

mix FUTURE INTERIOR

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A New Dawn

A bold new initiative sets out to pull Austria out of design obscurity. Richard Prime believes they might just succeed.



Many account managers would argue that branding, or more so re-branding, is one of the most difficult tasks in the creative field. To define a strategy that is clear and focused is crucial to creating a strong identity that people will continue to recognise. A good campaign can rescue a flagging product or company from the jaws of defeat. But what if the task is not to re-brand a product or a company but a whole country's creative industry?

Two years ago Andrés Fredes and Julia Taubinger, two Austrian designers based at the time in Barcelona, set out to achieve just that and revitalise the flagging Austrian design scene using the cutting edge capsule exhibition, Pure Austrian Design (PAD). Fredes laughs as he recalls the stimulus, "Over a few beers we [Fredes and Taubinger] decided to move from Spain to Austria and I asked her 'what about the design in Austria'? She said 'Austrian design! What Austrian design?'"

Austrian design's poor reputation has been a slow slide into oblivion, a far cry from its heyday at the end of the 19th century, as Dr Georg Emprechtinger, owner of furniture company Team 7 and Vice President of the Austrian Furniture Board explains; "At the beginning of the last century Austria was at the centre of design with its 'Werkbund' companies." Austrian designers were

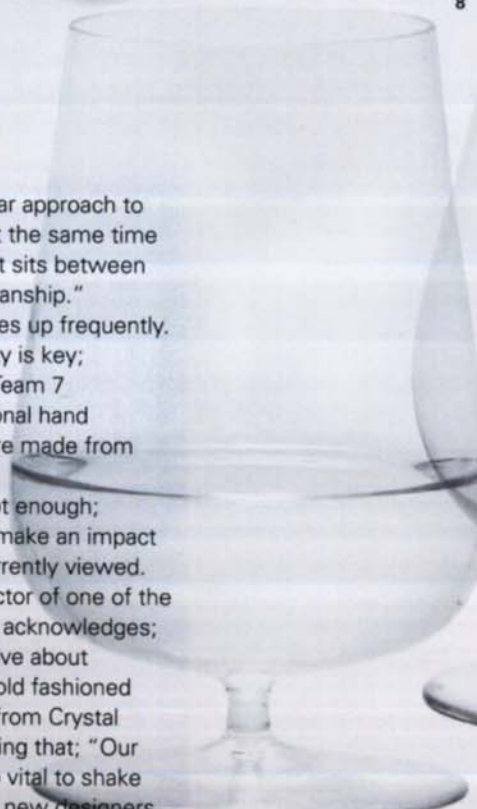
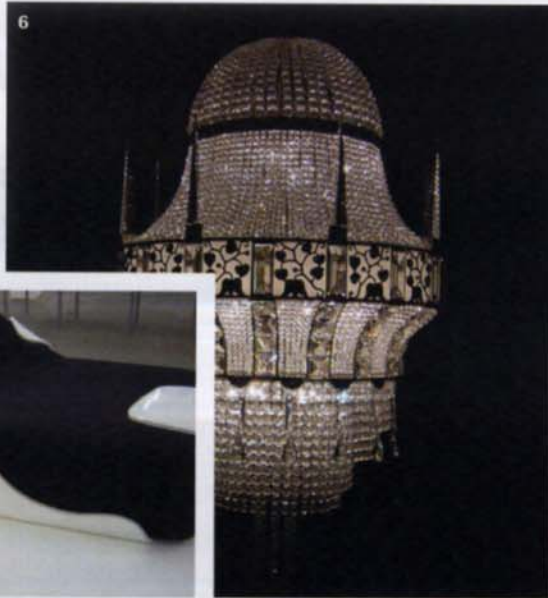
factor, "Not only was the country destroyed but also a little of the mentality. During the opening stages (post war) Austrians were seen as the bad guys. It took a long time for this to change."

Perhaps it was this sense of guilt plus the post-war opening infrastructure across Europe that turned Austria, once poised enviably in the centre of Europe with its good connections into a retracting recluse. Fredes concedes that, "Austrians like to work alone."

PAD sets out to change this, brought to London for the first time during London Design Festival 2006, the exhibition has over 80 examples of new Austrian design. Taubinger and Fredes have helped bring together a bold show of creative strength in numbers.

Fredes' vision is, much like the emerging Austrian design style, clear and honest, "Julia and I have defined strategies for marketing and branding and know we need to be in the design centres and shows to keep the profile high and build on what we have done so far. I want to take PAD to Scandinavia and not be afraid (of the competition). We have arrived. We are Austria and this is what we can do, We have the music, the design, the commitment and an unexpected spirit of hedonism."

So far, so much bravado. But can Austria really cut it on the super competitive global design



ones to watch...

POLKA

Founders Marie Rahm and Monica Singer's work stresses the importance of bringing pleasure back to usage. Polka's glass carafe with drinking glass (made with handblown crystal by Lobmeyr) is an understated example of how to design something that works perfectly while looking viciously beautiful. It's delicate looks and transparency mean that many visitors to PAD almost missed it at first glance.

www.polkaproducts.com



SODA DESIGNERS

Design team Nada Nasrallah & Christian Horner met studying industrial design with the likes of Ron Arad and Borek Sipek. The duo, who come from differing professional backgrounds, enjoy subverting the notions of spaces and their natural usage. Whether designing a set of magnetic rolling salt and pepper shakers or a magazine rack cum table that lives happily all over the house, Soda's designs display the Austrian attributes of impeccable craftsmanship and sly cheekiness.

www.soda.at

feels Austrian design has a similar approach to German design; functional but at the same time the approach is fresh and fun. "It sits between Italian style and German craftsmanship."

The word craftsmanship comes up frequently. For the Austrian old guard, quality is key; Emprechtinger enthuses about Team 7 employing only the finest traditional hand craftsmen for its sensual furniture made from hand sourced Austrian wood.

However, craftsmanship is not enough; design must be cutting edge to make an impact and this is not how Austria is currently viewed. Thomas M Bene, executive director of one of the country's best known exporters, acknowledges; "The image that people often have about Austrian design is that it's quite old fashioned and traditional." Leonid A. Rath from Crystal expert Lobmeyr agrees, concluding that; "Our heritage is important but it's also vital to shake off the shackles of the past. The new designers are open to tradition and as producers we are receptive to young designers and want to help them progress."

Crucially, there does appear to be more dialogue between emerging design and established companies. But Austria is still battling with massive under-investment; "Compared to Scandinavia who has over €6 million to promote

