

Top Dror

Dror Benshetrit's playful designs begin life as toys and end as the talk of New York

Dror Benshetrit seems charmed. Despite moving to New York only five years ago (he is Israeli-born and studied in Eindhoven), he has already established himself as a leading force in the city's crowded design scene. He meets all the right people - real estate magnate-to-the-hip Michael Shvo; influential MoMA curator Paola Antonelli, who was an early supporter; the people who commission for Bombay Sapphire, Boffi, Puma, Levi's. And everything he creates is at once completely obvious yet stunningly novel, and seemingly always a hit.

Benshetrit's designs, which now span products, architecture, graphics and art direction, are the kind you see and think, 'Aha, it's so simple.' They aren't simple, of course, but they make sense instantly. Benshetrit is bold and it works.

'I'm interested in two things,' he says, sitting at the huge wooden conference table at his HQ, Studio Dror, and pulling up a screen to show projects ranging from the redefinition of a shoe to the smashed 'Vase of Phases' for Rosenthal. 'Movement and transformation,' he concludes. In this studio, everything moves, transforms, redefines.

Benshetrit was happily designing products when he was asked to create the interior for a fashion boutique, Yigal Azrouel, in Manhattan's Meatpacking District. 'I'd never thought about products in context,' he says, explaining how he made the jump in scale. 'But they're just components of an overall interior.' The job's success helped his studio evolve into the multidisciplinary one it is today.

Every project is recognisably Studio Dror. How to spot an example? Chances are it'll be mutable - the 'Pick Chair' (say it fast) folds from a wall hanging into a seat; the 'Folding Table' turns into a desk; and the 'Lily Lace' chair, depending on whether it is in black or white, is the sexiest thing around or the very definition of purity - and just a little cheeky.

Benshetrit is an investigator as much as a creator, and it's his obvious curiosity, his engagement with the world around him, that makes his work so compelling. 'AN of the ideas start out as toys, as mechanisms,' he says, showing plans for a breathtaking new building with an interior that appears to unscrew out of its exterior. It's such an original move, maybe Benshetrit isn't so charmed after all - this kind of work is about more than luck.

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BENSHETRIT MARK

Above, at his New York studio, Benshetrit (centre) brainstorms with his team, whose disciplines range from product design to architecture and art direction

Left, the 'Folding Sofa', which pulls out flat to become a day bed, is among other folding designs for Italian manufacturer BBB