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hen an engaging show of contemporary Latin American design recently enlivened New York's Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), it received an animated response from visitors. This spirited reception surprised even the exhibition's chief curator, Lowery Stokes Sims. "By highlighting the emergence of a younger generation, we revealed a new face to Latin American design and the response exceeded our expectations," she says.

It was a similar story at Design Miami, where the latest limited editions, including Latin American designs, were unveiled in December. "Collectors love to make a discovery and are drawn to what they see as a fresh perspective," says Design Miami executive director Rodman Primack.

Rico and Havana in Cuba. "Our Latin American designers are receiving very positive feedback," confirms Cristina Grajales who runs her eponymous New York gallery. "Within five minutes of The Salon: Art + Design opening in New York last November we sold a brass Mathias coffee table (\$25,000) by Mexico City-based interior designer Gloria Cortina. And at Design Miami we took several commissions for Hechizoo, a weaving atelier based in Bogotá, Colombia." These included a bronze and nylon rug (\$30,000, pictured overleaf) with pink-to-green colour gradations and a subtly sparkling rug in leather and gold-plated silver (from \$30,000).

Hechizoo was founded in 2000 by Jorge Lizarazo, whose encounters with innovative construction materials during architectural studies at Los Andes University eventually found expression in custom-made textiles for upholstery, window designs, wall hangings and rugs. The results are remarkable. Organic fibres are integrated with metallic and nylon monofilaments, allowing textiles to filter and reflect light while fostering an architectural sense of structure.

Yet many European homeowners remain in the dark. "It's surprising how little people know about Latin American design," says London-based interior designer Sussy Cazalet. As a fan of contemporary Brazilian designers, Cazalet's latest project (the private members South Kensington Club) features work that includes elegantly minimal imbuia-wood coffee tables (£3,260), designed by Graça Kazan and Luiz Mario Moura of M Brasil, and Hugo França's sculpture-cum-seat (£33,000, pictured overleaf) in natural pequi wood. "Brazilian design has a traditional craft quality due to its respect for natural materials, but maintains a sense of irreverence with its outlandish use of curves and unusual shapes," says Cazalet. "For me it has the precision and quality of Japanese design but with a healthy dose of Latin American flair and sensuality."

Design Miami visitors also snapped up Colombian artist Alexandra Agudelo's handcrafted silver vases (example pictured overleaf, \$20,000) and bowls (from \$10,000). Inspired by artisan traditions, these one-off pieces celebrate nature's imperfections through irregular edges, grainy textures and uneven shapes. "Her designs transcend typical Latin American silvermith work with their historical links to Spanish colonial finishes and neo-baroque styles," says Grajales.

There have, of course, been earlier trailblazers such as Estudio Campana, founded in 1983 by São Paulo-based brothers Fernando and Humberto Campana, whose work features in permanent collections at the likes of New York's Museum of Modern Art and Centre Pompidou in Paris. What MAD's show revealed was a profusion of emerging design hubs in Buenos Aires in Argentina, Santiago in Chile, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in Brazil, San Salvador in El Salvador, Caracas in Venezuela, Mexico City and Oaxaca in Mexico, San Juan in Puerto

And at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Art, a recent exhibition by Chilean-born Sebastian Errazuriz proved a winter highlight. Based in Santiago and New York, Errazuriz creates engaging designs such as his Bilbao (\$75,000, pictured far left) and Metamorphosis (\$75,000) shelves, which have a branch-like wooden structure.

But the focus is not solely on emerging talent; the continent's creative legacy still reverberates. Gloria Cortina collaborates with local artisans to create bespoke furniture and lighting inspired by legendary Mexican designers and architects Luis Barragán, Diego Rivera and Mathias Goeritz. Similarly, New York-based Luteca, a new design brand with a Latin American focus, launched in February with never previously produced furniture by pioneering Mexican architect Pedro Ramirez Vazquez, who died in 2013. "It's

CHIC-O LATINO

Designers in Latin America are "staying local to go global", as they juxtapose traditional artisanal skills with a compellingly fresh perspective, says Nicole Swengley



From far left: Sebastian Errazuriz plátano and jequitibá wood, glass and stainless steel Bilbao shelves, \$75,000. Leo Capote recycled powder coated carbon steel nuts chair, around \$9,230. Claudia Moreira Salles imbuia-wood Fresta table, £13,750



Clockwise from top left: Hechizoo bronze and nylon rug, \$30,000. Hugo França pequi wood Tafui bench, £33,000. Alexandra Agudelo silver Cactus Redondo Grande vase, \$20,000. José Roberto Paredes pine and leather Maleta bookshelf, \$625

Salvador housing two architecture studios, a graphic design illustration studio, a textile and stamping workshop, an organic food store and a shop selling appealing designs such as José Roberto Paredes' Maleta (\$625, pictured far left), a small bookshelf-cum-side table designed to be carried, suitcase-like, by its leather handle around the home, and Roberto Dumont's Fold chair (\$545), the faceted geometry of which was inspired by Japanese origami.

"The Fold chair is made from fibreglass, applying a technique previously used to make small fishing boats," says Harry. "Many artisans have found themselves out of work due to technological changes. We saw this as an opportunity to introduce them to furniture manufacturing." Local hammock-weaving artisans help create the Washingtons' Lola chair (\$745), with its laurel-wood frame covered with woven cotton cord, while basket-weaving artisans make the intricate seat and backrest of their Ikono chair (\$745), inspired by midcentury circle chairs used in rural Salvadoran homes. "By using a very traditional material in a modern way, we're paying homage to the iconic 1960s circle chair," says Harry.

"Our vision is to create industrial-looking products with non-industrial techniques, focusing on achieving great quality to compete with the global design market."

Equally confident about "staying local to go global" is Javier Cristiani, design director of Markamoderna, whose indoor/outdoor furniture is hand-produced in El Salvador. "Our design process weaves

modernist principles with production techniques inspired by vintage racing car manufacturing methods, resulting in lightweight but strong furniture," he says. A small yet growing collection includes sporty designs like Lami Perf (table, \$715; side table, \$479; chair, \$652), which is made from perforated stainless steel according to efficient production procedures that avoid wasteful off-cuts.

And even Latin American designers working overseas are collaborating with artisans back home. Mexican designer Liliana Ovalle – part of London's Okay Studio – linked up with Colectivo 1050, a group of traditional potters in Oaxaca, to create limited-edition Sinkhole vessels (from £850) inspired by the geographical phenomena that sometimes occur in the urban landscape. Made from open-fired red clay suspended in an oak frame, the intriguing shapes and tactile surfaces suggest that a poetic beauty is present even in degraded civic infrastructures.

Environmental concerns encourage many Latin American designers to recycle or repurpose materials. The Campana brothers led the way by combining scrap materials (rubber hosepipes, rope, furry toys) with advanced technology to create memorable designs that

clear that many Latin American designers feel pride for, and are influenced by, their cultures," says Grajales. "Recent economic growth has provided the freedom to experiment and think more carefully about architecture, art and design. Many are keen to go back to their roots and history, exploring various techniques with artisans and bringing them into the 21st century."

At Grajales' gallery last autumn, a show by Paraguayan architect Pedro Barrail received an enthusiastic response for chairs, bar stools and tables that were designed in his Asunción studio but had been sent to a remote Paraguayan village to be "tattooed" by the Pai Tavytera people with patterns combining traditional mythology with contemporary motifs. Designs like the El Castor Tattoo stool (\$7,000), Levántate y Anda bar stool (\$10,000, pictured overleaf), Tattoo breakfast table (\$15,000) and Holy Mackerel side table (\$7,000) celebrate the tribe's pyro-gravure techniques, visual language and historical narratives, while appealing to contemporary homeowners. "His work is a beautiful juxtaposition of ancient and contemporary design," says Grajales.

San Salvador-based designers Harry and Claudia Washington are also passionate advocates of traditional crafts. "We use local artisans for all our products as manufacturing capabilities are limited in our country," says Harry. Building on this collaborative approach, the Washingtons co-founded The Carrot Collective, a group of socially aware designers keen to nurture creative ventures in their nation of 6m. Good design, they believe, can increase economic and cultural prospects while offering an antidote to crime and poverty. "The design community here has come a long

"Latin American designers are keen to go back to their roots, exploring artisan techniques and bringing them into the 21st century"

way quite quickly; people are noticing that we can create positive change," says Harry. "What we needed were incentives to encourage Salvadoran designers to keep the momentum going."

A significant boost was provided by the launch of Contempo, El Salvador's first national design competition, in 2007. Supported by US furniture specialist Bernhardt Design and local business leaders, the biannual event provides a two-month showcase for selected prototypes by local designers at El Salvador's Museum of Art. "There is a community of incredibly talented designers in El Salvador who needed a platform and voice to be successful. I'm really proud of what they're achieving personally and how they are helping the country economically and culturally," says Jerry Helling, president of Bernhardt Design.

In 2013 Bernhardt Design helped to launch The Carrot Collective's debut furniture and lighting collection at Wanted Design, a show held during New York's International Contemporary Furniture Fair, and repeated the exercise in 2014. The designs sell internationally through the Carrot Concept online store and via those of Fab and Touch of Modern. The Carrot Collective also has a physical space in San

now fetch top dollar at auction. And fellow São Paulo-based designers are following suit. Household brushes are redeployed in Rodrigo Almeida's Servant lamp (\$7,000), while vintage belts bind his Cintura shelf (\$2,000). Coletivo Amor de Madre, a São Paulo design brand and gallery, collaborated with Studio Swine (the Anglo-Japanese design duo Alexander Groves and Azusa Murakami) to create one-off stools (from \$350) from recycled aluminium tins.

And Leo Capote, a former Estudio Campana intern who now runs his own design studio, uses recycled industrial steel nuts in his Porcas chair series, paying gleaming homage to Verner Panton's S chair (around \$9,230, edition of three, pictured on opening pages), Arne Jacobsen's Egg chair (around \$22,150, unique piece) and Eero Saarinen's Tulip chair (around \$10,100, edition of three) – available at São Paulo design shop-cum-gallery Firma Casa.

Reclaimed or sustainably grown timbers are favoured by award-winning Brazilian artist Carlos Motta. His joyful Rio dining chairs (from £750) are made from FSC-certified eucalyptus, while colourful laminates on seats and backs derive from recycled



Above: Pedro Barrail wood and gold leaf Levantate y Anda bar stool, \$10,000

plastic bottles. Meanwhile, redundant sheet metal from the production of Brazilian coins is repurposed in the Moeda chair (£3,050) created by Rio de Janeiro-based Zanini de Zanine for his Studio Zanini collection.

Echoes of modernist designs by de Zanine's late father, midcentury architect

José Zanine Caldas, can be found in his sculptural yet functional Rocking lounger (£17,250).

Made from reclaimed ipê wood – nail holes indicate a former life – its ergonomic angles are created using handcrafted joints and dowels. Skilled carpentry similarly elevates reused timber in de Zanine's Espécies Ipê chair (£13,200), while his Skate chair (£1,400) reworks pre-loved skateboards as a seat and back rest.

Equally engaging are Rio-born, São Paulo-based Claudia Moreira Salles' thoughtful, architectural designs. A base of superimposed timber frames gives the Fresta table (£13,750, pictured on opening pages) a substantial yet airy look, while eight handcarved hollows in the solid walnut surface of the Domino bench (£11,100) cry out for cushions. Inspired by Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona sofa, Salles' bench revisits a much-loved icon by giving it a fresh cultural identity. It's both a visual head-turner and a

chic indicator of the compelling direction contemporary Latin American design is taking. ♦

LATIN LOVERS

Alexandra Agudelo, www.alexandraagudelo.com and see Cristina Grajales Gallery. **Carlos Motta**, www.carlosmotta.com and see Espasso. **The Carrot Collective**, www.thecarrotconcept.com and see Fab and Touch of Modern. **Claudia & Harry Washington**, Ave Las Palmas, Pasaje 6, 114 Col San Benito, San Salvador (+503-2207 3762; www.chwashington.com). **Claudia Moreira Salles**, www.claudia-moreirasalles.com and see Espasso. **Coletivo Amor de Madre**, www.coletivoamordemadre.com.br and see Studio Swine. **Cristina Grajales Gallery**, 10 Greene St, New York, NY 10013 (+1212-219 9941; www.cristinagrajalesinc.com). **Espasso**, Netil House, 3 Netil Lane, 1A Westgate St, London E8 (07442-506 759; www.espasso.com) and branches. **Fab**, www.fab.com. **Firma Casa**, Al Gabriel Monteiro da Silva, 1487 São Paulo (+5511-3385 9595; www.firmacasa.com.br). **Gallery Libby Sellers**, 41-42 Berners St, London W1 (020-3384 8785; www.libbysellers.com). **Gloria Cortina**, www.gloriacortina.mx and see Cristina Grajales Gallery. **Hechizoo**, www.hechizoo.com and see Cristina Grajales Gallery. **Hugo França Atelier**, www.hugofranca.com.br and see Sílvia Nayla and gallerist. **José Roberto Paredes**, see The Carrot Collective. **Leo Capote**, www.leocapote.com and see Firma Casa. **Liliana Ovalle**, www.lilianaovalle.com and see Gallery Libby Sellers. **Luteca**, +1646-510 5244; www.luteca.com and gallerists. **Markamoderna**, www.markamoderna.com and stockists. **M Brasil**, www.mbrasilfurniture.com and see Sílvia Nayla. **Pedro Barrail**, www.pedrobarrail.com and see Cristina Grajales Gallery. **Roberto Dumont**, see The Carrot Collective. **Sebastian Errazuriz**, www.meetsebastian.com and see Cristina Grajales Gallery. **Sílvia Nayla**, 109 Westbourne Grove, London W2 (020-7229 2262; www.silvianayla.com). **Studio Rodrigo Almeida**, Rua Lisboa 574, São Paulo (+5511-9997 60198; www.studiorodrigoalmeida.com). **Studio Swine**, www.studioswine.com. **Sussy Cazalet**, 020-8960 2149; www.sussycazalet.co.uk. **Touch of Modern**, www.touchofmodern.com. **Zanini de Zanine**, www.studiozanini.com.br and see Espasso.