Simeone, is that of decoration using metals.

Market

Making mistakes and getting it right, the conclusion reached by the professionals is that Brazilian design is starting to form a personality, driven mainly by fashion.

The opinion is shared by Simeone, who mentions the Havaianas flip-flops example. "It is a world phenomenon," he says.

The Brazilian sandals won consumers around the world. "The future is here, due both to access to materials and cost of production, as to the consumer market," states Simeone.

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