

DESIGN JOBURG

Haldane Martin

The Cape Town-based designer discusses his new collections and why, despite the volatile economic landscape in South Africa, it's an exciting time to be in Johannesburg

DESIGN JOBURG, WHICH takes place from 25–27 May this year, brings together some of the biggest names in South African furniture and interiors. Cape Town-based designer Haldane Martin is known for his detail-orientated approach to interior design, which often involves him designing bespoke furniture or components. His interior for Mad Giant Brewery's Urbanologi restaurant in Johannesburg, for example, led him to develop a new type of 3D-modelled concrete panel, and just scooped the prize for the best restaurant design in Africa and the Middle East at the recent Restaurant and Bar Design Awards.

ICON What are you exhibiting at Design Joburg this year?



ABOVE Sim-ply dining chairs designed by Haldane Martin

IMAGE: MICKY HOYLE

Haldane Martin We are working on two ranges, the Sim-ply collection and the Champagne chair collection. Sim-ply is distinctive for its simple rounded forms, cute proportions and unusually wide backrest, which hugs the sitter.

The latter looks a little bit like the chairs people make with champagne-cork wire, and they have a French bistro chair aesthetic. What's interesting about both of these designs is that they were born out of interior-design projects. They have been designed to fit a real-life context, which makes them good chairs.

ICON How has the design language and economic landscape changed in South Africa since you launched in 2002?



ABOVE Daddy O 6 by Haldane Martin, Tracy Lynch, Marco Simal and Kim Stern

HM The economic landscape has changed the most. Furniture designers have really felt the impact of Chinese copies being imported to South Africa. People's perceptions of price points are far lower than they used to be – we have to be more value-oriented than before. The design language is certainly less Afrocentric. Back in 2002 we were still very affected by the post-1994 optimism of South Africa's new democracy, which has since become a bit jaded.

In the course of Zuma's administration, much of this naivety has evaporated and has been replaced with a more pragmatic desire to make a positive difference to South Africa's economy through commercial interior design. The other thing that has changed is the influence of globalism in the online space. We're suddenly seeing trends emerge, get disseminated, get understood, get adopted and then people getting tired of them much, much quicker.

ICON How would you characterise the difference between the design scene in Johannesburg and Cape Town, where you're based?

HM Design and creativity is far more established in Cape Town and deeply part of the culture. In Joburg it feels like the design and creativity culture is much newer but also therefore fresher – but possibly not as experienced, particularly in terms of young furniture designers and emerging designer-makers (as opposed to older industries like advertising or architecture).

The inner-city design scene in Joburg is very exciting ... the suburbs you can keep! But it's a very exciting time to be in inner-city Johannesburg.

ICON What (and who) are you excited about in South African design right now?

HM I'm excited about the fact that the guys who have been around for a while – like Gregor Jenkin, Laurie Wiid, James Mudge, Dokter & Misses, Pedersen and Lennard – have really shifted to another level. So it's not this constant new generation of young designers that come up and disappear into corporate design, but there are those who started about ten or more years ago who are really becoming well-established brands that have very distinctive identities and make excellent furniture. ♦