

## Minas, Brazil's Number 2 Exporter, Uses Design to Increase Its Appeal

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The state of Minas Gerais, in the Brazilian Southeast, has just opened the Minas Design Center to provide incentives to industry investment in design. The unit is going to operate in promotion, information, communication, teaching, research, development and in policies to sponsor design. The initiative is promoted by the local government.

One of the objectives is to show the importance of design as a tool to increase the competitiveness of state produce. Another target is to help businesses in the state to insert articles with greater design on the national and international market.

Minas Design received investment of about S\$ 470,000 and occupies an area of 600 square meters at the Minas Gerais Technology Center Foundation (Cetec).

The space is shared with the Cetec and includes a meeting room, workrooms, library and small auditoriums. The center was made possible due to a greater program, called Minas Design, which establishes a set of actions for expansion and broader coverage of design in the various regions of the state, which is the largest in southeastern Brazil.

According to Enil Brescia, coordinator of Minas Design, the great flow of objects and technologies on the foreign market has made products more and more similar and increased competition. To face global competition, the challenge of companies is to develop products with singular quality, which are innovative and integrated to the social and environmental context.

To Rubens Cailais, mechanical technician and designer at Mod Line, an industry in the furniture sector that is based in the city of Contagem, in the Metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, the state capital, companies do not have great incentives in the area of product development. "We do not have knowledge of market tendencies. Minas Design is going to help very much in this process," he said.

The measure should help local companies to help increase their exports. Last year, the state of Minas Gerais already posted record exports. They reached US\$ 15.638 billion. Minas Gerais was the second main exporter in the country in 2006. The increase in foreign sales, over 2005, reached 15.8%.

The state of Minas exports around 2,600 different kinds of products, according to information disclosed by the government. Variety is registered, according to information published on the Minas Gerais government website, due to the participation of medium and small companies, as well as large, in exports.

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