

EINLEITUNGSTEXT FÜR DIE AUSSTELLUNGSREIHE „SIZE DOESN'T MATTER“ ÜBER ESTNISCHES DESIGN, 2014

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Size Doesn't Matter

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There are three countries in the European Union which have a smaller population than Estonia. Even so, the density of designers in this small Baltic nation is surprisingly high. Estonia has one designer for every 800 citizens – and we have great design education.

Did you know that Estonia is home to the Minox 'James Bond' miniature spy camera, Skype, TransferWise, and that we also have our own satellite? Estonia puts the 'E' in electronic: e-government, e-elections, e-parking and even e-Christmas tree delivery services from the spruce and pine forests outside the city.

The size of the country has its advantages. A small country acts like a (night)club: it is easy to test new ideas in Estonia because we have a lot of democracy and little bureaucracy.

Because a small country cannot rely on big industry, the design sector must search for alternative solutions, methods and materials to participate in and improve the many steps from design to manufacture.



Designers must combine the industrial with hand- and custommade; must blend traditional and contemporary; must hustle; must look outside itself; must find neighbours and partners with which to trade goods and ideas.

Design_estonia is a brand that unites Estonian designers actively involved in design life and exports. Design_estonia presents a wide array of original design products from professionals and their manufacturers. In the work of Estonian designers and makers you will find northern coastal simplicity and chic, aesthetic beauty and functional quality – all brought to you with humour, user-friendliness and a mind for sustainability.

Estonian design

How much could a national design distinguish itself in today's globalised society; what kind of impression does Estonian design leave to bystanders – is it an exemplary Baltic phenomenon or more like the little brother of the Nordic countries or Scandinavia? Estonian cultural identity is largely based on the sense of being part of the Finno-Ugric peoples. One of the crucial factors in preserving a unified cultural identity has been the Estonian language. Estonian designers value acquiring international experience through connections with the outside world. Estonia is grateful to its Nordic neighbours Finland and Denmark, which have helped to develop an awareness of design in Estonia. Despite the fact that designers familiarise themselves with contemporary developments and styles, a design identity will be influenced by idiosyncrasies of the cultural heritage and economy of the country. Ascetic, oriented towards basic needs and functions, a smart aesthetic, not focusing on luxury – these are the intrinsic qualities of Estonian design. National identity has always been a political question for Estonians and that has been the driving force behind many consciously but also unconsciously launched defence mechanisms. Estonian art, especially applied art, has managed to preserve a certain detachment from politics. Nevertheless, during the occupation, creative people used every opportunity available to protest against the official ideology through renewing artistic expressions.

Many nations can brag about their internationally known art and design icons. Unfortunately, Estonia rarely finds an opportunity. But still, let us name a few: Walter Zapp, the inventor of the spy camera Minox we all know from Bond films. Zapp developed the first model in Estonia in 1934, but as he did not find a manufacturer there, he took the prototype to Riga where it was put into production a couple of years later. Architects are familiar with the name Louis Kahn, yet the fact that he was born on Saaremaa, in Estonia, is little known. Fearing that the head of the family would be mobilised into the Russo-Japanese war, the family moved to the USA. The well-known artist Kalev Mark Kostabi, based in the USA, also has roots in Estonia, his family emigrated during the Second World War. Estonians are especially proud of the Luther furniture company that began production in the 19th century and, due to its high quality technology and level of innovation, brought together designers from all over the world. The factory is linked to names like Alvar Aalto and Bauhaus. The pinnacle of the factory's production included bent plywood items and humidity-proof cardboard and plywood suitcases.

A new Estonian design was born during the 1990s. As the country was exposed to the market economy, an understanding of design as the creator of a contemporary and high quality environment started to take root. Design education was first established in 1966 when Bruno Tomberg initiated the first programme of its kind in the country at the Estonian State Art Institute. As the word "design" was deemed too "western" at the time, the use of it was forbidden and it was replaced with "industrial art". Today, design is taught at the Estonian Academy of Arts (EAA), two private colleges and there is also a joint programme by EAA and Tallinn University of Technology. Various contemporary directions, such as service design and excellence in craftsmanship can be acquired at different colleges like Tartu Art College and the Viljandi Culture Academy. There are more than 2,500 designers with a higher education. More than half of them are also actively working in their field. Not many have the opportunity to work as in-house designers and the number of designer-entrepreneurs is growing. Graphic designers have the most opportunities to find work. There are around 70 companies exporting design products and services.

Outsourcing has been a main source of income for the Estonian industry, now production has also increased, that has offered jobs for designers and they have found recognition in the area. One of the designers who has received the Red Dot award is Martin Pärn for his table "Martin" and together with the author Martela was included in the compilation of the 200 best design products of the 20th century, published by the renowned design magazine MD.

A strong tradition of furniture design has greatly impacted the furniture and lighting fixtures' industry. Interior design for public buildings has been a special focus for companies such as Standard, Thulema (DME Award – European Design Management Award honourable mention) and 4Room. The most well-known furniture designers are Maile Grünberg, the Mang family, Katrin Soans, Toivo Raidmets, Taevo Gans and Anu Vainomäe. The most notable younger designers are Igor Volkov, Maria Rästa, Veiko Liis, Pavel Sidorenko, Sixten Heidmets, brands: Oot-Oot, Ruumilabor and Warm North. Some of the most successful lighting fixtures designers include Tarmo Luisk, Margus Triibmann and Tõnis Vellama. Mait Summatavet could be considered a true classic in Estonian design. The bath industry has grown into a considerable branch of production, represented by two larger companies Balteco and Aquatoriga ((DME Award – European Design Management Award honourable mention). There are also successful designers in the product development area: Villi Pogga, Aivar Habakukk and Sven Sõrmus.

The heavyweights of Estonian design include Matti Öunapuu, the founder of the first design agency and the designer of the innovative electric scooter Stigo, Tiit Liiv with his lengthy Finnish experience, Heikki Zoova, the head of the design department at EAA and Üllar Karro, designer of the solar powered scooter. There are also products for niche markets like retro motor vehicles



(Andres Uibomäe, Gabriel Verilaskja) and ergonomic bicycles from contemporary materials (Indrek Narusk). Companies offering industrial design services like Iseasi and TenTwelve are also enjoying increasing success. The only Estonian designer to be recognised within the car industry is the Germanbased Björn Koop.

With each passing year, Estonian product design is appreciated internationally more and more. It has found its way into several exhibitions, fairs and the international market. Magazines like Elle Decoration, Dwell, Avantage, AD, Newsweek, Wallpaper, Monocle, New York Times etc and countless bloggers have published substantial articles about Estonian designers and their accomplishments.

As the local market is small and access to mass production is extremely limited, the lines of design and applied art are often blurred, which is also evident in the works of Estonian glass designers (Maie-Ann Raun, Kalli Sein, Annkris-Glass), ceramicists (Raili Keiv, Ene Raud), jewellery designers (Tanel Veenre, Anu Samarüütel, Kärt Maran, Kadri Mälk, Julia Maria Künnap, Maarja Niinemägi, Kärt Summatavet) and designers of leather goods (Stella Soomlais, Piret Loog, Kadri Kruus, Kadi Paasik). Currently, the demand for small runs of semi-handmade quality products is increasing, which is great for Estonian designers with exceptional craft skills. The waiting list for custom-made crafted wooden spectacle frames (Karl Annus) or handmade footwear (Kärt Põldmaa, Sille Sikkman, Kaspar Paas) can be several months long. These products are in demand outside the country as well and happy customers include wellknown actors as well as royalty.

The sector most involving design is the clothing and textile industry. The best known brands are Ivo Nikkolo, Monton, Xenia Joost, Lilli Jahilo, Katrin Kuldma, Aldo Järvesoo, Jaana Varkki, Marit Ilison. Kriss Soonik and Kristian Steinberg are making waves in the UK. Reet Aus, PhD took a bold step by creating a new quality in fashion as she applied the up-cycling method to recycling and manufacturing waste and as a result, she reduced her ecological footprint to 20%, compared to



regular production. Traditional textiles are being reinvented by a new generation of textile designers who are experimenting with new innovative solutions. Intelligent textiles are becoming increasingly popular. An artistically and technically high level of skill is demonstrated by textile designers who, in addition to traditional solutions, create “talking” and light conducting textiles; combine textiles with wood and concrete or old newspapers and even coffee packages – Monika Järg, Mare Kelpman, Annike Laigo, Kärt Ojavee, Elna Kaasik and Krista Leesi.

Estonia is also internationally renowned for its fondness for innovation and the extensive use of information technologies. Internet banking and m-payments (mobile payments, m-parking) are in common use in the country; also e-parliament, e-elections, e-tax board and a digital ID-card. Companies like Skype, Playtech, Transferwise and Fits Me have become known around the world. In Estonia, the internet is like a human right.

Estonian graphic arts historically also have strong roots and a distinct school of graphic design is developing, it has begun shedding the influence of Dutch design which has been prevalent due to the fact that many of the designers have studied in the Netherlands. Designers with a distinct style include Asko Künnap, Kristjan Mändmaa, Ivar Sakk, Jan Tomson, Eiko Ojala, Markko Kekishev and Indrek Sirkel. After recent education reforms, a new generation of designers demonstrating a new way of thinking is emerging. Increasingly, the focus is on user centred communication design (Disainiosakond), typography (Anton Koovit, Mart Anderson, Kristjan Jagomägi) and user interface design (Markko Karu, Velvet). Graphic design is primarily dominated by ad, branding and design agencies (AKU, Brandmanual, Der Tank, Identity, Tuumik).



Since the year 2000, Estonian design has been regularly introduced outside Estonia as well. “Estonian Design in Focus” was the first international exhibition of Estonian design, taking place at the Helsinki Design Museum. This was followed by invitations to Copenhagen, Berlin and the St Etienne Biennale. A collection of Estonian design has been repeatedly displayed at fairs in Paris (Maison&Objet), Frankfurt (Ambiente) and London (100% Design and Fashion Week); it has been presented in neighbouring countries such as Lithuania, Latvia and different cities in Finland, in Germany, in France, also in St Petersburg and in China and the USA. The Estonian House in Helsinki has been a partner and mediator in Finland. In Tallinn, designers have converged on Kalamaja, a district selected to be among the 20 most famous hipster neighbourhoods in the world. In 2011, the Estonian Association of Designers opened the Estonian Design House, which functions as a centre of information and competence but also houses design studios, a cafe and a gallery that offers a unique display of the works of 80 Estonian designers.

Since 2006, the association of designers has organised the Design Night Festival (Disainiöö). Initially, it was conceived as a 24-hour-long festival presenting Estonian design, now it has developed into an international event where designers from over 20 countries have shown their work. At its core, the festival programme features exhibitions, competitions, educational lectures and workshops; it also presents fashion shows, PechaKucha nights, light installations and other fascinating events.

Design organisations:

The Estonian Association of Designers (EAD). EAD brings together over 140 designers from fields like product, textile, fashion and graphic design. It promotes Estonian design in its home country as well as abroad; it initiated the development of a national design policy; together with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications and the Ministry of Culture, it participates in creating means for developing design and increasing demand and supply.

EAD regularly organises educational seminars, workshops and competitions.

EAD participates in the work of larger design organisations and is a member of the board of various organisations (ICSID, BEDA, EIDD Design For All Europe, DME Award), it collaborates in projects focused on issues like inclusive design, health care design (EHDM), design management and so on. EAD also initiated the Tallinn For All project, which received the DME award; it organised the European Innovation Festival IF... in Tallinn and hosted the DME gala in 2011.

EAD presents the BRUNO product design award (as a part of the Estonian Design Awards).

It organises the Design Night Festival (www.disainioo.ee)

It established the Estonian Design House housing the Estonian design showroom and designers' studios. (www.estoniandesignhouse.ee) www.edl.ee

Estonian Design Centre (EDC) was established by: the Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonian Design Institute and the Estonian Association of Designers.

It develops a suitable environment for companies to use design. It organises collaborative projects between designers and enterprises (Buldooser, Vedur); it participates in creating means for developing design. It introduces Estonian design at foreign fairs and design events.

It gives out the SÄSI young design award and organises the Estonian Design Awards event. EDC is a member of BEDA.

www.disainikeskus.ee

www.etsdm.ee – The Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design

The principal funders of design in Estonia:

Enterprise Estonia
Cultural Endowment
Ministry of Culture
The City of Tallinn

Eesti Disainiauhinnad / Estonian Design Awards:

BRUNO / biannually / EAD

SÄSI / biannually / EDC

ADC Estonia / annually /

The service design award / biannually / Estonian Service Industry Association