

Think inside the box

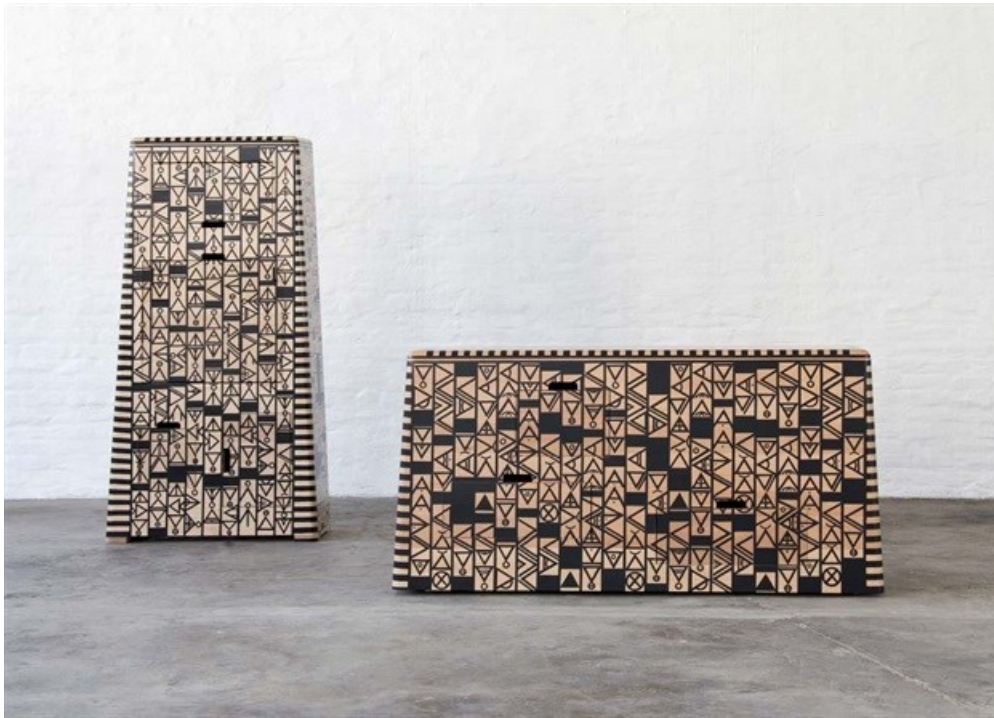
 By [Terry Levin](#)

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'Thinking outside the box' a business term from the 1970s, is still occasionally heard by those in the pursuit of elusive creative solutions deemed to exist somewhere outside the bounds of corporate dry walling.

The very kinds of solutions that the 54 designers and creative thinkers on the programme (and many of the 1,500 delegates) at the 21st Design Indaba festival currently running at Cape Town's Artscape complex, are willing and able to provide.

The Design Indaba stage provided local outfit Dokter and Misses (DAM) – best known for their funky cabinets, stools and lamps as seen regularly in local décor magazines – the opportunity to explain their design process, beginning with images of the Bauhaus inspiration that informed their early work.



Bauhaus, is the now almost 100 year-old art movement, which marked the advance of European art, design, architecture, typography and product design into the Modernist age, by stripping away all ornament to the bare bones of the designer's toolbox – the pure forms of the triangle, cylinder and cube and the pure primary pigments of red, yellow and blue.

The Artscape stage allowed DAM husband-and-wife team Adriaan Hugo and Katy Taplin, the scope to stage a mini-retrospective of their furniture and objets, via a note-perfect choreographed and curated presentation. Dancers dressed in geometric foam block costumes, bobbed against a backdrop of animated graphic design motifs showing countless dissected and reformulated variations of geometric shapes, making one wonder whether whoever suggested thinking outside the box in the first place, might have solved their creative dilemmas by looking more closely within it, rather than outside. I mean the Golden Mean is inside the box, who knows what other treasures might be in there too.

In the case of DAM, embracing inspiration from traditional African motifs, has allowed them to span the divide from the heights of European modernism to the cutting edge of an African design narrative, which seems to be hitting just the right global contemporary aesthetic for right now.



A similar African ethos in terms of a combination of pastel and neon colour-blocking, pattern and playing with essential shapes, was in evidence in the presentation by Nigerian-born Yinka Ilori, showing the inspirations behind his furniture designs infused from Nigerian cultural roots, transplanted to a flamboyant and happy London council estate upbringing.

What emerges from these designers working in the African design vocabulary or parable as Ilori would put it, is the simplicity – the joy of coming home, a family living room, proud decoration, a shared heritage from the mother continent that is being increasingly valued by the rest of the world.

Speaking of boxes (and homeliness), the kings of flatpack furniture – Ikea, will soon be looking to African designers for inspiration. On the Design Indaba stage today, Jesper Brodin, CEO of Range and Supply at Ikea of Sweden and Marcus Engman Head of Design at Ikea, spoke about their impending collaboration with invited Pan-African designers, commenting “There is so much creativity coming out of Africa, in music, in fashion, in architecture right now, we want to learn from Africa.”

For the project Design Indaba will be drawing from their extensive network of multi-disciplinary design alumni. Architects and creatives such as Selly Rabe Kane, Renee Roussouw, Christian Benimane, Issa Diabate, Laduma Ngxokolo and others – from South Africa, Kenya, Senegal, Egypt, Angola, Ivory Coast and Rwanda – will collaborate with Ikea around modern rituals and the importance they play in the home.

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