



Hayón and On

DESIGNER **JAIME HAYÓN** MANAGES TO BALANCE LIFE AS AN ARTIST-CUM-DESIGNER, DELVING INTO HIS SUBCONSCIOUS TO PRODUCE PLAYFUL, HUMOUROUS AND ORIGINAL WORKS, WRITES OLIVIA TOTH

PHOTOGRAPHY VINCENT TSANG



DESIGN
The Cutting
Edge



JAIME HAYÓN IS WEARING a pair of green, over-sized spectacles on the day of our interview that are rather fetchingly offset by his canary yellow Camper-Hayón shoes. It's a typically Hayón ensemble: offbeat, wacky and reflecting his innate sense of fun. It's daytime garb for the designer who's been known to don a rabbit or clown costume when the mood takes him.

Despite his global notoriety, the Spaniard is self-effacing, warm, engaging and the antithesis of what one would expect from one of today's hottest contemporary design talents. Born in 1974, Jaime (pronounced *High-may*) has cut his teeth on projects that have been as varied in scope as they have been unfettered in their creativity. An exchange student in the US prior to studying industrial design in Madrid and Paris, Hayón's first big break came in 1997 while working as a researcher at Benetton Group's "communication research centre" and creative hothouse, Fabrica. A year into his tenure, Hayón was handpicked by Luciano Benetton and Oliviero Toscani, the mastermind behind the controversial "United Colours of Benetton" campaign, to head up the design department. Hayón refers to Fabrica's notorious pressure-cooker environment as "a dream, [with] 30 creators from all over the world in a box made by Tadao Ando, in the middle of nowhere."

"The Fabrica experience was a little bit crazy," he says with a lilting Spanish-American twang. "At the age of 22, I was flying on a private jet

with Mr Benetton because Oliviero Toscani and Luciano sort of accepted me. I learnt really early on to have a lot of responsibility. What I found there was that I discovered myself." Fabrica's "thinking laboratory" stretched Hayón to the limits and challenges such as organising a 5,000-square-metre exhibition became part and parcel of the designer's formative experiences.

While exhilarating, he admits that constantly breaking down what he had learnt in school and "starting from zero" at Fabrica caused him to question the world as he saw it. Tired of the constant pressure, Hayón retreated into his fantasy world and began making toys as a means of escapism. "On one side, I was having meetings as part of this Benetton machine. But I was like, 'In my house, I don't accept that.' The other me was thinking, 'What the fuck am I doing here?' and was getting wasted with friends thinking about the next thing to do."

Handed the role as director of the whole show at Fabrica, Hayón took the surprising decision to leave and take a year off. "I said 'Bye bye Italy, bye bye marketing and welcome the new world of being in the middle of El Raval in Barcelona in a small house with my backpack. It all went really naturally,'" he smiles.

Despite today living in London's eclectic Soho district, Madrid-born Hayón is every bit an avant-garde Spanish soul. Crediting the love and freedom of his parents as a huge grounding force, Hayón is one of Spain's renaissance generation who cross-references a cultural past while looking to the future. "My parents look at my work as if I'm coming with cakes. It's really a natural way to accept it. I was on the cover of the *Financial Times* *How to spend it* and my mother was like, 'Why are you dressed like a clown, Jaime?'" he laughs, adding, "You go to Denmark,

MAGIC PEN

OPPOSITE Jaime Hayón at Lane Crawford Home
ABOVE LEFT, RIGHT Hayón's trusty diary and pens; bathroom furniture goes Baroque for ArtQuitect; horse vase by Bosa Ceramiche from Hayón's Mon Cirque exhibition





people of my parent's age, they know everything about Arne [Jacobsen] and they all have wooden floors. In Spain, they have a [laminated] photo that looks like wood."

By 2003, Hayón's first exhibition debuted at the David Gill gallery in London. Inspired by a visit to a cactus park on the Spanish island of Lanzarote, the *Mediterranean Digital Baroque* show merged the boundaries of design and art with Hayón's signature surrealist flair. Multi-tiered, multicoloured ceramic cacti, birds and supersonic, leather-upholstered pigs stood out against white walls graffitied with Hayón's Picasso-like etchings. At the centre of the exhibition stood a Hayón house with a toy installation featuring hundreds of "love invader" dolls ready, as Hayón puts it, "to conquer the world."

"I have a saying that in the 21st century, we can do these things," he explains. "I think that the society we live in right now is ready to understand that there can be fusions and hybrids like me. People today are ready to accept the hybridity of cultures like you accept a Murakami work for Louis Vuitton. It's a fusion of disciplines and it was time to have that happen."

Hayón's *Mon Cirque* installation of 2006 stretched his creativity still further, showcasing a series of hand-painted ceramic plates, clown lamps and horse head vases all manufactured by Bosa Ceramiche in galleries in Barcelona, Paris, Cologne and Kuala Lumpur. Later that year, Hayón added pieces from his baroque Showtime and Halo collections, ArtQuitect bathroom range and his quirky, elegant Metalarte lighting line for his *Stage* exhibition at London's Aram Gallery. *Stage* evolved and travelled to Madrid and Rotterdam, charting the designer's work as it went up until 2007.

Fast forward to his first Hong Kong showcase in late 2008, courtesy of Lane Crawford. Beyond interfacing at global design shows, the luxury



RARE BIRD

TOP LEFT, RIGHT

Hayón, surrounded by his sketches; Hayón brings his signature ceramic touch to this Lucky Green sweetmeat box from his Crystal Candy Set for Baccarat
INSET Fantasy Collection vase for Spanish ceramic house Lladró



retailer's home and lifestyle merchandise manager, Ross Urwin, had forged a partnership with Hayón via the designer's companion and collaborator, Dutch photographer Nienke Klunder. Klunder's own role has been instrumental, both as the visual documenter of Hayón's craft and now as a design partner. From the inspiration through to the final execution of Hayón's collaborations with ArtQuitect, Bisazza, Bernhardt Design, Established and Sons, Camper, Lladró and Baccarat, to name but a few, she has documented the ebbs, flows and stratospheric heights of his imagination.

Umbilically attached to his diary, Hayón is constantly sketching *Alice in Wonderland* figures, fantasy birds and cartoon demons rendered in Picasso-esque, inky brushstrokes, coloured pencil and pastel. Despite the technical brio involved, there's an almost folkloric, naïve treatment to the multi-headed cacti, clowns and pseudo self-portraits, which ultimately reflect his sunny, effervescent persona.

Hayón applies a similar irreverence to conventional design dictates. "Take my chair over there," he says, pointing to a lacquered plastic, baroque-style chair from his Showtime collection. "Somebody asked me to do an exterior chair and I did an interior chair. They asked for blue, I gave them red. So you question things. It's a plastic chair, but you paint it like a piano, so it's a certain contradiction." The second hallmark of

DESIGN

"I never accepted the fact that I had to follow a certain path, because it breaks the real me as an explorer, an artist"



Hayón's work is his artisanal approach to quality borne of craftsmanship. "You want to work with artisans, so you bring the plastic chair to an artisan in Barcelona and you make a unique recipe out of the way you work. This is the way in my work where you can see this hybridity. For me, it is the moment to work this way. It's my style."

As a designer, artist and entrepreneurial collaborator, striking a genuine rapport with clients is paramount. "I have to have a great relationship with people, as I work from the heart and from [a place of] passion," he says. "I never really accepted the fact that I had to follow a certain path because it breaks the real me as an explorer, as someone questioning things, someone who works like an artist. They will show me what they can do, but they won't tell me what to do." Hayón views his designs as "emotional, they're sort of a bridge to another reality." And with a design process that is rooted in art beyond the designer's traditional role as a problem-solver comes an element of risk. "I know about design, I know about industry," he says. "I'm really serious about what I'm doing, but I'm telling my clients, 'If you want to work with me, you have to risk it. And only with risk will you find a new path.' It's not only about living in a bubble, it's also about putting that bubble into something physical, something that works."

Hayón believes product designers should be afforded the same creative freedom as fashion

designers, referencing the avant-garde catwalk shows of fashion duo Victor & Rolf: "They're dreaming and they make you understand what's the world, what's behind it. My question is, 'Why would [product] designers not do it too?' Philip Starck was the first one to create a brand, a name. In general, designers have always been behind the concept [but] in the 21st century, design is getting more value in galleries. A lot of the pieces are very special and they're unique. If you look at a piece by Damien Hirst and you take a piece by the best designer in the world, it's like, 'Why shouldn't they be rated [equally]?'"

Hayón's commitment to his design dream is brought to bear by a continuous cycle of creation with a purpose, as documented in his latest book, *Jaime Hayón Works*, published by Gestalten. Five years of his life's work are condensed into 320 pages, charting the rigorous processes and projects to emerge from his ateliers in London, Barcelona and Treviso, Italy. Waxing lyrical about his design team and the craftsmen he collaborates with, Hayón calls the process "a completely super-dynamic way to work."

"The best day of my life was when I discovered I'd made truly what I wanted and not what others had told me to do. I think when you discover what your real talents are, and if you really make what you want with your own vision, is when you really succeed. And that's like an open door, because the next thing is up to you." ■



HEAD CANDY

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Baroque cabinet from the ArtQuitect collection; Hayón's statement sketches; interior at La Terrazza del Casino restaurant in Madrid **ABOVE** Hayón's green chicken rocking chair