

KEEPING IT SIMPLE – SEAN DIX

By Margie T. Logarta



Sean Dix, interior architect and designer



most iconic Copine chair.

Unlike Dorothy Gale in the classic Wizard of Oz film, designer Sean Dix is not really in a hurry to return home to Kansas in the heart of the US Midwest.

That's understandable as Dix has grown up – thanks to the Peace Corps work of his dad – in some “pretty fantastic places,” as he describes it, naming Saipan, Fiji and the Philippines among others as his former playgrounds. “Growing up overseas gave me invaluable opportunities to gain new experiences, make friends from other cultures and learn from them. It exposed me to artefacts that I never would have seen had I remained in Kansas.

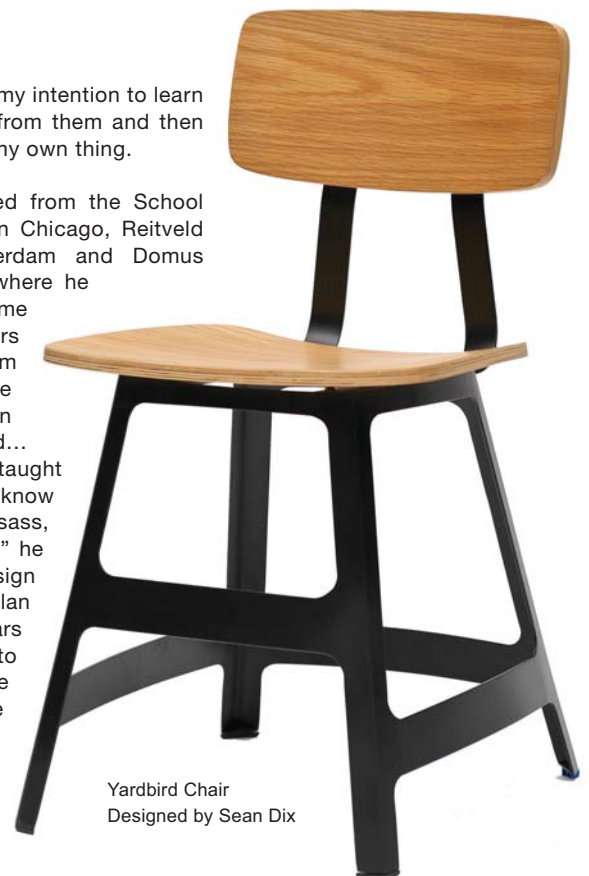
“I think of the intricate woven basketry in the Philippines, cops in sulus (a kind of skirt for guys) in Fiji, WW2-era bullets and helmets and landmines scattered all over Saipan.

“I think all of that stuff mixed together to develop an interest in unique things, in creating, and in people and what they do and why. This seems like a pretty good description of ‘designer.’”

I trained under some of the best designers in the

world. It was always my intention to learn as much as I could from them and then take it away and do my own thing.

After being graduated from the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, Reitveld Academie in Amsterdam and Domus Academy in Milan, where he trained “under some of the best designers in the world like Tom Dixon who took me on when I was an ignorant, eager kid... James Irvine, who taught me most of what I know and Ettore Sottsass, who refined the rest,” he established Dix Design + Architecture in Milan in 2000. Eight years later, he moved to Hong Kong “because I felt the best place to be was Asia,” and this is where he has been based since.



Yardbird Chair
Designed by Sean Dix



IFC men's toilets designed by sean dix



Belon Sean Dix design interior

His client roster includes Yardbird Restaurant, Ronin, Carbone Restaurant, Black Sheep restaurants, Hong Kong Cricket Club, Okra, HD Buttercup, Belon Restaurant, Panda Restaurant Group, YUM!, IFC Mall and retail entities TAL Apparel, Moschino, Bluebell, Harrods, Bosco di Ciliegi, Design Within Reach, Edimass, Fiorucci, Byblos, ArtsGroup, Furla and I.T.

He explains his strong lifestyle orientation. "F&B especially is a lot of fun because it is really challenging with so many factors to balance, most of which only work when nobody notices them: things like light levels, acoustics, flow, efficiency and vibe. Creating a great guest – and employee – experience is tough. The aesthetic component is, of course, also significant and always interesting because I feel like we start afresh with every project, trying to reinforce in three dimensions that which the client wants to communicate such as the character of that restaurant, in that specific place with this particular menu and other considerations."

No second guesses how Dix's creative process kicks into gear. He says: "The idea for a design

usually stems from being presented with a particular problem and my thoughts about how best to approach it.

"I'm inspired by the challenge of creating something good, something that really works, something that others will appreciate and enjoy over time.

"Initially, I take a ton of notes and spend time considering the multitude of requirements and how to fit all of those pieces together. I try not to draw and I avoid looking at similar existing examples as I don't want to get distracted by aesthetics at that early stage. Once my ideas begin to take shape I will start sketching the general ideas.

Then, when those start to take shape, we start working in 3D, computer modelling rough ideas. Those go through hundreds or thousands of iterations, slowly evolving (and sometimes devolving) into what will become the final project. At that point, we go to prototyping (in the case of furniture) to see more clearly where there might be further issues to resolve that weren't apparent



CONVENTION PLAZA HK LIVING AREA SEAN DIX



CONVENTION PLAZA HK DINING AREA SEAN DIX



MP Convention Plaza Apartment



MP Convention Plaza Apartment

in the computer model. Usually, we do a couple of prototypes before we refine the final design.” The age-old conundrum of form vis-à-vis function is a no brainer to Dix, who says: “They’re so closely intertwined that it is difficult for me to consider them individually.”

Furthermore, he is reluctant to trace any “evolution of his style,” explaining: “I’d like to believe that I don’t have an identifiable style,’ unless, perhaps, it is a rigorous attention to function and rationality. Every project my office is involved with is quite different from the last since our clients have very different requirements.”

Concerning the blending of aesthetics, practicality and commercial viability in design to achieve success, he strongly counsels: “Throw away anything superfluous. Keep it simple. Make it durable and comfortable and, equally important, make sure it doesn’t shout.”

The proof is in the proverbial pudding, and Dix points to a recent project, the new

Yardbird Restaurant in Hong Kong, which he feels particularly pleased with. This fourth project with Chef Matt Abergel, he believes, “reflects all the knowledge and experience that we’ve accumulated since we designed the first, renowned Yardbird six years ago.”

Of this iconic hangout, he says: “The team is proud to be there and full of enthusiasm; the guests have a great time and eat spectacular food. And mostly, nobody talks about the design. That is how it should be.”

Materials that age well will often find their way into his projects, “those that look good once they’ve been banged up a bit such as natural aluminium, white oak and natural stone.”

From Dix’s studio in Hong Kong’s bohemian Western



Okra stool design by sean dix



CHOMCHOM



CAFE LGB 2ND FLOOR Full Side View



HLF HK INTERIOR DESIGN SEAN DIX



CAFE LGB 2ND FLOOR Interior

Spindle Bar Stool
Designed by Sean Dix

District, projects, which include “designing pretty much everything, including the doorknobs,” says the designer-entrepreneur, proceed apace in disparate locations: Jakarta, Paris, Los Angeles, Hong Kong and China. In addition, Dix and his eight team members come up with contemporary furniture, which are distributed worldwide either directly and through distributors or retailers like Picket&Rail in Singapore. A smaller office in Milan is also part of the activity.

Says Dix of the set up: “For the most part, each designer leads different projects, though we all contribute to them. I hop from desk to desk all day, tweaking things and discussing details, exchanging ideas.

“My name is on the door – I do a bit of everything.

Mainly though, my role is working directly with our clients helping them to develop their concepts, and then, helping my team refine and realize them.”

With value for purchases a significant consumer trend, Dix, who has lectured in prestigious design institutions such as IULM (Milan), Politecnico di Milano, Domus Academy (Milan), Beckman’s (Stockholm) and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, believes his furniture’s price point is extremely good “especially when one considers that the quality is quite high.”

Should some of the items in Dix product lines look like they wouldn’t be out of place in a smart dining setting, they probably had formed part of a project. He admits that specific F&B activities had produced some much appreciated commercial option.



RONIN HK BAR DESIGN SEAN DIX



YARDBIRD HK GF OVERVIEW DESIGN SEAN DIX



OKRA 1949 BEIJING DINING ROOM DESIGN SEAN DIX

Helping to bring Dix's concepts to life and to one's living room is a team in southern China, whom he describes "are like a big family of about a thousand workers."

Facing future challenges will not be a stroll in the park. He observes: "One particular technological challenge is that, as the world gets smaller and social media becomes ever more present, I find that sometimes clients spend too much time looking at Instagram."

"They see things that they think are cool, and in fact, often they are cool, and ask for similar work. What they don't realize is that everyone else has also seen those same images and is inspired to do something similar. I try to stay away from that stuff as much as I can."

Industry awards are fine for display, but Dix prefers an influx of requests for proposals and the approbation of clients for a project completed and gone beyond expectations.

"I won a Lego competition in Manila when I was about 12," he says. "I recall it was for the design of a pretty cool helicopter." **FFE**



Edimass International is the manufacturer and global distributor of the world famous Sean Dix range of furniture. For OEM and franchise enquiries, please contact cs@edimass.sg. Commission agents are welcome.

Sean's first claim to fame is his Copine series. He has followed up with many other acclaimed pieces. Edimass is the original manufacturer from the start.

Sean and Edimass has strived to produce high quality yet extremely affordable originals. Prices are only fractionally higher than replicas although the quality materials used and strong construction are often in great contrast to the copies.

We are also looking for franchisees. Franchisees will be supported with low MOQs, store design, web advertising and marketing materials.