

POTENTIAL UNLEASHED

Five architects turned product designers who challenged conventional norms, and created an impact in the world of design

RESEARCH: BENOY SEBASTIAN

What made you decide to become a product designer?

Being an architect by training, the shift to product design, or what we term it as micro-architecture came naturally. Small elements can have big impact on spaces, and the goal was to expand the architecture and interior design explorations through the product design lens - mainly through experimental lighting and furniture to create interesting spaces.

What do you find the most fulfilling about product creation?

Exploring materials and design processes are the most exciting part of the process. Also working with local artisans and craftsmen, as it's a great learning experience to understand the production processes.

What skills did you gain from architecture school, or working in the architecture industry, that have contributed to your success?

The key skills you gain from architecture, I feel are discipline, patience and quick thinking. These skills are extremely important when managing workshops, executing labour and site work in the profession.

The best advice I have received?

'Be an honest architect', these were the parting words from one of my former employers, Fritz Haller, Managing Partner at Landolt+Haller Architekten in Switzerland. I have lived up to it ever since trying to bring an honest approach in design, production processes and all other aspects of our business.

I always wanted to design?

I want to design the lighting for the next upcoming airport in Navi-Mumbai. Experiencing the lighting design at the present international airport in Mumbai was inspiring, and has given us a new goal for the next few years of what scales we have to achieve.

My best achievement?

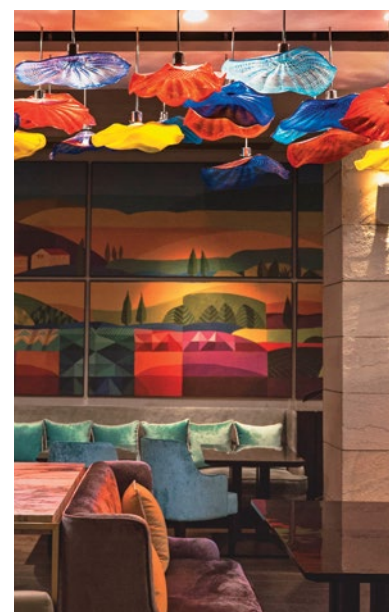
The lighting design completed for the Lodha World Towers was one of our most fulfilling achievements. The project included designing chandeliers for spaces over 150 feet long, which we designed and executed within a stipulated time-frame of under



two months. Those projects opened up new avenues for large scale projects for the studio along with new found confidence in what we can achieve and deliver.

Do you miss working as an architect?

We are a multi-disciplinary practice, and are still designing and executing architecture works across various scales. We have a 32,000 sqft private residence in Gandhidham under design, along with restoration of a 120 year old art deco building in Mumbai. We also recently finished a three storey pre-school in Thane. So, architecture, product design are all an ongoing process.





What made you decide to become a product designer?

It started early on right after graduating from architecture school; I attended various international design shows for our family run business, which really impacted my perception. The design and experimentation process, to detailing to production processes, the international market - the whole spectrum. I could see how theoretical knowledge was translated into actual finished products. This was further fueled by Masters in Design, London, where I fell in love with design all over again.



What do you find the most fulfilling about product creation?
Well-designed products not only serve a necessity, but also have an emotional extension. When I design, I usually try to respond to something that moves me in a personal way. The product

should imprint on the user emotionally for them to seek it and not dispose it in a very short frame of time. The fact that it has power to enter your daily rituals and can augment your behaviour is very exciting.

What skills did you gain from architecture school, or working in the architecture industry, that have contributed to your success?

Architecture is the mother of all design educations. Space is generally treated in a more holistic way rather than a stylised/ decorative approach. Design research, experimentation, inclusion of local crafts, sustainable materials, process optimisation and user experience factors are all for designing a space, which also applies to product design as well. There is a shift in scale certainly, but eventually it's all about creating an experience. The space or the product should move you. Or else don't have it.

The best advice I have received?

Don't restrict yourself to any one particular design medium. Try everything; each material emotes and behaves differently.

My best achievement?

The upcycled series that is currently on a 10 year travelling exhibition with IFA, Germany and the faceted series, which was exhibited at the Triennale Design Museum, Italy.

Do you miss working as an architect?

Yes, absolutely!

Architect Speak

What made you decide to become a product designer?

Our practice primarily consists of architects and we look at design challenges as opportunities. We have always had an interest in working on self-propelled projects, where the brief is not necessarily client driven, but has been created by us. Products are a good scale to begin with and focus on detail therefore we established MuseMART, which is our product brand and the first step towards working on self-propelled projects.

What do you find the most fulfilling about product creation?

Products can be prototyped and created in a timely manner, and in most cases products can be held and experienced more intimately. The material analysis and manufacturing process is exciting and as opposed to architecture there is instant gratification in designing products, as products can be manufactured in a lesser time period than designing and creating a structure or a built environment.

What skills did you gain from architecture school, or working in the architecture industry, that have contributed to your success?

Savannah College of Art and Design equipped me with design principle tools and also laid the foundation for design thinking to enable problem solving. The experience that I gained from working at a large firm like Gensler in New York helped me in building my planning and execution skills and strategically developing design guidelines. Working at Pinakin in Mumbai, I was able to focus on interior design detailing.

The best advice I have received?

I don't know about best, but one advice that I remember receiving in Valley School, Bengaluru from my art teacher was to complete everything you start, and whatever you do make sure you do it with passion. Another advice that also resonates is the one that I received from my project manager at Gensler in New York - fight the battles that you need to, and not every battle is meant to be fought.



I always wanted to design?

A complete experiential design for a hotel or inn that entails service design as well as product design. To design an experience that begins with booking a room till the time of check out; from the graphics to the architecture and everything in between. To design an experience that is layered with details.

My best achievement?

My best achievement so far has been the establishment and creation of MuseLAB along with my friend, my pal and confidant; Huzefa Rangwala. We are fortunate to be working with a bunch of great and enthusiastic individuals on our team who are as passionate and excited as us.

Do you miss working as an architect?

Fortunately for us we still have our architectural and interior design practice MuseLAB.



SAIF FAISAL
(SAIF FAISAL DESIGN WORKSHOP)

What made you decide to become a product designer?

I was always keen on pursuing automotive design as a career; I joined architecture as a base course in design. During my architecture days in college, I was designing



and building formula student race cars with fellow students from the mechanical engineering department for International Formula-SAE competitions, we competed in Australia, Italy and Germany. Then it dawned upon me that specialising in a particular discipline would be very restrictive, learning quite a bit of automotive design on my own with help and encouragement from some mentors, I thought product design would just broaden the scope.

What do you find the most fulfilling about product creation?

The most fulfilling thing is the self initiated design ideas and concepts that I can work on and make a working prototype, rather than waiting for a client to bring in a project that only becomes a reality with their funding. It is quite satisfying to have the integrity of design not compromised in the process from the initial intent to the final design.

What skills did you gain from architecture school, or working in the architecture industry, that have contributed to your success?

I love architecture; it is quite romantic to me. But, sadly I did not learn much, it always felt like I was discovering - 'what not to do,' maybe it was because of the way it was taught and practiced in India. Rather everything I explored out of architecture helped me get here.

The best advice I have received?

'Don't do it! You can't do the contemporary work you aiming at developing with International brands staying here.' I took it as a playful challenge.

I always wanted to design?

Everything that I haven't yet designed. I would like to design

things that are beyond the corporeal world, meaningful things and experiences that shape us to be better culturally and socially.

My best achievement?

I'm an autodidact, so every time I acquire some new skill or learn something, it gives a good sense of accomplishment. Designing and competing in Formula-SAE around the world in college, while being enrolled in architecture would be up there in the top. Also, my thesis project, which I was asked to drop as the faculty deemed it unworthy, but I took an extra semester to do it on my own and did it quite well. The irony is that it was nominated for BeOPEN Future and exhibited at the 100% Design London 2012.

Do you miss working as an architect?

I miss architecture a lot. I would soon be taking up some selected projects.





ARCHANA VAN GILS
(AVG ARCHITECTURE EN INTERIORS)

What made you decide to become a furniture designer?

Furniture plays a vital role to create desired experience around the house. While doing interior projects, furniture designs always fascinated and inspired me to design any space with a perfect ambience. I travelled across different countries and explored different cultures, and fell in love with fascinating details, materials and manufacturing techniques of furniture making.

What do you find the most fulfilling about furniture creation?

I adore the creative constraints of functionality and trying to make something lasting. I absolutely enjoy the overall designing process from initial inspiration to conceptualisation and workshop challenges, until the prototype is ready to showcase. Nothing can match the joy of receiving great feedback from customers, not only in India, but also from around the world.

What skills did you gain from architecture school, or working in the architecture industry, that have contributed to your success?

Architecture school was an overwhelming, yet a wonderful experience for me in terms of allowing me the freedom to fully



express my ideas. My practical training and work experience on the other hand taught me to work with challenges and limitations that helped me to carve out a niche in the industry.

The best advice I have received?

It has to be from my mentor - architect Atal Kapoor who once said, "if you come to me with a problem and you do not have a solution, then you are definitely part of that problem." Try to see any problem with this perspective and eventually, you will come up with a solution.

I always wanted to design?

Something which is original and can reflect my vivacity and enthusiasm for life.

My best achievement...

A difficult question, but I certainly feel my vigor multiplies multi-fold when my designs get appreciation from few of the best global designers whose work I truly admire.

