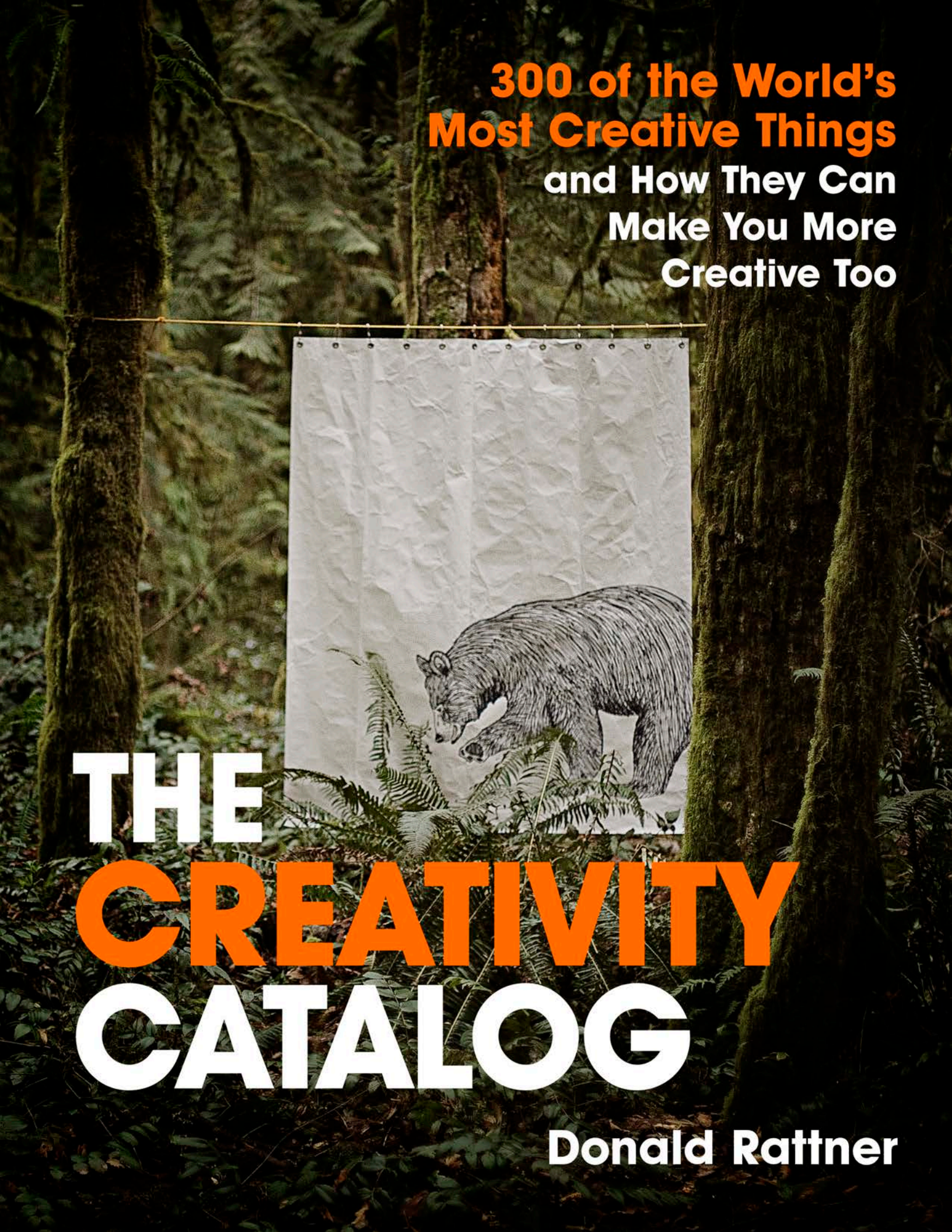

300 of the World's Most Creative Things and How They Can Make You More Creative Too

THE CREATIVITY CATALOG

Donald Rattner

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Donald Rattner
FOUNDER OF THECREATIVEHOME.COM

THE CREATIVE HOME

HOUSE OF CARDS (1952) BY CHARLES AND RAY EAMES, REISSUED BY EAMES OFFICE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE CREATIVITY OF THINGS

WHY THIS BOOK • The subject of creativity is getting a great deal of attention these days. Educators and experts continue to publish books and papers offering their perspectives on creativity. Businesses large and small hire consultants to train staff in creative thinking as a way to spur innovation in their daily work. Parents scramble to learn about the latest techniques for advancing their children's mental development through creative activities. Add a hefty supply of blog posts, Web sites, conferences, and even degree programs in Creativity Studies, and it becomes evident that our enthusiasm for insights into this valued commodity shows no signs of diminishing.

Of course, we believe there's always room for one more book on any given subject, especially when it's our own. But *The Creativity Catalog* doesn't fall neatly into the usual categories of publication you'll find on the shelf. It's not an academic tome delving deeply into the latest theories about creativity. It's not a self-help guide to finding professional success by teaching you a particular skill set, like how to brainstorm effectively. And it's not an excursion into the psychology of self. What *The Catalog* is primarily intended to do is introduce you to some of the world's most creative things so that you can learn to be more creative by using and understanding them.

PURPOSE OF THE CATALOG • We've deliberately referenced the verbs "to use" and "to understand" in our statement of purpose because the products selected for *The Catalog* can be approached in two ways: as platforms for exercising individual creativity through direct use, and as models for devising things that provide users with the opportunity to be creative. Which approach you take in reading this book likely depends on your profile and objectives. If, for example, you're a parent or teacher looking for things that will encourage young people in your charge to develop their creative faculties, then you're probably going to evaluate the products for their potential effectiveness in achieving this goal. Individuals wanting to enhance their own capacity for creative thinking, whether for business or personal reasons, or to fit out a home or workplace with products that allow them to express their creativity, also will tend to view the contents of *The Catalog* from an applied viewpoint.

On the other hand, if you're an entrepreneur, manufacturer, or product designer wanting a deeper appreciation of how to make things incorporating a creative component, then you'll find *The Catalog* a rich source of inspiration and instruction offered up by an array of talented individuals, firms, and brands.

ALGUE BY RONAN AND ERWAN BOUROULLEC FOR VITRA (2004)

DEFINING CREATIVITY AND RELATED TERMS • *Creativity* is a somewhat elusive concept. Its nuances defy simple and universal definition, a challenge made all the more difficult by our practice of applying it to a diverse field of human activities and disciplines. Not long ago creativity was primarily associated with the fine arts and applied design; today we also explore creativity in relation to the sciences, business management, innovation and entrepreneurship, psychological development and personal wellbeing in children and adults, philosophy, and technology. Crafting a succinct explanation of creativity that fits so many contexts is not an easy lift. Compounding the difficulty is our practice of variously describing a person, a process or activity, and a product, whether an idea in our mind or an observable performance or artifact, as creative. Nevertheless, from the voluminous literature that has appeared in recent decades there seems to be a general consensus that creativity encompasses two principal attributes: *newness* (or novelty) and *value* (sometimes called usefulness or appropriateness). Both conditions must be evident for something to be described as authentically creative; for example, you could compose some text by randomly writing one letter after another, but it would fail as a creative act since no one would understand its meaning.

Nonsense words might be an extreme case, but what if an object or idea you come up with is novel and of value to yourself and perhaps to a small group of other people—ought we deem it creative in the same general sense as a more widely known and accepted invention would be? The short answer in at least one school of thought is yes, but with qualifications that will be explained later on.

Innovation is a related term that is sometimes used interchangeably with creativity. According to its standard dictionary definition, to innovate is to change something that is established, typically by introducing new methods, ideas, or products. It is most commonly used in the context of business and especially entrepreneurship, and can be loosely considered a synonym for creativity when used in *The Catalog*. In effect, it means the implementation of creative ideas. A second related term is *imagination*, which is the process of bringing to mind things that don't physically exist or are not evident to the senses. Creativity demands imagination, yet not every act of imagination is necessarily creative—we can all mentally conjure up a unicorn without actually having invented or produced the beast.

Definitions of creativity are historically and culturally rooted. *The Catalog* is grounded in the Western tradition of equating creativity with originality and physical production, epitomized by the biblical story of Earth's creation. Eastern views of creativity, by contrast, commonly revolve around emotional and personal revelation. Neither tradition has been completely static through the centuries; for instance, the ancient Western belief that creativity was channeled from the divine was widely held until around the Renaissance, after which we gradually came around to the view that human beings are innately creative on their own. As time goes on, we can expect that our present definitions of creativity will undergo further transformation.

PRODUCT SELECTION • This book brings together a group of products that explore the relationship between a particular type of everyday object and human creativity. All the products share a common profile. They are well-designed, affordably priced by common standards, and reflect good to high production values. In terms of product type, they fall under the categories of consumer and home goods, and in subcategories ranging from accessories, lighting, furniture, and children's things to jewelry and apparel, storage and organization, wall and floor coverings, and decor. While any of these products would feel at home in a residential context, some would be equally comfortable in a workplace, commercial, or hospitality environment. Some are driven in their design by aesthetics, others are engineered primarily to serve a pragmatic purpose. Most were introduced within recent decades; a few are legacy products with longer histories. Whatever their context, typology, or background, they are united in their intent to enhance the quality of their surroundings and enrich the lives of their users. At the time *The Catalog* went to print every item was in production; we excluded one-off, handmade, and limited edition products to ensure that you, the reader, could obtain any item you wanted from *The Catalog*. We also omitted digital and tech products, both hardware and software, because they facilitate a different kind of creativity than the manually operated products in *The Catalog*, and would be better treated in a separate publication.

Of the many brands represented in the collection, a few can be considered large, international, or long-established companies, while the rest are small to medium-sized, regional, and more recently founded. The roster of designers is similarly diverse, mingling respected names and well-earned reputations with lesser known, emerging, and anonymous figures. Both brands and designers are global in origin and operation, aptly reflecting the state of international commerce today.

CREATORS AND USERS • *The Catalog* divides the world of consumer product design into two camps: conventional and creative. Our choice of labels is not to suggest that so-called conventional products lack creativity, of course, since just about any object with even modest design aspirations is invested with the imagination of the people or company that conceived it. Neither do we mean to imply that conventional products are uniformly commonplace or boring. Many of the world's most inspired and accomplished products, in fact, are conventional in the sense we're applying it here. Rather, we're trying to distinguish between a traditional and still dominant approach that confines creative design to a small circle of people working in a prescribed process and a less common one that turns us all into designers.

Let's have a look at conventional merchandise first. On the whole it's safe to say that most conventional products aimed at adults are designed so that we as consumers can use them as easily as possible (whether that goal is actually attained is another matter, but at least this is the stated intent among most design teams). Little is left to our imagination, because that is about the last thing we are thought to want to have to exert to

enjoy a product. In fact, if we have to think deeply to discover what something does, how it operates, or what's required of it, then the design team could be criticized for failing in its professional responsibility to convey a clarity of function and purpose. In the traditional model for making things, creative responsibilities are strictly segregated by role: designers design, consumers consume. And since the designer leaves off from involvement with the product once it goes out into the market, creativity is also partitioned chronologically, occurring almost entirely in the product development phase.

A different philosophy underlies the products in *The Catalog*. Conceiving and fabricating a creative design product is only the first stage of a multiphase process of imaginative thinking involving both designer and user. The initial stage begins more or less the same way as it does with a conventional product—an individual or team of individuals set out to carry a project from idea to realization. Where it starts to deviate from the traditional model is in the conception of the product with regard to our role as users. Instead of devising an object that is nominally ready to fulfill its function out of the box, the designer of a creative product makes something that empowers and even requires us to physically and imaginatively manipulate it in order for it to serve its purpose. Because we're called on to exercise our creative skills, the nature of our engagement with the object is qualitatively distinct from the routine effort of assembling a piece of merchandise according to its instructions, or mechanically operating a product by turning it on and off.

Unlike the conventional object, whose design has been completely worked out by the time it appears in stores, a creative product invites us to be a protagonist in the latter stages of its evolution. No more are we passive consumers of goods but collaborative, co-creative members of the team of people that originally launched the product. As has happened with so many facets of contemporary culture, the rigid boundaries separating the experts from the "crowd" in the discipline of product design have fallen away and a new, more reciprocal relationship between the two formed in its place. The circumstances giving rise to this transformation are the same as elsewhere: the emergence of the creative class, the shift from an industrial to a knowledge economy, and of course, the advent of the Internet. Devised in the era of mass production and the expectation of mechanical efficiency on the part of the workforce, the traditional authoritative, top-down model of product delivery was right for its time—just as the more democratic paradigm of creative design is right for ours.

CONVENTIONAL VERSUS CREATIVE: A CASE STUDY • Creative design can affect our entire experience of a product, from the search stage to the moment we start using it, as the following case study will show.

Imagine you need to buy a large rug for one of the rooms where you entertain in your home. You visit a number of stores and showrooms and surf the Internet to see what's out there. Chances are the majority of the rugs you come across will be rectangular in shape, are available in up to a

half-dozen standard sizes, and have their patterns already imprinted in the weave *(p. XII, top)*. You eventually select a particular rug to buy at one of the stores you toured during your search and have it trucked to your home because it's too big to lift it yourself or fit into the trunk of your car. The two burly individuals with advanced muscular development who deliver the rug are kind enough to lay it down on your floor for you before concluding the transaction and departing. Other than placing any furniture on top of the rug that needs to go there, you'll likely have little to do with your rug in the future except look at it and clean it.

Now let's see what happens when you opt for a creative floor covering instead, using the Stitch Interlocking Rug as a case study *(p. XII, bottom)*.

Finding nothing like it in stores, you discover Stitch on the Internet and order it online. When it arrives at your door it comes packaged in triangular boxes, each weighing just a couple of pounds and containing ten pieces. The pieces are shaped to fit together in the fashion of a jigsaw puzzle, except that there is no single, right answer to how the pieces are to be joined. Instead, you're free to place the pieces in any configuration you want, in any quantity you want, and in any assortment of colors you want. You can even change your mind as you go and modify the rug by adding and taking away pieces, or swapping out colors. If you ever tire of your arrangement in the future you can do the same then.

If you need to move or put the rug in another space at a later date, you could pack it up yourself and reassemble it with little trepidation as to whether it will fit. What happens if your new space turns out to be irregular or nonrectangular in plan? Such a situation is a real dilemma for conventionally shaped rugs, which look awkward when thrust into environments they were not intended for; unfortunately, there's little you can do about a single-piece floor covering when confronted with this conflict except try to sell or store it. A flexible carpet, meanwhile, can be easily manipulated to have its perimeter harmonize with the contours of just about any surrounding space.

Creative design even affords a degree of financial flexibility when it comes to buying things. Should budget be an issue for you, you can choose to limit the number of pieces you purchase initially until you're prepared to cover the cost of the remainder. Perhaps you're able to utilize a smaller area rug in the meanwhile. You might eventually decide that the more modest covering meets your needs perfectly well. Conventional products, by contrast, are sold as monolithic, indivisible units at an equally fixed price—you can't chop a pair of blue jeans in half so as to reduce your outlay before taking them home. Sure, rug dealers are known to haggle a bit, but at the end of the day either you purchase the whole rug for a stipulated sum or you leave empty handed. An inflexibility of design sometimes correlates to an inflexibility of financial commitment.

THE NEW CREATIVITY • The tale of the Stitch Rug illustrates how far the traditional definition of creativity has been stretched beyond its historical boundaries in how we think about the concept today. For a long time creativity has been popularly viewed as an attribute of people working

ASSEMBLAGE MODULAR STORAGE BY SELAB FOR SELETTI (2010).

THE PRODUCTS

HOUSEWARES AND DECOR

JEWELRY AND APPAREL

SHELVING AND ORGANIZATION

CHILDREN

HOUSEWARES AND DECOR

10-UNIT MODULAR FURNITURE SYSTEM

BY SHIGERU BAN FOR ARTEK (2009)

Noted Japanese architect and 2014 Pritzker Prize–winner Shigeru Ban based this modular design on L-shaped units that can be combined to make different kinds of seating, from individual chairs to multi-seat configurations. As an extra bonus the pieces can also be used as table bases for tops of varying sizes. Assembling one package of ten modules takes under ten minutes thanks to a simple system of connecting rods.

The highly ecological and ethical 10-Unit System is made from UPM ProFi, an environmentally innovative composite. Its principal raw materials are recycled paper and plastic. The composite has proved to be tough, and humidity resistant. It is an environmentally sustainable material that can be disposed of by incineration, or recycled back into the production process. All materials in the composite are nontoxic.

One pack of ten pieces makes a stool, chair, or table base. Benches, settees, and coffee tables require two packs. Pews and soccer stadium seating require three or more packs. Be the first on your block to make a hundred seats in a row!

Available in White, which has a mottled finish similar to travertine, and Black.

ABYSS RECONFIGURABLE TABLE LAMP BY OSKO+DEICHMANN FOR KUNDALINI (2007)

This design by Osko+Deichmann fundamentally rethinks the conventional idea of a table lamp. Instead of a fixed form with a weighted, stable base surmounted by a focused light source, we have a linear, repositionable 43-inch-long (109 cm) loop with no visible beginning, middle, or end. Its vertebrate-like casing allows for infinite combinations of self-supporting forms that seem to float freely in space.

The lamp, if we might call it that, is lighted by a 10-watt, high-voltage LED strip and encased in a modular, injection-molded opal polycarbonate.

Made by Italy-based Kundalini, a source of innovative illumination since 1996. The fixture is CE listed, which is the European equivalent of the UL listing common in the U.S. Works with standard U.S. wall outlets.


ADAPTATION VASE BY BRANDON PERHACS (2009)

Adaptation Vase is a finely crafted interactive vase that invites a unique approach to flower arranging. It's designed with four magnets set in a wood base, plus four glass tubes and four stainless steel spheres. Simply insert the stainless steel spheres into the tubes and place them on the magnets in the base. The tube vases may then be tilted, swayed, and turned into any desired configuration. Add water and flowers to create a unique centerpiece that can change like the seasons—or even more often.

The base is made from wood sustainably harvested locally from Bainbridge Island, Washington where designer Brandon Perhacs is based. It measures 9 by 2½ by ¾ inches (22.8 by 6.3 by 1.9 cm).

Made in America. Flowers not included.



ALEXANDER GIRARD ALPHABET BLOCKS BY HOUSE INDUSTRIES FOR UNCLE GOOSE (2006)

Alexander Girard (1903–1993) is widely known for his contributions to the field of American textile design, particularly through his work for Herman Miller from 1952 to 1975, where he created fabrics for design greats George Nelson and Charles and Ray Eames.

This set of contemporary alphabet blocks is an homage to Girard's playful mid-century style and his long-held admiration for folk art. Created by the design company House Industries to coordinate with the San Francisco MOMA's exhibit on Girard, the twenty-eight wood blocks feature a cleverly adapted factory logo puzzle. Can you spell F-U-N?

Made in America and printed with child-safe nontoxic inks, although you definitely don't have to be a child to appreciate them.

Blocks are 1¾ inches (4.5 cm) square. In their box the set measures 14 by 9 by 1¾ inches (35.5 by 22.8 by 4.4 cm).

ALGUE BY RONAN AND ERWAN BOUROULLEC FOR VITRA (2004)

Algue are modular, connectible ornaments created by the world-famous fraternal design team of Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec. Reminiscent of plants, the pieces can be joined together to form web-like meshes of indefinite size and complexity. By varying their density, you can achieve a range of effect, from a light, diaphanous curtain to a nearly opaque space divider.

Made of injection-molded plastic, Algue come in packs of twenty-five and will cover approximately ten square feet (1 m^2) in area for each pack, depending on assembly.

Each piece measures approximately 11¾ by 21¾ by 16 (29.9 by 55.2 by 40.7 cm). Available in Green, Red, Transparent, and White. Colors can be mixed or remain monochromatic.

ALL OF A PIECE TABLEWARE BY DANA CANNAM DESIGN AND EARNEST STUDIO (2013)

All of a Piece Tableware is a collection of interchangeable modular elements that connect to form various serving, display, and organizing pieces for the table. The elements forming the collection are few in number, consisting of no more than a tray, shallow bowl, candleholder, and an end cap, made of marble, granite, or wood. Yet out of this limited palette comes a rich assortment of beautiful housewares, from trivets to centerpieces, key holders to cheese servers. The secret ingredient? Hidden magnetic connections buried inside the modules make assembling every piece a snap. For an even more intensely atmospheric effect, insert an LED light source between the modules and really watch the table light up.

All of a Piece is a genuinely collaborative effort of Dana Cannam Design and Earnest Studio, two Netherlands-based design firms that clearly make a pretty good combination of their own.

ALPHABET BLOCKS BY PAT KIM FOR AREAWARE (2013)

Most alphabet blocks are . . . well, blocks. This beautifully designed letter set is exceptional in having each letter cut out of a block of wood to reveal itself in the round.

Designed by Brooklyn-based Pat Kim, the blocks are made from mahogany and pine woods. The dark, tight grain of the mahogany makes for a pleasing contrast with the lighter, heavily grained pine.

Stack the blocks, write out words with them, teach a young child the letters of the alphabet—these stylized Alphabet Blocks are an heirloom toy and desktop accessory for young and not so young alike.

Each block is approximately 2 inches (5.0 cm) in each direction. Comes in a presentation-quality wood box.

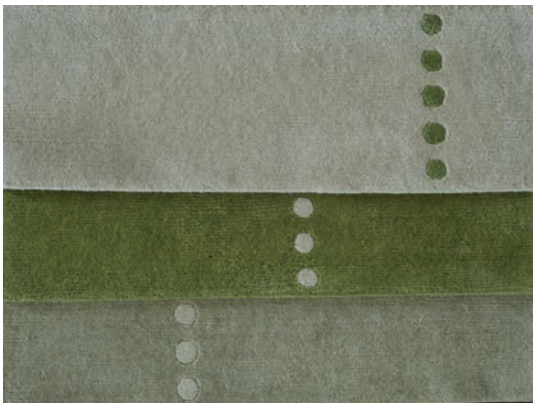
ALTO MODULAR STAIR CARPETS

BY LIZA PHILLIPS DESIGN (2006)

Alto Steps are modular carpet pieces that provide a fun, attractive and functional enhancement of one of the most important architectural features in any multi-level space. Their benefits are many: they prevent slipping, muffle noise, soften the staircase's hard materials, and are customizable in their layout.

All the components in Alto are made to order from the finest Himalayan wool hand-spun by Tibetans in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal. The wool is rich in lanolin oil, which is important both for the absorption of the dyes as well as the plush texture for which Tibetan rugs are famous. Traditional vegetable dyes or eco-friendly Swiss Ciba colors are used exclusively.

Design a stair treatment using any combination of the standard components of treads, deep steps and landings. The components come in several color schemes, each of which contains a range of complementary hues and decorative patterns.



APPO CORK TRAY BY CARLO TREVISANI FOR SELETTI (2011–2012)

Next time someone asks you to put a cork in it, make it a cork tray instead. Appo Cork Trays are a great way to repurpose some of those empty wine and beverage bottles you're forever throwing out. Slide an Appo into the neck to transform the vessel into an eye-catching centerpiece or serving tray for hors d'oeuvres (also known as appetizers and finger food). They also work well for creating nifty tabletop or shelf displays.

The small tray is made from sustainable and durable cork, and measures 7 inches (17.7 cm) in diameter and 3 inches (7.6 cm) in overall height.

ARCHITECT'S CUBES BY JOHN BENNETT AND GUSTAVO BONEVARDI FOR MOMA (2010)

The eight Architect's Cubes in this collection, each made of a different natural, synthetic, or composite material, can be combined to create a large cube or arranged individually as sculptural building blocks. Architects John Bennett and Gustavo Bonevardi designed this emphatically tactile tabletop piece to encourage the creative exploration of cubic forms and materials.

The size of the cubes varies slightly due to the unique nature of each material used. An Architect's Cube nominally measures 1¼ inches square (3.1 cm^2). The tray is 10 by 1½ by 1½ inches (25.4 by 3.8 by 3.8 cm).

ARKIV MODULAR KNAPSACK

BY MISSION WORKSHOP

The ultimate in modular transport, the Arkiv Modular Knapsack gives you an arsenal of removable accessories to customize your backpack. Add and subtract components as needs dictate. No more running out of room one day, then carrying around an empty sack of potatoes because of one or two things you had to handle the next!

All Arkiv bags and accessories feature waterproof materials, multiple weatherproof compartments, urethane-coated YKK zippers, and an internal frame sheet. Made in America and backed by a lifetime warranty. Available in Black Cordura, Dark Gray Cordura, and Waxed Canvas.

COMPONENTS INCLUDE:

Small or Large Pack and Folio: Packs can be used in either roll-up mode, or in a traditional flap-down configuration, and come with a Folio case. The two front-mounted Arkiv rails allow for the additional attachment of accessories. A U-lock slot in the back can double as a handle when the Folio is used as a stand-alone bag.

Laptop Case: This weatherproof roll-top Laptop Case combines dense foam and two layers of waterproof fabric to create a protective and versatile laptop case. Two extra front-mounted rails allow for the addition of the Folio, Tool Pocket, or Utility/Cell accessories. A U-lock slot in the back can double as a handle when the Laptop Case is used as a stand-alone bag. Fits on the front panel.

Tool Pocket: A medium-sized weatherproof pouch for carrying the tools of your trade. It features one urethane-coated zipper pocket and one annex rail for the addition of the cell pouch. Belt loops and a U-lock strap enable you to use this accessory as a hip tool pack. Fits on the front panel, laptop case, and folio.

Utility/Cell Pocket: Weatherproof zippered Utility Pocket, sized to hold smartphones and compact point-and-shoot cameras. Compatible anywhere on pack.

Vertical Roll Up Pocket: Weatherproof top loader. Sized for cylindrical objects, such as water bottles. Fits side panel.

Vertical Zippered Pocket: This versatile side compartment has a two-way zipper that works well for storing long items. Fits on the side panels.

Shoulder Strap: Converts all accessories into a quick and easy shoulder bag. Constructed from heavy-duty nylon webbing.

SHELVING AND ORGANIZATION

BOOGIE WOOGIE SHELVING

BY STEFANO GIOVANNONI FOR MAGIS (2004)

Boogie Woogie is right! A term first used to describe a particular style of dance-inducing music in the 1930s and 1940s, it aptly describes the distinctive undulating facade of this modular shelving unit from Magis Design. Assembled in multiple units, the piece produces a unique sculptural effect worthy of Italian Baroque architecture and unlike almost any other shelving system on the market.

The modules are made in Italy of injection-molded ABS plastic, and come in either an open or closed back. They can be stacked on the floor up to four units high and for as long as you've got room. Place them against a wall or use them as room dividers as well as for storage, in which case you might want to place modular groups back to back for a two-sided facade.

Available in a high-gloss Black, Red, and White. Two modules per package.

Each square module measures 20½ inches by 11 inches deep on the outside (52 by 20.7 cm); the clear opening inside the module is about 15 inches square by 11 inches deep (38.1 cm2 by 20.7 cm).

BOOKWORM BY RON ARAD FOR KARTELL (1999)

Not every bookcase needs to play it straight, or so thinks world-renowned designer Ron Arad. Arad clearly threw out the standard playbook when he designed this wall-mounted, customizable shelving system in 1999. It was his careful analysis of extrusion technology which enabled him to create a bookcase that can be bent to assume an unlimited number of curved shapes without compromising strength and functionality.

That means you can create an installation entirely your own. Transform the mundane fact of storing books and objects into a sculptural focal point and accent piece in your space.

Made from batch-dyed, fire-retardant PVC. Each shelf length can support as much as 20 lbs (9 kg) when properly installed.

Available in Short, Medium, and Long lengths and in five colors: Matte Aluminum, Matte White, Opaline Cobalt, Opaline Black, and Opaline Wine Red.

All Bookworms have 7¾ inch deep shelves (20 cm). Lengths run from 126 to 323 inches long (320 to 820 cm).

CLOUD MODULAR SHELVING BY RONAN AND ERWAN BOUROULLEC FOR CAPPELLINI (2004)

Made of a high-density polystyrene, the Cloud Shelving System has garnered much attention thanks to its modular, original form and innovative materials. Clouds can be stacked and aligned to create large shelving and display units, room dividers, or sculptural installations. There is no limit to the size of a structure you can build with these components other than the size of your space. The units, fabricated using a rotational molding technique, are joined by means of snap-on clips.

Cloud is on permanent exhibit at New York's MoMA.

An individual module measures 73¾ by 41½ by 15¾ inches (187.5 by 40 by 105.2 cm).

COMPONIBILI STORAGE SYSTEM BY ANNA CASTELLI FERRIERI FOR KARTELL (1969)

LARGE ROUND UNITS

Flexible, functional, and practical, Kartell's Componibili storage modules have been in production since the 1960s and have been widely recognized for their innovative design. But don't just take our word for it: take a trip to MoMA in New York or the George Pompidou Centre in Paris, where you can view Componibili in their permanent collections.

The series come in Large, Round, and Square units. Each design offers different options for tailoring the design to your specifications, including size, color, and accessories. Select the components in the quantities you need from the available options, then simply stack the pieces together to make your own modular storage grouping. The pieces will just as easily break down and reassemble should you ever need to add to or reconfigure your group.

Slip a set of casters under the bottom unit and your Componibili will go where you go. Or they can sit directly on the floor if you prefer they stay put.

Made in Italy of durable ABS plastic. Square modules are available in White; Large Round comes in Silver and White. Units range in height from 9 to 15 inches (22.9 to 33 cm).

Componibili were designed in 1969 by Anna Castelli Ferrieri (1918–2008), a pioneering architect associated with the postwar period of Italian modern design, and a cofounder of the Kartell brand with her husband.

SQUARE UNITS

CHILDREN

3DOODLER PRINTING PEN

BY MAXWELL BOGUE AND PETER DILWORTH (2013)

Traditional Old World draftsmanship meets New World technology in the 3Doodler, the world's first 3D printing pen. Unlike many technologically conceived devices, however, this one is easy to use out of the box. In fact, if you can trace, scribble, or sign your name; you can use the 3Doodler to create three-dimensional drawings in the air or build up sculptures on a tabletop.

Fundamentally, the 3Doodler is like a 3D printer except you hold it in your hand and it's powered by your mind instead of a computer file. Just plug it in, insert a supply of colored plastic, heat it up, and you're ready to create with the press of a button and the movement of your hand.

This is one of those ideas that seem outwardly simple, yet only occurred to a small group of creative people just a few years ago. Mind you, so excited was the world about this invention once it was announced that the Doodler team raised an astonishing $2.3 million on Kickstarter—after asking for just $30,000 in seed money. And no wonder: the 3Doodler is a unique item that appeals to hobbyists and artists, grown-ups and children, the technologically literate and the digitally disinclined.

A starter kit includes a 3Doodler pen, power cord, and a choice between two types of plastics. Additional packets containing fifty strands in a variety of colors can be purchased separately.

ALPHABET FACTORY BLOCKS BY HOUSE INDUSTRIES FOR UNCLE GOOSE (2012)

House Industries was formed in 1994 as a font foundry specializing in handmade typographic designs. So it's entirely fitting that the equally talented alphabet block company Uncle Goose would collaborate with them to produce the Alphabet Factory blocks set.

Inspired by the original House Industries factory logo and featuring a selection of letters, numbers, and symbols from House's renowned font collections, the blocks are not only played with by hand, but they are made by hand as well. In other words, this is an analog product through and through.

Made in America from basswood, each set contains twenty-four cubes 1¾ inches square on each face (4.4 cm^2). For ages three and up, and later stage people who admire a post-industrial aesthetic.

ARCHITECTURAL STANDARD UNIT BUILDING BLOCKS BY MELISSA & DOUG

Give a child the chance to design architectural masterpieces with this set of forty-four hand-scrolled and -turned wooden blocks in eleven different shapes. Columns, pediments, voussoirs (the wedge shapes in traditional archways)—it's a veritable treasure chest of classic architecture.

The natural finish, smooth-sanded hardwood block set is packaged in a handsome wooden storage crate for easy storage. Packaged dimensions are 4½ by 15 by 12 inches (11.4 by 38.1 by 30.4 cm).

Recommended for ages three and up.

AUTOMOBLOX BY PATRICK CALELLO (2004)

Many parents are familiar with the childhood impulse to pull things apart, often to their chagrin. Well, this toy may be the solution to the problem. Automoblox is deliberately designed for children to engage in unstructured action play with a collection of modular car and truck designs whose pieces are actually meant to come apart. Only now, kids are encouraged to put them back together so they can play with the cars, or better yet, to interchange them with other models for a vehicular mash-up. Think of Automoblox as creative destruction for the pre-entrepreneurial set.

Models include sports cars, utility vehicles, hot rods, trucks, and vans. Automoblox come individually in full-sized versions as well as in sets of miniature vehicles for people with smaller hands, or smaller garages, or who just like smaller things.

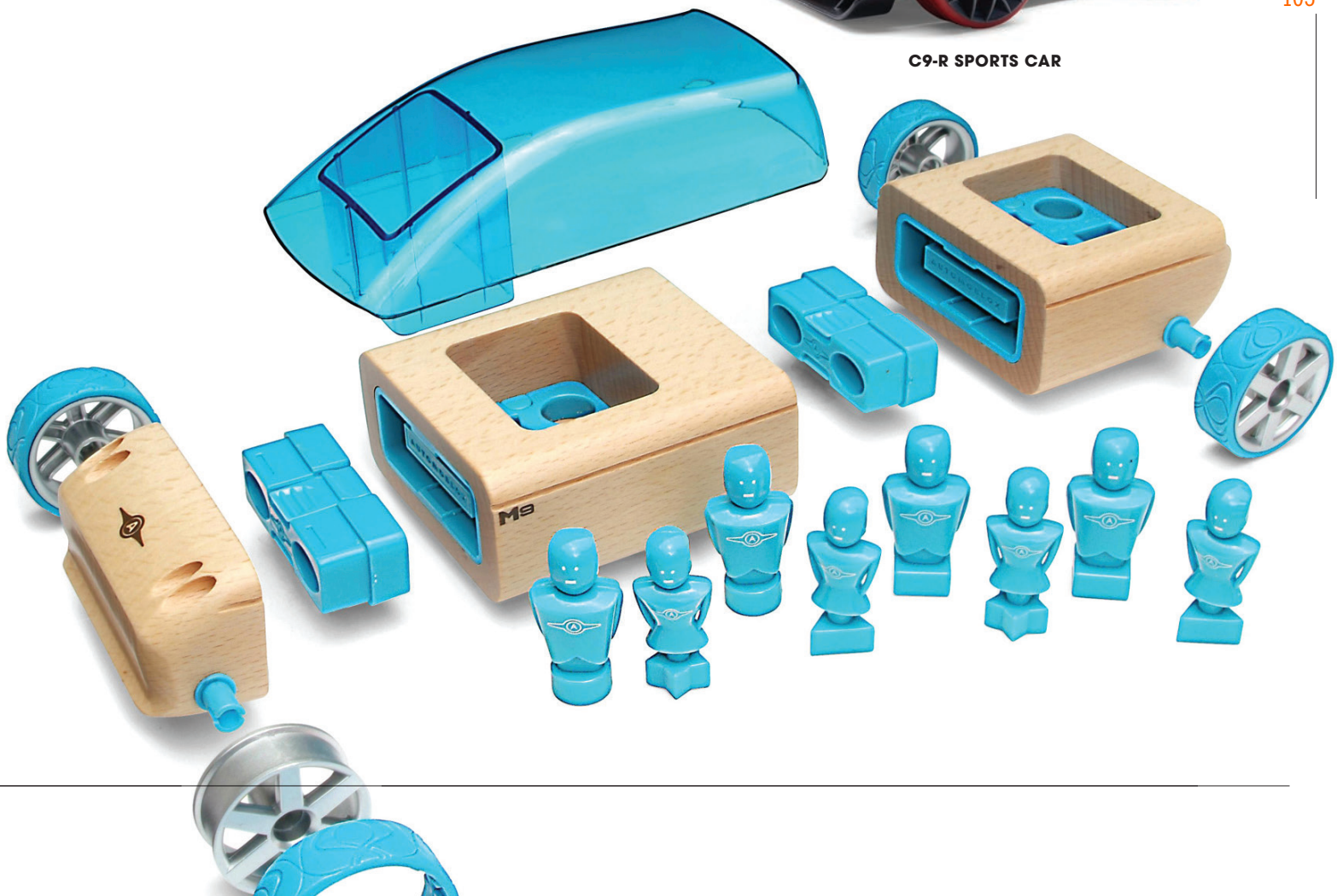
Beautifully designed by founder Patrick Calello, the products stand out for their visual quality, ingenious interlocking part system, and predominantly wood construction. Calello came up with the concept while still a student at Rhode Island School of Design; ever since then he's been driven to bring his idea to market, to the joy of miniature motorheads everywhere.

Automoblox is recommended for ages three and up, although we caution grown-ups from hogging them too often.

M9 SPORT VAN

C9P SPORTS CAR

C9-R SPORTS CAR



T9 PICK-UP

T900 TRUCK

X9-X SPORT UTILITY

BALANCING BLOCKS BY FORT STANDARD FOR AREAWARE (2012)

We can't tell which is a better analogy for these distinctive balancing blocks: the great sculptor Isamu Noguchi or the Flintstones. Depends on your cultural frame of reference, we guess. Either way, you can't help but admire the unexpectedly novel way of thinking about blocks that notable Brooklyn design firm Fort Standard brought to the task.

Instead of conventional cubic forms, each block is carved into a multifaceted shape that appears irregular at first glance, yet carefully distributes the mass of the block around a central axis to facilitate stacking. Build 'em up, tear 'em down—the solid wood blocks can take it, because they're handmade from repurposed hardwood salvaged from old furniture.

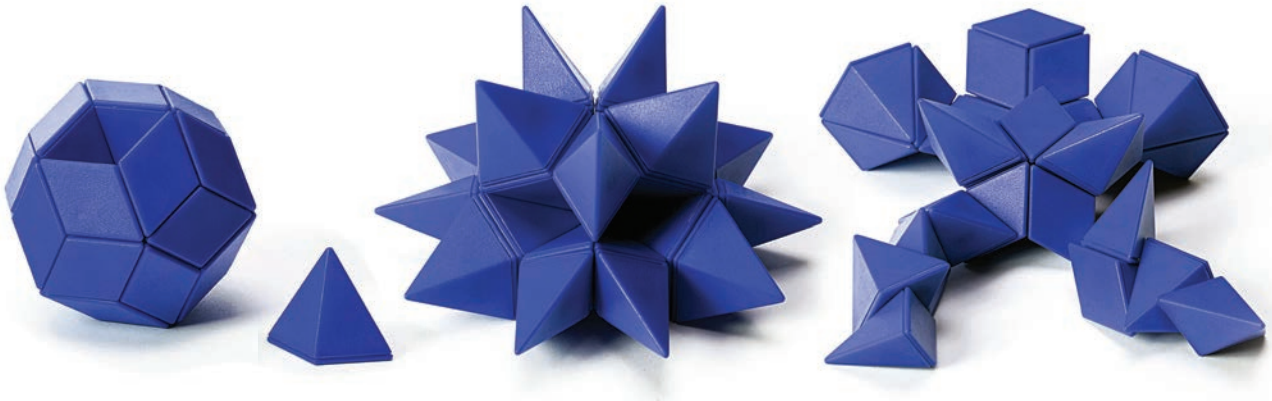
Available in Multicolor and White, finished in a nontoxic paint that allows the natural grain to show through. Comes as a set of ten blocks in a nice cotton drawstring bag and handsome packaging suitable for gifting. A hands-on treat for children and grown-ups alike.

BALL OF WHACKS BY ROGER VON OECH FOR CREATIVE WHACK COMPANY (2006)

Rubik has his cube, van Oech has his equilateral quadrilateral, or more precisely, a spherical shape formed by thirty rhombi held together by powerful rare-earth magnets. Not so powerful, however, that you can't pull them apart and recombine them into an infinite number of configurations. Abstract geometric shapes, representative animal, vegetable, and mineral figures, celestial bodies—you'll never lack for new combinations to explore.

This is one of those rare toys that work as well for adults as it does for younger folk (you know, the ones who figure out the Rubik's Cube in about half the time you do). Do it while watching late night comedy shows, waiting at the airport, driving through midtown (as a passenger, of course), or pretending to work. Actually, in stimulating brain activity and hand-eye coordination you may well find yourself zipping through the rest of your day after just a little activity with the Ball.

Available in Black, Blue, Multicolor, and Red. Comes with a creativity guide full of tips and exercises written by Mr. von Oech. Multiple sets can be combined to form larger figures.



BAUHAUS OPTICAL TOP BY LUDWIG HIRSCHFELD-MACK (1923), REISSUED BY NAEF

Bauhaus graphic artist and educational toy specialist Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack (1893–1965) designed this Optical Color Mixer Top in 1923. Sold as one of several successful toy products executed by Bauhaus workshops and instructors, the piece was eventually discontinued, only to resume regular production in 1977. The toy is not only fun but instructive as well because it shows how form and color are optically transformed under the effects of motion. Having seven interchangeable discs to play with means way more fun than just the same old top going round and round. They also hold helpful information on the back side explaining the optical phenomenon brought about by each disc.

Made of wood, the top has a diameter of approximately 4 inches (10 cm). Recommended for children and other people three and up.

BIMODAL BLOCKS BY TIM BOYLE FOR BRINCA DADA (2012)

We hesitate to call these blocks because . . . well, because they look like no other block set we've seen. Whereas most blocks are a series of identical cubes with printed or carved decoration, these are undulating, irregular, nonrepetitive, and let the natural wood grain be the decoration. Which may be why they're so appealing, fun, and exceptionally stimulating to the imaginations of child and grown-up alike.

Hand-carved BiModal Blocks will last a lifetime, or more realistically, multiple lifetimes. As stunning in the playroom as they are in the living room or office. Twenty-two pieces per set.

Oh, and did we mention that you can also use these blocks to play games? It's true—in fact, a total of four different games with up to three players, as described in the booklet provided.

Not for children under the age of three.

BUILDING BLOCK MENORAH BY DECOR CRAFT

Be the first on your block to build a menorah with interchangeable building bricks! The colorful snap-together pieces will stack and join in a limitless number of possible arrangements, which will delight kids (and grown-ups who are kids at heart) by giving them an outlet for creativity and imagination. A joyous holiday just got even better!

The set includes forty building blocks and twelve removable stainless steel cup inserts for the candles. Each block measures 1¼ inches square (3.2 cm^2).

CHANGEABLE LUNCHBOXES BY WHIPSAW FOR YUBO (2007)

In an eco-conscious world, it's difficult to rationalize using disposable food holders for your kids' lunch day after day. Neither is it fun for kids to have their food squashed into a mushy mess because they're packed in a soft pouch and buried under a lot of other lunches at school. Oh, and did we mention the hassle of trying to clean out lunch pouches when they can't go in a dishwasher?

Time to bag the baggies and the pouches, parents! This adorable modular lunchbox and container system solves all these problems, and more. Each set comes with one large and two small lidded containers, detachable front and back lids, and an icepack. Add some medium-sized containers and an attachable drink holder for even more food flexibility.

And we saved the best for last: your kids can decorate their boxes with removable cover plates illustrated with kid-friendly themes, from dinosaurs to cupcakes. Collect different plates and swap them out to keep the look as fresh as the food.

All pieces are dishwasher safe, except the cover plates, which are easily removed for cleaning. Outside dimensions are 10 by 7 by 3½ inches (25.4 by 17.7 by 8.8 cm).

DESIGNERS AND BRANDS

Agayof Art & Judaica
Ron Arad
ArchitectMade
Areaware
Automoblox
Enrico Azzimonti
F. X. Balléry
Shigeru Ban
René Barba
Dror Benschetrit
Maxwell Bogue and Peter Dilworth
John Bennett and Gustavo Bonevardi
Black+Blum
Tord Boontje
Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec
Brave Space Design
Pil Bredahl
Brinca Dada
Robert Bronwasser
BuzziSpace
Cappellini
Peer Clahsen
Andrew Comfort
Laura Cowan
Cuboro
Gideon Dagan
Björn Dahlström
Jonas Damon
Dana Cannam Design
Decor Craft
Dante Donegani and Giovanni Lauda
Julia Dozsa
Charles and Ray Eames
Earnest Studio
eco-kids
Elenco
Enlisted Design
Fat Brain Toys
ferm LIVING
Anna Castelli Ferrieri and Kartell
Flensted
Fort Standard
Fractiles
Free Art & Technology (F.A.T.)
Ben Fritz
Matt Gagnon
Massimo Giacon
Ron Gilad
Stefano Giovannoni
Good Erdle
Grain
Michael Joaquin Grey
Grimm's Spiel und Holz Design
Jonas Grundell
Martí Guixé
Fritz Haller
Hape
HAY
Eija Helander
Scot Herbst
Heiko Hillig
Housefish
IdeaPaint
Patrick Jouin
Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack
House Industries
Mirjam Hüttner
Incorporated
Italianissimo
Stephan Jaklitsch
Nauris Kalinauskas
Hila Rawet Karni
Peter Karpf
Frank Kerdil
Kathrin Kiener
Ed Kilduff
Pat Kim
KMN Home
Koziol
Dr. Lakra
Doron Lachisch
LEGO
Lerival
Bernd Liebert
Nel Linssen
Magis
Magna-Tiles
Makedo
Javier Mariscal
Patrick Martinez
Melissa & Doug
Metal ART
Metre Ideas and Design
Zoe Miller and David Goodman
MindWare
MIO
Mission Workshop
Modern-Twist
Lisa Monahan
Johannes Molin
Moorhead & Moorhead
MOS Architects
Muuto
Naef
Nendo
Jo Niemeyer
Christian Northeast
NuOp Design
Roger von Oech
Osko+Deichmann
Peleg Design
Brandon Perhacs
John Perry
Eric Pfeiffer
Liza Phillips Design
Pico Pao
Plus-Plus
Laura Polinoro
Giulio Polvara
Luis Pons
QisDesign
Quirky
Red Hen Books and Toys
Remember
ROOM Copenhagen
Roost
Royal Family Design Labor
Patrick Rylands
Ricardo Saint-Clair
Franco Sargiani
Selab
Héctor Serrano
SmallWorks
Julien De Smedt
Roxi Suger
Sy-Lab
Tamawa
Tegu
Tempaper
The Utility Collective
Carlo Trevisani
Tveit & Tornøe
Uncle Goose
Kristian Vedel
Vitra
WallCandy Arts
Wall Coaster
Marcel Wanders
Way Basics
David Weeks
Wexel Art
Yube
Yubo
Karl Zahn
Eva Zeisel
Clara von Zweigbergk

LEGO STORAGE BRICKS AND HEADS BY ROOM COPENHAGEN (2012)

AGAYOF ART & JUDAICA

Menorahs (p. 43)
agayof.com

Avner and Aviah Agayof are a father-and-son team known for their finely crafted artistic Judaica. Avner is a trained silversmith and responsible for the design work, while Aviah manages the business operation. Avner founded Agayof Art & Judaica in 1970 and since then has become a leading figure in his craft, personally supervising the production of each design. From their Jerusalem-based studio the Agayofs produce a wide range of ritual objects, including mezuzahs, menorahs, candleholders, cups, and cutlery in an innovative contemporary idiom that nonetheless remains strikingly connected to its historical roots. Their work is characterized by a consistent adherence to the fundamental geometries of circle, square, and triangle, and the use of anodized aluminum cast in a distinctly metallic palette. Agayof designs can be found in major museums and shops all over the world.

RON ARAD

Infinity Wine Rack (p. 39) and Bookworm (p. 84) for Kartell
ronarad.co.uk

Born in Tel Aviv in 1951, educated at the Jerusalem Academy of Art and later at the Architectural Association in London, Ron Arad cofounded, with Caroline Thorman, the design and production studio One Off in 1981 and later, in 1989, Ron Arad Associates architecture and design practice. In 2008 Ron Arad Architects was established alongside Ron Arad Associates.

Ron was awarded the 2011 London Design Week Medal for design excellence and became a Royal Academician of the Royal Academy of Arts in 2013. He was Professor of Design Product at the Royal College of Art in London until 2009.

Along with his limited edition studio work, Ron's studio designs for many leading international companies, including Kartell, Vitra, Moroso, Fiam, Driade, Alessi, Cappellini, Cassina, WMF, and Magis. He has also created a number of public art pieces, most recently the Vortext in Seoul, Korea, and the Kesher Sculpture at Tel Aviv University, and has executed several architectural commissions. He was honored with a major retrospective at MoMA in 2009.

ARCHITECTMADE

BIRDs (p. 15) and Child's Chair (p. 108) by Kristian Vedel, Gemini Candle Holder by Peter Karpf (p. 32)
architectmade.com

Copenhagen-based ArchitectMade was founded in 2006 by Morten Jensen. The company offers a curated collection of unique architect-designed classics from the golden age of Danish Modern design. Among the creative talents represented in its catalog are Finn Juhl, Poul Kjærholm, Peter Karpf, Kristian Vedel, and Jørn Utzon. Following the tradition of Danish design, its products are made to high standards of quality and craftsmanship. They are sold in many leading design retailers and museum shops all over the world, including MoMA in New York, Skandium in London, and the Deutsche Guggenheim Museum in Berlin.

AREAWARE

Alphabet Blocks (p. 11) by Pat Kim, Cubebots (p. 22), Hanno the Gorilla (p. 33), and Ursa the Bear (p. 71) by David Weeks, Dovetail Wood Animals by Karl Zahn (p. 26), Infinite Tree by Johannes Molin (p. 39), Numbers Cube Clock by Jonas Damon (p. 53), Balancing Blocks by Fort Standard (p. 105)
areaware.com

Currently based in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Areaware was founded by Noel Wiggins in 2003 and was originally known as Are Aware. Noel's goal in forming the business was to create useful products that would appeal to both imagination and intellect, with frequent doses of humor and wit. Since launching, Areaware has enlisted the talents of many emerging as well as world-class designers, including David Weeks, Pat Kim, Fort Standard, Rich Brilliant Willing, Karl Zahn, and Jonas Damon.

AUTOMOBLOX

Automoblox (p. 104)
automoblox.com

It was while studying industrial design at Carnegie Mellon University that student Patrick Calello was given an assignment to develop new concepts for the DIY wooden hobby industry. Being a car guy at heart, Patrick immediately began exploring a novel toy car concept involving interchangeable parts made out of wood. He believed that the key to a clever and innovative play vehicle was to merge modern automotive styling with traditional craftsmanship, and that this fusion would inspire

creativity among children eager to devise and assemble cars of their own design. By the fall of 1992 Patrick had come up with the core design characteristics that would eventually evolve into Automoblox; five years of rigorous design and product development later, Automoblox arrived in the marketplace.

ENRICO AZZIMONTI

Chalkboard Clocks for Diamantini & Domeniconi (p. 19; pictured, opposite)
en.enricoazzimonti.it

Enrico Azzimonti studied at the Polytechnic of Milan, earning a degree in Architecture in 1993 and a Masters in Design and Management two years later. Prior to graduation he founded his own architecture and industrial design studio. His firm's client list has counted BLM Group, Zava, TVS, Lavazza, Fratelli Guzzini, Coop, JVC, Diamantini & Domeniconi, Bilumen, Risolì, and Demolli.

Since 2006 Azzimonti has been teaching at the European Institute of Design in Milan and has run studios in several universities in Italy. His work has been published in multiple industry publications, and several of his pieces are in the permanent collection of the Museu de les Arts Decoratives in Barcelona.

F. X. BALLÉRY

Les Perles Candlesticks for Y'A PAS LE FEU AU LAC (p. 41)
www.fxballery.com

F. X. Balléry was born in 1977 in the French Jura. After initially pursuing studies in the sciences, he decided to go to the École Supérieure d'Art et de Design (ESAD) of Reims in 1996 to become a product designer instead.

A winning design for the Comité Colbert Young Talents Award for a Chanel bag led him to work on Issey Miyake's perfume line, and later to a stint at Ron Arad's studio in London. It was there that he discovered the Royal College of Art, from which he obtained a degree in 2000.

A second Comité Colbert Award—this time for a Hermès picnic set—spurred new clients and sponsors, among them BPI, Yves Saint Laurent Beauty, and Ricard.

Back in Paris, he founded his own studio and is currently pursuing projects in product, furniture, packaging, merchandising, and interior and industrial design.

SHIGERU BAN

10-Unit Modular Furniture System for Artek (p. 6)
www.shigerubanarchitects.com

Shigeru Ban (b. 1957 in Tokyo) is a Japanese architect widely known for his innovative designs to quickly and efficiently house disaster victims. In 2014, Ban was named the 37th recipient of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, the most prestigious prize in contemporary architecture. The Pritzker Jury cited Ban for his innovative use of materials and his dedication to humanitarian efforts around the world, calling him "a committed teacher who is not only a role model for younger generation, but also an inspiration."

Ban studied at the Tokyo University of the Arts, and then at the Southern California Institute of Architecture. Later he went to Cooper Union's School of Architecture in New York, where he studied under John Hejduk and was graduated in 1984.

Ban's portfolio now includes residential, cultural, commercial, and institutional building projects, as well as interior, industrial, and exhibition design. He has been widely published and was profiled by *Time* in their survey of 21st-century innovators in the fields of architecture and design.

RENÉ BARBA

Hanging Screens for Koziol (p. 33)
koziol.de/en/unternehmen/Designer/rene-barba-paris.php

Born in 1965 in Havana, Cuba, René Barba was educated at Miami Dade Community College and at the École National Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (ENSAD) in Paris, where he received his diploma in Industrial Design.

René worked as a freelance designer in Paris for several years after school, and later for the Bombay Furniture Company in the U.S., for whom he won a Presidential Design Award for Best Product in 1997.

Returning to Paris he launched a private practice and began teaching at the Paris fashion school École Supérieure des Arts et Techniques de la Moderieure des Arts Décoratifs (ESMOD) International. Past clients include the Italian furnishings company BBB, Ligne Rosset, and Koziol.

DROR BENSCHETRIT

Quadror Blocks for DCI (p. 000), Try It Trivet for Alessi (p. 133)
studiodror.com

Founded by Tel Aviv–born and Eindhoven Academy–trained Dror Benshetrit, the eponymous New York firm Dror is a multidisciplinary practice encompassing product design, architecture, interior design, and art direction. His work is notable for exploring the nature of movement, transformation, and multifunctionality in the context of three-dimensional form.

Dror's client list includes Alessi, Bentley, Boffi, Bombay Sapphire, BBB Emmebonacina, Cappellini, Kiehl's, Levi's, Material ConneXion, Maya Romanoff, Marithe + Francois Girbaud, Rosenthal, Skins Footwear, Yigal Azrouël, Shvo, Swarovski, and Target.

Dror has lectured around the world and received numerous design awards, among them the GE Plastics Competition

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NATURAL HOME
IKEA the book
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100 SUNS
Dieter Rams:
As Little Design as Possible
Sophie Lovell
bill
DAN GRAHAM
THE PHILIP JOHNSON TAPES
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Spiral Jetty
OPTIC NERVE
INSIDE THE BMW FACTORIES
LIFTING THE YOKE:
The DASH Diet Action Plan
JAMES ON
Eero Saarinen
FURNITURE
Marilyn Neuhart

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DONALD RATTNER (modularscholar.com) received a B.A. in art history cum laude from Columbia in 1979 and an M.Arch. from Princeton in 1985. Three years later he joined Ferguson Murray Architects as an intern, and eventually rose to partnership there before founding Studio for Civil Architecture with Andrew Friedman in 2002. The firm now operates as Studio for A.R.T. and Architecture. Rattner's architectural portfolio has garnered over a dozen awards for design excellence in the course of his career and has been widely published.

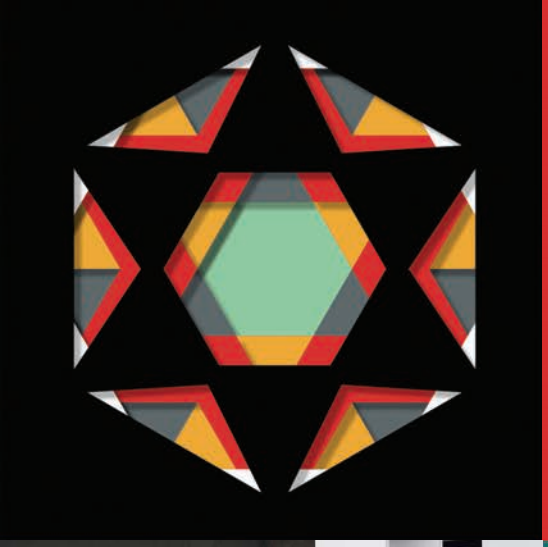
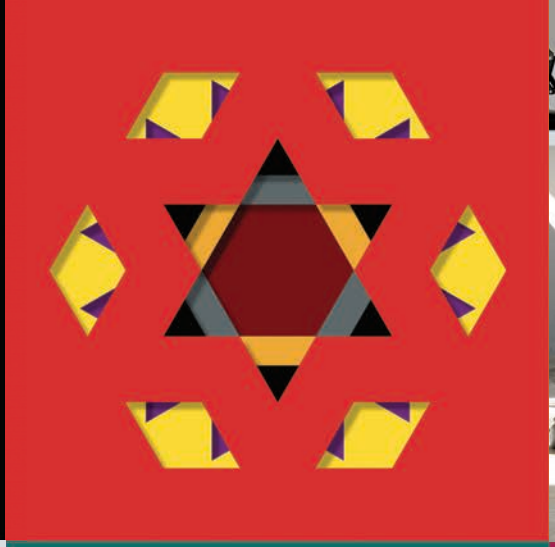
Studio's practice comprises a range of services and building types. For private clients the firm has designed custom single-family residences and refurbished existing homes in urban, rural, and suburban settings. For resort developers it has designed amenity buildings, planned neighborhoods, produced residential prototypes, created architectural pattern books, formulated design guidelines, and generated renderings and authored printed materials for marketing purposes. The firm has also forayed into fine art, having exhibited work in several gallery environments and won a competition award in the 2010 Philagrafika art festival.

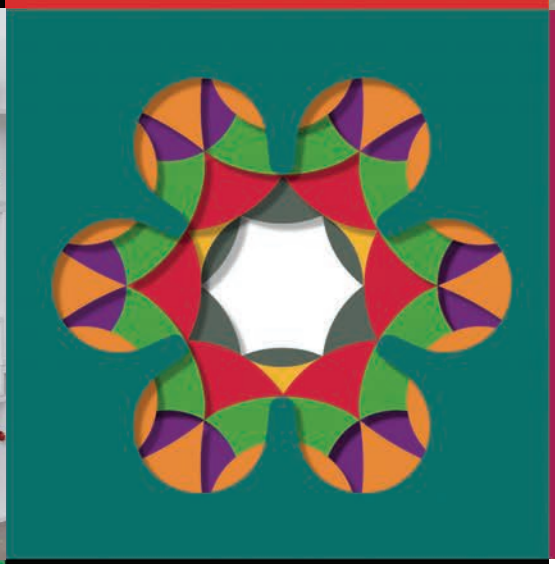
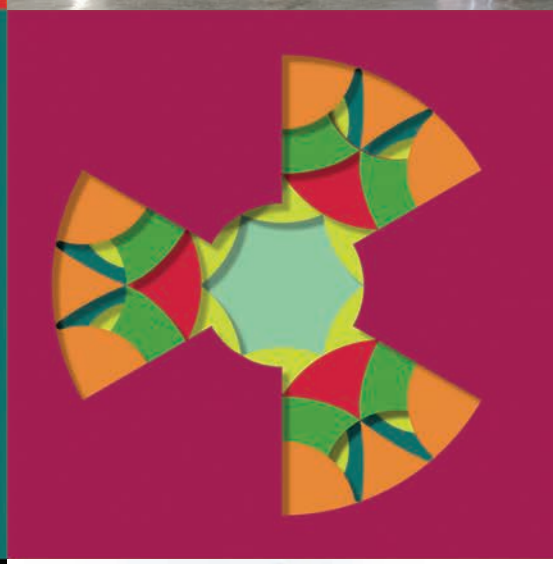
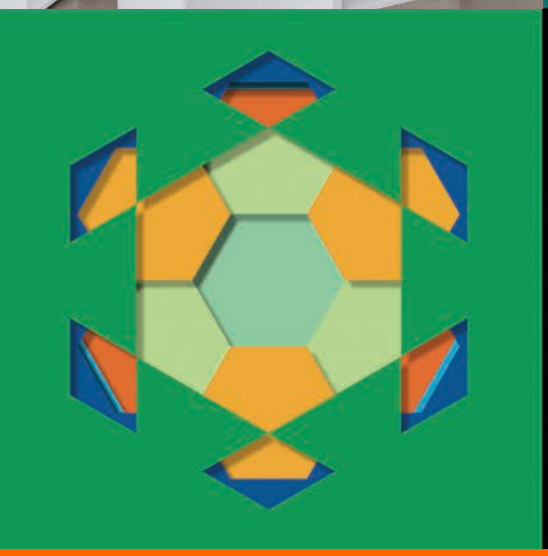
In addition to advancing his practice, Rattner has sought to share his knowledge and experience with the profession and public through teaching, writing, and speaking at such venues as New York University, New York Academy of Art, University of Illinois at Chicago, and Parsons School of Design. Published writings have appeared in *Architectural Record*, *The International Dictionary of Architects and Architecture*, *Design Professionals and the Built Environment*, and *Residential Architect*.

His professional and academic activities have been featured on CNN and in *The New York Times*, *Town & Country*, *House & Garden*, *Robb Report*, *Residential Architect*, *Builder*, *Progressive Architecture*, and numerous blogs and online channels.

In 2010 Rattner launched MODULE R, a retail design store offering customizable, interactive, reconfigurable, and modular products by contemporary designers and brands from around the world. This eventually morphed into THE CREATIVE HOME (thecreativehome.com), a forum for people to learn about personal and professional creativity, find techniques and things to nurture creativity at home, and share examples of what people are doing to make themselves, their families, and their homes more creative places.

ISBN 978-0-9907787-0-7
ISBN ebook 978-0-9907787-1-4
ISBN ebook 978-0-9907787-2-1

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