# Searching near and far for distinctive style hh2



# house&home



Designers are embracing digital technology and in the process, changing the way we see furniture hh3

# going green

**The minimalist Spring chair,** made with a single ribbon of laminated bamboo, is the elegant, adult version of a child's bouncy seat. See it and another other sustainable works of art at www.modernbamboo.com

The No End sofa, designed by Jakob & MacFarlane in 2006.
**Cover, Zaha Hadid's Crystal chair.**
Sawaya & Moroni

# 2D is the new 3D

**Revelling in the digital age, designers are blurring the boundary between graphics and products – pixellating, folding and flattening furniture, while creating an edgy new take on trompe l'oeil, reports** Yvonne Courtney

Just as the realm of graphics on the inside of our gadgets gains dimension and colour, so the world outside is becoming a layer that can be compressed into a realm of flat-landish design – designs that seem to celebrate the low-tech, recalling the kind of pre-industrialised fabrication process that a child might use (think scissors, paste and construction paper).

Whether this is nostalgia for a simpler era or a celebration of the opportunities offered by digital technology is open to debate. Living in a postindustrial culture in which most objects have been reinvented again and again, it is becoming ever harder for designers to improve upon existing models. Thus, product designers are turning increasingly to the field of graphic design to make their work seem fresh; they don't accept the old-fashioned, rationalist distinction between the two disciplines.

The cartoonish furniture by the British duo, Wrongwoods, exemplifies the trend: fusing utilitarian lines with playful faux-wood-laminate decoration, it's the result of a collaboration between the designer, Sebastian Wrong, and the artist, Richard Woods. The limited edition pieces (produced for Established & Sons) are a witty, updated take on midcentury modernism. "It is trompe l'oeil operating in a world with lots of branding and lots of graphics," explains Woods, although he concedes that it isn't strictly trompe l'oeil, in its classical sense; rather it's based on the idea of faking it in an obvious, postmodern way. The all-female Swedish design collective, Front, has also been toying with subtle visual trickery for the past few seasons, creating decorative effects that are both

stylish and clever. Its groundbreaking Sketch collection turns freehand drawings into tangible objects. Pen strokes made in the air are recorded by motion-capture to become 3D digital files that are then "materialised" through rapid prototyping technology into real pieces of furniture. Its Changing Cupboard, on the other hand, transforms slatted billboard technology into constantly shifting pixels, while its sketched and shaded furniture and carpet range called, appropriately, Shade, appears to have 3D form thanks to its hand-drawn appearance.

The work of the British designer Julian Mayor, to be found in Europe's more conceptual design galleries, includes Clone – a chair that looks like a pixelated image of a traditional 18th-century Queen Anne chair, thanks to laser-cut vertical layers of plywood – and another chair, Impression, that aims to represent the human form in a 3D grid. "Computers think in grids. People's minds think more organically. My work takes both approaches," explains Mayor. When designing seating he starts with a drawing, before moving on to 3D computer modelling, which allows him to "look at the inside and outside of an object at the same time".

Cities are the inspiration for two of the tables produced by the Italian company Edra.

Figurative art works as much as functional furniture, the multi-sided Brasilia table, designed for the Pisa-based company by the Campana Brothers, is a chaotic mosaic of glass shards: a concentration of modernity that reflects the stones on which the Brazilian capital stands, while Ezri Tarazi's New Baghdad table is made of aluminium profiles

welded together in an imaginary and futuristic way to form a map of the Iraqi capital.

Taking a more poetic route, Bisazza's new Digital Memories collection by Tord Boontje harnesses the ancient technique of mosaic, using digitisation to enable it to work optimally. "When I look at mosaic patterns," explains Boontje, "I'm immediately reminded of a pixelated image, a digital image. We use digital images from cameras and video to capture moments of life, these become our memories. This collection is based on the idea to use images that trigger memories when you look at them ... "

Heading in another direction, why not live or work in two dimensions with the Fractals graphic cupboard-cum-room divider? The asymmetrical units, designed by the Italian design firm Sphaus, can be used separately or combined to create perspective elements along a wall. More ingenious still, the multipurpose Line Environment by the Turkish designer Aykut Erol could have come straight off an Etch-A-Sketch pad: it comprises bookshelves, CD rack, lighting unit and TV stand – which appear in a single, unbroken line of aluminium.

Smaller, everyday household objects are also getting the flatland treatment: Purewhyte's Drew coat rack and Drawing Light by Amsterdam-based Form Follows Freedom magically resemble 3D line drawings. And Ernest Perera's dish drainer for Delica, made in a waterproof combination of wood and melamine, makes a refreshingly graphic addition to the kitchen – although it may not inspire much washing up, for fear of cluttering its clean silhouette.

Making strong reference to an industrial and graphic idiom, the Bent collection by Stefan Diez and Christophe de la Fontaine for Moroso consists of faceted three- and six-pointed geometric shapes. Made in laser-cut aluminium in happy-construction primary colours, each chair or table is creased along oversized perforations – as if made of paper. Similarly, Real Good Chair by the American design studio, Blu Dot, is shipped flat and assembled by folding along laser-cut lines. The studio recently launched a new version in copper with a leather seat. Designed by the New York-based Stephen Burks, the Part tables by B&B Italia, and Woman room partition by Idee in Tokyo, are both rendered in a graphic, origami-like style. The folded aluminium pieces are cut from a flat pattern and treated with a special soft-touch paint.

At a time when Zaha Hadid was

struggling to get anything built, Lebanese-Italian design studio, Sawaya & Moroni put their faith in the architect's angular designs – as seen with the geometric Crystal chair. Sawaya & Moroni is renowned for its high concept, graphic furniture – such as the prism Icy chair by Setsu & Shinobu and the No End couch – an architectural puzzle of reinforced triangular cushions – by Jakob & MacFarlane.

Unlike their predecessors, today's trickery practitioners are pioneering specialist graphic, photographic and print forms to evolve trompe l'oeil in ever more clever ways. This is no longer painterly effects; it's modern technological artistry.

Only in the last few years has digital printing been sophisticated enough to capture the detail of a photographic or painted image sufficiently to blow it up to super-huge dimensions. What's more, modern production methods leave the viewer guessing about the realistic boundaries of the objects as well as the complexity of their construction.

It was precisely this medium that inspired the London-based Lebanese interior designer Rabih Hage to give two of the guest rooms at London's Rough Luxe Hotel the contemporary trompe l'oeil treatment. "Now there are no limits," he says, "and unlike commissioning a painted mural, putting up a canvas is pretty instant."

The British designer Deborah Bowness has been a leader in readdressing the trompe l'oeil genre – so often associated with clumsily painted walls in Italian restaurants or 1980s murals of classical figures on the walls of indoor swimming pools. Originally inspired by the découpage that inspired much of Fornasetti's output, Bowness depicts life-size details in her retro-styled 3D wallpaper: rows of frocks on hangers, standard lamps, library shelves filled with books. The instant change it brings to the tone of a room is what appeals to Bowness. "It becomes more than decoration. My designs can serve as a contrast ... for a really grand interior you could add a shabby chair image and instantly change the feel... likewise, you can create illusions of

grandeur instantly in fairly standard rooms." Her Books wallpaper, for example, makes even the smallest library voluminous – in an ironic way that "books by the mere" never could.

Front's neo-trompe l'oeil designs for Moroso launched at this year's Milan furniture fair include Soft Wood bench (disconcertingly real-looking "pine" planks that are, in fact, upholstery fabric) as well as Drape and Cushion sofas, which, as their names suggest, appear to be richly draped and deeply cushioned. On a more populist level, Front is working with Ikea: the Swedish giant's new PS collection includes Selma, a chair with a seat comprising several thin, padded cushions that can be "turned" like the leaves of a book – each printed with a different design of trompe l'oeil fabric and lace.

On a grander scale, the Australian architectural firm, ARM, has designed a dynamic performing arts theatre in Melbourne. Fusing architectural and acoustic design, the building's geometry has been enhanced to provide greater sound intimacy and improved sight lines for the audience. Its dramatic façade, featuring 3D iridescent steel tubing folded and bent against black aluminium cladding, is echoed inside, where a dramatic lobby appears to be made of shape-shifting planes. Closer to home, Karim Rashid's design for Switch restaurant in Dubai Mall features floors and ceilings smothered in stylised Arabic script, together with lit, undulating lines on the floor that are designed to evoke a "digital running river".

Thus, digital technology is freeing designers from their screens and sheets of paper to explore dynamic 3D installations and objects. They are emerging with an exuberant, visual language that successfully mixes product, interior and graphic design to deal with space, material and physical products. It's pure 2D made to inspire our 3D existence.
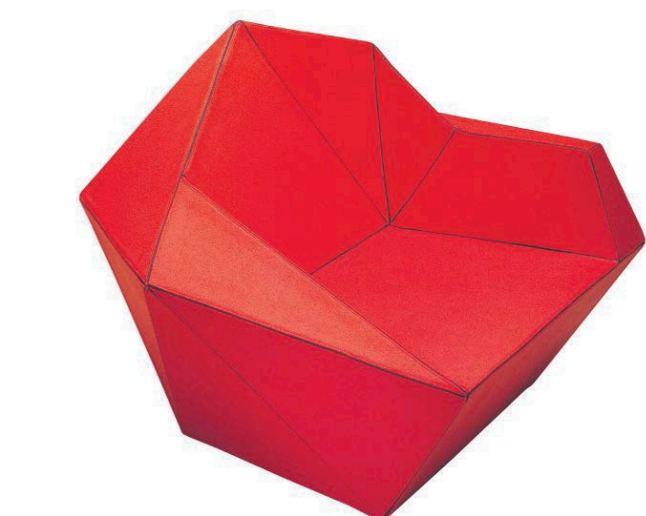
**Above, the Icy armchair by Setsu and Shinobu Ito.** Sawaya & Moroni **Above right, the Chest of Drawers by Sebastian Wrong and Richard Woods.** Established & Sons **Right, the PS Selma easy chair by Front.** Ikea