



Oskar Zieta: design with a surprise effect

An interview from Wrocław by Maria Cristina Didero

The Polish designer recounts his designing approach, an interdisciplinary combination of intuition and research

There is a growing international presence of Polish design, catapulted onto the design-stage in recent years to some degree by the successful [Lodz Design Festivals](#) „, curated by Agnieszka Jacobson-Cielecka. This delightful town, situated a couple of hours from Warsaw, manages to attract thousands of visitors (especially foreign) to a vast array of cultural offers that, as well as design, includes a photography festival, a theatre event and numerous encounters with a literary focus. It was, indeed, in Lodz in 2010 that [Oskar Zieta](#), based in Wrocław, presented the "Underpressure" curatorial project, a colourful overview of inflatable applications, including some in stainless steel, his best known creations. Zieta's CV already boasts illustrious precedents and presences such as [Young Creative Poland](#) (2009 in London and at the Triennale in Milan in 2010) and a performance at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for the last 100% Design Festival.

Zieta is an architect born in Szczecin, a few kilometres from the German border in northern Poland, in 1975. He moved to Switzerland where he has, since 2003, been a researcher and professor at ETH, Federal Institute of Technology, in Zurich. He has a Master in Computer Aided Architectural Design (CAAD) and it was during his studies that he developed the sophisticated FIDU „, Frei Innen Druck Umformung (Free Inner Pressure Deformation) technology, which transforms flat, shaped surfaces made of two sheets of steel previously welded together into 3D objects, by injecting a powerful jet of compressed air between them.

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Oskar Zieta worked on this technique for years before perfecting it in 2007. The process stems from the combination of three elements: research „ "lots of study and hours and hours of work" , he likes to stress „ design and a production process that is able to provide innovative solutions to shape and make the form stable, while at the same time creating pieces that are all different. The process is a perfect balance of mass production and limited edition because some of the objects, e.g. the Chippensteel 0.5 chair, which requires a final hand finish - the last touch of the maestro. Over the past couple of years, Zieta has produced a huge and multicoloured collection that resembles lifebelts. His famous PLOPP stool is in the collections of international museums such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Museum fur Gestaltung in Zurich and the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich. PLOPP has won countless awards, including the YDMI Young Professional Award from the German Design Council, the Red Dot Award, also German, in 2008 and the Materialica Technology Award in 2009. Last Sunday, Zieta was handed the Audi Mentor Prize 2011 for A&W by the Japanese giant Tokujin Yoshioka.

Oskar Zieta's latest challenge is to successfully apply this technology to architecture. Objects made using FIDU can sustain ten times their own weight and a 100kg element can support approximately one ton. These technical specifications prompted the thought of producing elements for architecture, which more than all else combines the value of lightness with the function of support: work is in progress on a bridge and other new and surprising applications!



The Kamm coat hanger, available in different sizes, is welded and inflated very carefully under high pressure to create unique bulges and waves

Maria Cristina Didero: How do your objects originate? Oskar Zieta: My creativity is a combination of intuition and research. My design always has many hours of work and study behind it. My ideas follow the laws of physics, when kinetic energy is turned into potential energy. Nothing comes out of nothing and nothing is ever wasted.

How do you put your ideas into substance, how do you physically portray them?

I draw all the time, I scribble. It is always quicker to draw than explain something in words.

Do you believe in taking the history of design into account when you are creating and if so is there an object you would like to have designed yourself?

There are many! Konstantin Grcic's Myto, for instance. I love designs that convey their production process. I think the world will change very soon and design products will have to start using different parameters. It will be important to stop and think about how they are made and their function but also how they can be transported and the costs involved.

Space travel will be popular in ten years' time, so what will be the sense, for example, of the Eames' chairs? Will they become a dream to avoid the risk of turning into dead weight.

Masters?

Jean Prouv., a great source of inspiration and I love Peter Zumthor's work.

What is your own definition of design?

I used to think architecture was an endless story without a happy ending, an ongoing process, and design was more like a phrase that ends with a full stop. Today, I work in design, architecture, art and engineering and I realise that the product development process is long, complex, mysterious and fascinating. As I work on projects that involve technologically innovative processes, I think the only possible definition possible for design is: systematic and interdisciplinary work.

What has been mankind's most useful object?

The mass production of nails radically changed building methods in architecture and design. I think CAD has had the same value as the nail in contemporary times; it has changed everything. What will come next?

We are in contact with design every day, as we go about our routine lives. What is your personal relationship with design? What is your first memory linked to design?

I like to surround myself with objects that tell different stories. I like design that builds a relationship with people. I remember, when I was a child, I had a Polish bicycle called Wigry 3. It always had to be altered and modified. It was the first thing I put my hands to as a designer.

Do you collect objects?

I collect design objects that tell stories. I collect objects designed by friends, which I swap with my own products. I love ironical objects that trigger an AH-AH reaction, as they say, a surprise effect. I also love products that give rise to new technology, like the first chair of a type or the first table in a particular material.

What is your relationship with time like?

Unfortunately, I have no relationship with time; it always passes before I realise it!

You divide your time between Poland and Switzerland but you also travel all over the world. Is there a place you like more than anywhere else?

Italy, of course! The temple of design.



←

Plopp stool detail. Presented for the first time into the exhibition "Young Creative Poland", the Plopp stools are produced in an innovative FDU technology. FDU means that two ultra-thin steel sheets are welded together around their edges and inflated under high pressure to give a 3d object



Osiem is a lamp designed and produced in FDU technology as a construction for a light bulb. Shaped in a way that helps to bend it easily and form a 3d lamp. Product is available in Beta edition „ its features are still developed



↑ Oskar Zieta in his studio. Behind him, the Plopp stool

Wrocław, Poland

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