

Nestled in the leafy Sao Paulo neighbourhood of Pinheiros, in a 1958 modernist house, is an agency called Santa Clara, named after the patron saint of communications. The agency's been there since 6 May 2006, when it was founded and the house has a lovely big round swimming pool in a garden that its 55 employees enjoy loafing around and dipping into. Since its inception, the agency has landed a fistful of impressive global clients such as Coca-Cola, Fox Networks and Johnson & Johnson, and it is today on the brink of opening a sister operation in Buenos Aires. It is, in short, one of South America's top small agencies. Interestingly though, it is for planning and strategy that Santa Clara is best known, rather than for creativity - despite netting numerous awards in its first two years at Cannes (Film and Outdoor), The One Show and CCSP (Creative Circle of Brazil).



(Above) First Steps, for Fila and (above right) Robot, for Eldorado Shopping

client deals directly with the planner or creative responsible for its projects. I could say we're like McKinsey, but funnier."

Santa Clara remains a fiercely independent shop, but since last year it also became part of the growing Nitro network of like-minded independent agencies. It began discussions with various networks in 2006, when it was looking for a financial partner, but talks stalled over worries that a typical network would destroy their model. Around 18 months later they met Chris Clarke, the founder of Nitro, and a deal was struck.

"Chris was building a very interesting independent network," says Campos. "In less than 30 minutes we discovered both of us were searching for the same thing. Nitro is a true creative business partner for its clients and we believe that is the way to go."

The agency is now known as SantaClaraNitro and is Nitro's hub for Latin America. It also works on global businesses and pitches outside the region, retaining its independence but at the same time having the strength and opportunities of global players.

Campos is remaining true to his small agency roots in this sense. He started his career working for independent, small to medium-sized agencies in Rio de Janeiro, moving to Giovanni FCB in Rio, at 32, where he was creative director for five years. He then moved to Sao Paulo to become creative director of the Sao Paulo office, where he met some of his present partners in SantaClaraNitro. He stayed for three years, during which time the agency grew more than 150 per cent and was recognized for top creative work.

So what does this leading player on the Brazilian advertising scene think of the state of Brazilian advertising today?

"Brazilians are creative by nature," the 40-year-old enthuses. "If you go

santaclaranitro agency são paulo

Besides lolling about the company pool, staff at Santa Clara are making a big splash in South America's adland. Agency founder, Fernando Campos, tells **Belinda Archer** about keeping it horizontal and making a noise without yelling

Fernando Campos, its founding creative director, explains: "The agency became well known for its creative work, mostly because of awards. But it is not what one would call a creative shop. Now we're starting to be perceived for what we really do, which is strategy. It's really a great planning agency. The good creative work comes because of the strategic insights." Appropriately, Ulisses Zamboni, Santa Clara's planning director, was just awarded Planner of the Year by Meio & Mensagem, Brazil's leading national advertising magazine. But the agency also has an unusual, fluid structure. "We're extremely horizontal, with very few bosses and departments," says Campos. "We keep changing roles as the projects go and we don't have, for example, a digital department, but do constantly great digital work. What happens is that everyone thinks digital, like everyone should be a great planner. All our creative people are planners. There is also no account department or account director. Again, like a consultancy company, the

walking around the streets of Rio de Janeiro during carnival week and look at the costumes, you will have no doubt about it. If you look at the way we play football (well, not me, I suck at football) you will have no doubt about it. If you look at Brazilian music, or architecture, you will have no doubt about it. And yes, when you see

the Brazilian advertising work in Cannes you will have the same feeling."

The bad news, however, is that the Brazilian work on show in Cannes is not the work that can be seen regularly on TV or in a magazine, he says.

"I think when it comes to everyday-life advertising, Brazil is still afraid of being creative, in the way we are in other areas. The average Brazilian creative is bold and brave in Cannes and quite scared in everyday life - scared of the client, scared of experimenting, scared of his boss."

Nevertheless Brazil has built up a strong reputation for print work and, ironically, some of the best recent work has been in Sao Paulo, in the wake of the city's ban on outdoor advertising, implemented in January 2007.

"I am 100 per cent for the Clean City Project," says Campos. "Sao Paulo was becoming a visual mess. And the effect on creativity has been great, for when you have to make an impact and you're not allowed to yell, that's when creativity kicks in." ©