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Goal, Brazil: Furniture store scores big in the U.S.

Espasso draws fans with strong lines and nontraditional shapes

BY [JASON SHEFTELL](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS



Espasso, or "the space" is designed as a giant loft so customers can see the furnishings in action.

In 2002, [Carlos Junqueira](#), born in Sao Paulo, was sitting in a Long Island City warehouse staring at a huge room filled with furniture made by his compatriots.

There were floppy wooden and leather chairs made by [Sergio Rodrigues](#), hard-edge modern pieces by [Carlos Motta](#), and simple but elegant dining-room tables from [Etel Carmona](#), who also ran a factory producing objects for other designers. The woods came from the Brazilian forest - strong and natural. The phone, though, never rang. When his friends asked him where he was going, he would say "the space," which in Portuguese translates to "Espasso," the name of his business. When Brazilians would come to visit his collection, they would think they were going to Long Island. One brought a sandwich for the long ride, which takes 11 minutes from midtown.

"No one knew where Long Island City was," says Junqueira. "I had to do everything myself, including unload trucks, unpack crates and do all the selling. At first, there wasn't much activity, but then, all of a sudden, it wouldn't stop."



Exterior of Espasso at 38 North Moore St.

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Not all of a sudden. After initial press in New York and Brazil, and his first booth at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair at the Javits Center, Junqueira's phone rang, and rang. Designers and collectors were attracted to the strong lines and non-traditional shapes. They had flair, yet were perfectly constructed, combining a modern sensibility with a foreign force.

Since then, he has taken his warehouse in LIC to Tribeca, where he sits now. His loft-like gallery store at 38 North Moore St. has become known around the world for proving that Brazilians are a force in the furniture-making and design world.

By consolidating Brazilian furniture designers, Espasso has turned Brazilian objects into a national calling card among the global design set. The result is a steady stream of sales with high-name purchasers such as [Andre Balazs](#), [Diana Vinoly](#), [Jay-Z](#), and [Alan Tanksley](#). His openings for new pieces are like mini-Carnavals with fashionable South Americans wolfing down empanadas and sipping Caipirinhas on classic furniture from their homeland.



Wiry shelves by [Taidge O'Neil](#) with the Voguei desk.

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Brazilian furniture, like the country, is red-hot. With one of the top-growing economies in the world, Brazil will host the 2016 Summer Olympics and 2014 World Cup. The furniture, says Junquiera, is not very different from Brazilian people.

"It's diverse, very natural, with different materials, and, of course, it's beautiful," he says. "Brazilians are comfortable but strong people. We come from very different backgrounds. That shows in these pieces."

Compared to American or British furniture, Brazilian pieces seem easier to be around. They don't look like the souped-up engines of an Italian coffee table or have the snotty elegance of Art Deco French pieces. They borrow lines from the Danes, but they have a more lived-in feel. They can be at home in a glass house or a comfortable wooden study. They almost smile at you, just right for a disco nap or business meeting.



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[Carlos Junqueira](#), owner of Espasso on N. Moore St. in Tribeca, in front of the work of countryman [Sergio Rodrigues](#).

Junqueira started out importing Brazilian shoes to New York, then coffee. An expert at importing goods from Brazil as far back as 1992, he was granted an “extraordinary abilities” visa allowing permanent residency. He sold his upper West Side penthouse to inject cash into the furniture business. Today’s success comes after years of hard work.

“I am a fighter,” he says. “I was like a surfer waiting for the wave. Now it has come. A lot of these pieces were designed in the 1960s for the masses. These were not for rich people. Everyone could have them. That’s why they work. People from all over like them, just like they like people who come from Brazil.”