

Furniture wizard **Stefan Diez** has little time for show-off design, preferring the challenges of creating for manufacture.

Trish Lorenz tracks down the young Bavarian who values commitment from potential clients



At a time when many contemporary designers are focusing on creating one-off pieces for galleries and collectors, it is refreshing to find a studio where the commitment remains very much on design for manufacture. Stefan Diez, the Munich-based furniture designer, does exactly that. An intriguing combination of engineer, craftsman and contemporary designer, his pieces for clients as diverse as Thonet, Rosenthal, Authentics and Moroso have one thing in common: deceptively simple and meticulously thought through, they all stretch manufacturing boundaries.

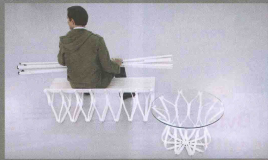
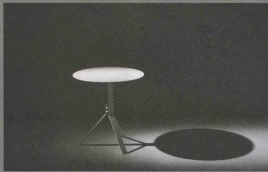
'I don't like show-off design - things made for magazines, rather than for people,' says Diez. 'My design philosophy stretches beyond a sketch or an idea. I believe the designer has to be an engineer, too. You need a precise idea about how you want to construct your product, and you have to have input in the search for people who can help solve manufacturing problems.'

A product of the German education system, which focuses on depth rather than speed of learning, Diez has a broad-based expertise. After school, he undertook an apprenticeship in cabinetmaking before completing an MA in Furniture Design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart in 2002. Diez had initially planned to become an architect, but discovered the Stuttgart school while on an errand during his apprenticeship. Intrigued and fascinated by the huge variety of workshops - encompassing metal, wood, glass and other materials - he had a moment of epiphany. 'Seeing the workshops and the models, suddenly everything made sense. I knew exactly what I wanted to do,' says Diez.

His fascination with materials has never left him. His work to date encompasses everything from glass and ceramics to wood and, with his latest project, paper. Diez is currently working on a series of bags for Authentics. Made from a synthetic paper, they weigh less than 100g but can carry up to 30kg. They have a simple aesthetic, and Diez says he enjoys subverting perceptions of the material. 'Paper is seen as lacking value, and what triggers my design is questioning what makes something beautiful and gives it quality. I like to go beyond the obvious values of the material. No one uses paper in a way that has value, and these bags won't be cheap,' he says.

His apprenticeship in cabinetmaking also continues to inform his design - Diez is an inveterate modelmaker. 'I love making sketches and models. Playing with a material is a means of exploring its qualities, and working hands-on is a way of expressing my thoughts. I can only work up to a certain complexity in my head - after that, I have to make a model. Computers are great for precision work, but at the start of a project you may not know exactly what you want, and hands are much faster and more effective,' he says.

His approach to design is perhaps best illustrated by Shuttle, which he designed for Rosenthal. The project combines every



aspect of his ethos - the glass jars and ceramic lids are an intriguing mix of materials, and their simple aesthetic belies the difficulties inherent in their manufacture. 'It's a simple lid but complex to engineer,' says Diez. 'In the end, we did much of it ourselves - finding the materials, testing and engineering [the design].'

Despite the economic downturn, his studio is busy with a series of projects for 2009, including a plywood chair and a bar stool for Thonet, both of which will launch at the Milan furniture fair next year. Looking ahead, Diez is hoping to keep things simple. 'I see myself working for fewer clients in the future. I want to avoid manufacturers who are fearful or have a lack of vision; I want to work for clients who are as ready to commit as I am,' he says. It's a tough policy, but they do say that all the best relationships are based on mutual commitment.

1 and 2 Bent furniture range, created for Moroso
3 Stefan Diez
4 and 5 Schoenbuch's Upon range
6 and 7 Kuvert bicycle bag and the Papier bag, for Authentics

All designs by Stefan Diez