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September 13, 2008

Interview with 72 Smalldive

Understated yet impactful, cutting edge yet classic best describes the stunning creations from the Milan based [72 Smalldive](#) studio. The studios attention to detail and back to basics approach make their accessories instant classics for discerning men and women who want to break free from the masses.

This month we talk with them about their journey from founding the studio to winning prestigious design awards and their views on the evolution of production techniques.

WeFew: Tell us a little about the background of 72 Smalldive - who's behind the label and how did the studio come to be?

72 Smalldive: The label was started by Sزتiong Soh, a strategy consultant by day and a design addict by night. Sزتiong's hardcore addiction to design and "all things beautiful" often lead him to new friendships with talented artists, artisans, and designers in Milan (where he's based). With the conviction that material consumption can be meaningful and humane, Sزتiong gathered the help of Alessandro Carboni, 72 Smalldive's jeweller-maverick, to establish the studio, in 2005, specialising in bespoke handcrafted jewellery. Despite the success of the venture, Sزتiong felt that the studio should place its focus in making high quality and well-designed products more accessible to consumers. With its team of designers - Alessandro Carboni, Katelyn Aslett, Tso, Stefano Vinci - 72 Smalldive launched its first prêt-a-porter jewellery collection "Cut" in 2006 and in the following year presented Materialimateriali in Paris in 2007. 2 products from the collection were awarded for innovative design in fashion accessories and will be featured in Agence Marc Praquin's 2008 compendium of good designs.



WeFew: In terms of design, why does 72 Smalldive stand apart?

72 Smalldive: The team at 72 Smalldive prefers to take a holistic approach towards design. Consumers and even designers are increasingly viewing design as visual differentiation and not more. We at 72 Smalldive, however, hope that our design projects will help construct a positive and rewarding relationship between humankind and products.

Design plays a central role in the building of many ancient civilisations - in fact not only it inspired, it also empowered these civilisations. Hence why should it not do the same for the modern world?

Aesthetics aside, we try to encompass other aspects of product design - are there more sustainable approaches to our production? Can we make consumption a rewarding act? And finally what true purpose do our creations serve?

When 72 Smalldive decided to add leather bags into its accessories collection, the question we asked ourselves was "Why do we need to create another bag". Apart from diversifying our range and satisfying our creative egos, what other key reasons do we have to bring another product into this frenzied world of consumerism? Hence in our first collection, we did not aim to be another "IT"

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bag, instead we took pains to choose the appropriate leather craft studio to develop the clutch purse, we offer our jewellery designer the opportunity to incorporate his skills into leather accessory design, and most important of all, we revisited and incorporated abandoned aspects of bag designs into our collection.

In the thwarted world of consumerism, designers presumably dictate the must-haves, while consumers hunt for these must-haves. In circumspect, it is consumers' cash belts that empower designers to dictate and enslave them.

72 Smalldive does not want to be caught in this ironic vicious cycle, instead we prefer to think that our consumers are intelligent beings who understand or are willing to learn about the design and production choices in a product. We hope that through that relationship, consumers acquire discernment in making day-to-day choices and eventually influence the market in a positive way. In doing so, we hope we are making a positive difference!



WeFew: Your first collection, Materialimateriali, as well as the latest, Jet Set Rock, both utilise hand crafting and artisanal skills. Do you think there should be higher awareness toward artisan skills in product design and is this the 72 Smalldive design ethos?

The role of artisan skills dominated the design debate at the turn of the 20th Century. A key issue in the profession of design had been the confrontation between Art and Crafts Movement and the Industrial Revolution. Then, the Art and Crafts movement sought to reconcile with the ongoing campaign for quality and standardization through machines. Proponents of the Art and Crafts Movement felt that each step of the creation process should involve the designer working with his or her hands in order to prevent the loss of artisan skills.

Machine production, of course, ensures certain level of quality and standardized finishing to products which a craft studio may not offer. Yet, on the other hand, the craft master's experience and skills provide the knowledge base required in the transforming a creative concept into a product. In view of this, 72 Smalldive seeks a balance between the use of machinery and handcrafted skills in the production our creations as we feel that design without artisan skills is 2 dimensional - knowledge of nuances, textures, hues, linearity are elements that cannot be picked up through the mastering of AutoCad or some computer-aided device.

If we take a look around us, there are many industries in the design world that are able to successfully encompass these two opposing realms into their design process; French Couture houses, Swiss Watch Manufacturers, and Scandinavian Glass Makers are living proofsthat artisan skills are relevant today.

Artisans form a significant part of the knowledge base in world of design. To ensure that craft skills and craft knowledge are passed on to the next generation, artisans need the opportunities to justify and sustain their trade. Therefore 72 Smalldive endeavours to involve artisans in the making of our products.

We hope through our ethos we can inculcate a new perspective towards consumption - where the context and history of design and craft skills precedes before visual aesthetics, and the material worth of a product.



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WeFew: In the short time since your launch, you have participated in the 2007 Paris Fashion Trade Show, and already stock your work next to well established brands in Italy, Germany, France and Austria. What does the future hold for 72 Smalldive?

72 Smalldive: In April 2008 this year, 72 Smalldive launched a collection called "Little Shop of Love". The collection is based on modern (and often witty) perspectives of a couple's relationship. More importantly the project serves as a 'doodle pad' for the designers and selected craft studios in Milan, Bangkok, Brisbane, and Brooklyn to create an eclectic and accessible collection of lifestyle products. In other words we would like the project to put creativity and the support of artisan skills as top priorities over commercial objectives.

There is still a long way to go in establishing the label, and being a very small player in this market, we are treading carefully. Having won 2 awards for our products this year, we certainly hope that that we are able to create more of such products in 2009 and the many years to come. A core objective of ours for the near future is to utilise even more eco-friendly materials and suppliers.

72 Smalldive is also reviewing more creative retail channels to showcase our products. We have entered into a marketing venture with a retail consultant to explore newer opportunities in the area of "Slow Retail" (as in "Slow-Food")



WeFew: How would you describe the 72 Smalldive woman/man?

72 Smalldive: Style wise, the 72 Smalldive individual (a moderate minimalist) is eclectic, understated and at times nonchalant. The aesthetic preferences and lifestyle choices of a 72 Smalldive individual are often influenced by various cultures this well-travelled individual has been exposed to. A person who resides in the precinct of 72 Smalldive is a confident realist. This person understands the limitations of the real world but is unafraid to stick his/her neck out for a little common good.

Visit the [72 Smalldive shop](#) to see their current and past collections.

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