

INTRO

spective
magazine

SHOP TALK



for Murray Moss, running the Soho gallery he created back in 1994 is much like running a theater. The ever-rotating performances, which present design at its most riveting, afford him the opportunity to play two roles he is well prepared for: actor and director. (As a young man, he studied

acting at the New York University School of the Arts.) "My job is to illuminate and articulate the narrative behind each object I sell through my own filter," says Moss. "I do this by using everything at my disposal. It's like playing Hamlet every day." This design and retail visionary is also a set designer extraordinaire. Ever since opening the sleek, white-walled, brightly lit shop on Greene Street in Soho in 1994, his presentation of design objects has been lauded as a retailing revelation. Moss elevated his merchandise in a manner previously reserved for the icons and treasures found in churches and museums. Seventeen years later, there

may be other shows in town, but few are as distinct and design-driven: "We still do not regard function as the primary driver of design," says Moss. "We look instead for a product's narrative or a visual connection. Function comes last." Whether it's a show-stopping Nathan Sawaya custom Lego creation (based on an Ettore Sottsass bookcase produced by Memphis) or a set of handmade, signed slingshots by Christopher Jarratt, Moss is intent that his customers linger and study the objects so that they are fully understood. "Here, it's as much about taking the time to look as anything," says Moss.

The front window at Moss entices passersby with designs by Marcel Wanders, Mathias Bengtsson and Joris Laarman. Previous page: Murray Moss, retailer extraordinaire. All photos by John Gruen





Upon entering the gallery, one's path is guided by a thoughtfully placed handrail, meant to suggest the best route in which to encounter the objects behind glass cases or staged on white Corian platforms. "The shop is laid out in long aisles to let the objects' stories unfold in a linear fashion," explains Moss, whose serious expression belies a sense of humor as sharp as the pine-and-spray-paint Christopher Chiappa knives he sells. "I even have dioramas. It's very Design Museum-meets-Museum of Natural History in here." His intention isn't just to help the visitor savor each of his products. It's also to prevent them from oversaturation. "The handrails help to control the distance that a person is standing from each case," he explains. "This allows me to break down the visual presentation into manageable stories. Otherwise, it can be overwhelming. And I never want to give away too much."

Above: Clay Dining Chair by Maarten Baas. Left: at one of the store's many events, Moss entertains Philippe and Jasmine Starck in front of Georg Baldele's Vertical Glitterbox chandelier.

A scale model of the *Titanic*, made by hand in Azimute, France, sits atop the "Wrongwoods" long low cabinet by Sebastian Wrong and Richard Woods for Established & Sons.



Moss is fastidious about how the objects he loves are displayed, but he admits that, "I'm less interested in the functional aspect of functional design. I love how things are made when they are made well and I love working with anybody obsessed about making things." He continues: "I value that dialogue and it informs what I choose for the store. I created Moss so people could not only shop for great design but also explore new ideas. The shop functions as arbiter, advocate and presenter, as well as a showroom and salon."

Left: Bronze "Bots" by
Ray McClure. Right: A
fully curated stacked-
display case showing
Moss's many wares.





Street at night. Come Rain, Come Shine chandeliers and
by Tord Boontje.

by 1999, Moss and Franklin Getchell, his partner and the company's president, were ready to expand, so they broke through the building's walls to create additional space. (The now 4,000 square foot gallery no longer includes that original store). "When we first opened, I began by showcasing my obsession with post-war Italian industrial design," explains Moss of his dizzying array of inventory. "But since the store was called 'Moss' and not the 'Twentieth Century Design



Above: Fly Chaise by Mark Robson. Right: Ross Lovegrove's silvered glass suspension lamps for Yamagiwa above wooden "Knives" by Christopher Chiappa.

Shop,' I felt no obligation to present a 'balanced' offering. I felt the shop should carry anything I wanted and was interested in, even if that meant only Italian products. I am not, after all, the gift shop of the United Nations!"

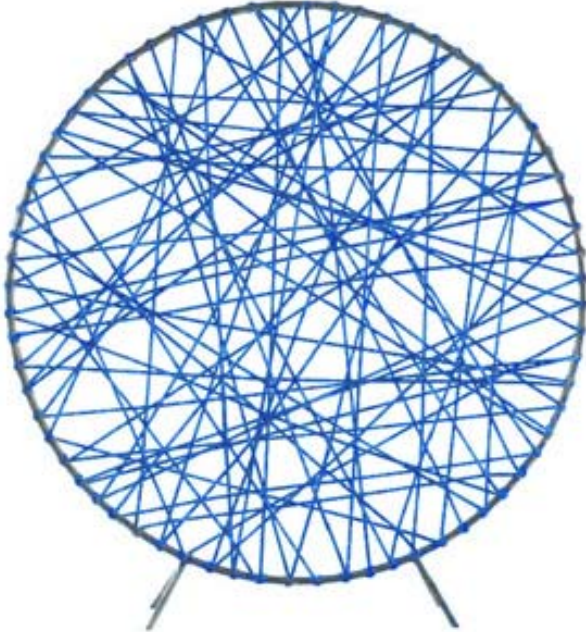
Today, his product selection reflects the many nationalities of his current design passions, with such pieces as the 2006 "Honeycomb Vase" of Rotterdam-based Tomás Libertiny (made with the help of some 40,000 bees); the "Where There's Smoke" chair, created originally by Marc Newson and "reshaped" by Dutch designer Maarten Baas via a torch; a champagne flute fashioned from muslin glass — the thinnest possible crystal — by Vienna's Josef Hoffmann in 1917; and the 2005 "Fossili Moderni" lighting installation by Milanese artist Massimiliano Adami, made from polyurethane foam and found objects. "My goal here, of course, is to create a 'Wunderkammer,' or a 'Treasury of Wonders,'" says Moss, who, stages five major exhibitions per year. These are consistently well attended by a devoted following of design connoisseurs.





The Robber Baron collection by Studio Job, in painted, patinated and gilded cast bronze.

Moss in Sculpt Armchair by Maarten Baas. Photo by John Gruen . Right: Zig Zag Screen by Fernando and Humberto Campana.



and always, he is searching to satiate as well as titillate. “The vibe in Moss is, I hope, akin to reading a unique autobiography that is as collective as it is personal,” he says. “I want people to walk in and say to themselves: ‘Now these people are really thinking!’”

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1. Round Eros table by Angelo Mangiarotti

This wonderful collection of tables, designed in the early '70s, has been beautifully reissued by AgapeCasa. They're perfectly true to the originals, which you can come across at auction or vintage shops, but here, at least, you can get exactly what you want - the shape, the height, the color marble.

2. XXXL Floor Vase by Gaetano Pesce

I love everything that Gaetano makes. This floor vase and its two sister vases in blue and yellow were made exclusively for us, and they are giant and breathtaking and perfect examples of his genius.

3. Solid C2 Chair by Patrick Jouin

Made by a process called 3-D printing, this is an early brilliant example of an entirely new form of manufacture. This is the future.

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4. Clay dining chair by Maarten Baas

Each piece of Maarten's Clay furniture collection is hand made and therefore unique, but still this is open production. The colors are bright, the shapes child-like and otherworldly.

5. To Be Continued Bench by Julien Carretero

Because of the way Julien makes this bench, without imposing a form on the mold beyond the very first one, the material itself literally shapes the bench as it grows. The designer frees it to do what it will.