

One to watch



WHO:
MATTHEW PLUMMER-FERNANDEZ

Multidisciplinary designer Matthew Plummer-Fernandez recently gained an MA in product design from the Royal College of Art. He previously studied computer-aided mechanical engineering at King's College London and graphic design at the University College for the Creative Arts at Epsom.

WHY: Plummer-Fernandez's cross-disciplinary approach to his design work has yielded unusual hybrid objects such as his Sound Chair. He has exhibited internationally with the support of Designersblock.



WHAT: (#1) Made from water-jet cut polythene foam, Sound Chair is a physical manifestation of a sound wave graph. It was launched at the London Design Festival in 2008 and was sold

in Selfridges.

(#2) The Apifera is an installation that Plummer-Fernandez designed for one of Selfridges' shop windows. The geometric spiral structure measured 5m x 3m and was designed to respond to street activity and daylight, mimicking the way that the geometric shapes of flowers and plants are known to attract insects. In the case of the shop window, the attraction was engineered to attract customers into the store.



(#3) Four Footfalls, another installation for Selfridges, used automated ink machines that responded to the footfalls of pedestrians outside the store. Over the course of eight weeks, the ink slowly dripped down to stain a number of white canvas posts, leaving an abstract reminder of the number of shoppers who passed the window.

WHERE: www.plummerfernandez.com

➤ BURDIFILEK

Diego Burdi and Paul Filek have a flair for luxury design that, thanks to their enthusiasm and ambition, is now in demand from clients across the world

Interior design company Burdifilek may be based in Toronto but when I talk on the phone to one of its two founders, creative partner Diego Burdi (pictured, left, with fellow partner Paul Filek), his boundless enthusiasm comes over loud and clear.

And it's no wonder. Burdifilek has recently put the finishing touches to the interior of its first W Hotel in downtown Atlanta, the company's most prestigious project to date. It's quite a coup for a firm that started out in a recession 15 years ago with Burdi and managing partner Filek only a couple years out of Toronto's Ryerson University.

'We basically took on anything that came our way,' Burdi remembers. 'We were of an age when there was really nothing to lose. In fact, I'd recommend doing that in this economic climate – especially if you're young – just roll the dice.'

Burdi's enthusiasm is infectious and it undoubtedly helped his company punch above its weight in those early years. A successful project for Canadian retailer Club Monaco established a relationship that led to more stores in New York on Prince Street, Broadway and 67th Street.

The turning point came seven years ago with the commission to design the interior of the Holt



Renfrew department store in Toronto. 'It was interesting', says Burdi. 'We were among a group of other designers presenting their ideas for the store and we were definitely the smallest company. We'd never done a department store before.'

But Burdifilek is not a company to let details like that stand in the way of great projects and, once again, enthusiasm and ambition won through. 'We went in for a meeting in the morning and they said it would take them a couple of weeks to decide – but we got a call that afternoon and they said we had the job. We fell into this world of luxury design and it's been a non-stop ride ever since.'

It is a ride that has taken the company to Germany, Italy and the USA. Following the Holt Renfrew project, Burdifilek was commissioned to work on another Wittington Group-owned department store, Brown Thomas in Dublin. 'We're now on our third project for Brown Thomas, a jewellery store', says Burdi.

So how did Burdifilek get from department stores to luxury hotels? 'Well, it was like this. Here we are doing our thing and having major success in the retail world and I'm like: "You know, I think it's

time we got into the hotel world,'" says Burdi.

'Some companies might think: "Well, we've never done a hotel before so we'll aim at the middle" but we did the opposite. We sent out some stuff to W and basically said: "So what do you think?"' The bravado paid off. A couple of weeks later, a call came through and they had the job.

'We're having a great time with the hospitality world,' says Burdi. 'It calls for a different methodology and approach to design, so we're becoming more of a multifaceted company.'

He continues: 'What's really amazing about W and Starwood [the owner of W Hotels] in general is that they look at the talent behind the company, and that's what they saw in us. This time they rolled the dice.'

The company's interiors don't exactly follow a style – there's the contemporary chic that you would expect from W Hotels, the solid quality of their work for luxury department stores and the fun, colourful schemes for smaller retailers. 'There is an artistic flair to all of our work,' says Burdi, 'but it's always appropriate for the client. I think that's the reason for the company's success.'

So did starting the company in a recession help Burdifilek deal with today's financial crisis? Burdi thinks so: 'I sometimes wonder, if we'd started the company seven years ago, would we be able to deal with today's economic climate? We've lived it, we're well seasoned and resilient, but we've also been very fortunate to have had some very well-established clients who really understand the importance of design.'

So what's next? 'Well, I'd love to do more in the European market because there is a design sensibility there that is a little more refined.' As for Canada, Burdi says: 'It's a very creative country with a lot of enthusiasm, but it's a very large landmass with a small population so there isn't always as much opportunity as there could be.'

Opportunities may not always be forthcoming but one thing is clear: Diego Burdi and Paul Filek make their own luck. **■ Jamie Mitchell**



PHOTOGRAPHY: LEE TOWNDROW



Diego Burdi (left) and Paul Filek have secured a host of luxury clients. Insets show their designs for #1 Murale, an upmarket cosmetics retailer in Canada, and #2 the W Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia