



JOANNE RATAJCAZAK FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Nicole Tarasick/Toronto

In an age when so many emerging designers are frantic to expand their brands, Toronto's Nicole Tarasick remains a cool anomaly. Paying no mind to the trend of cross-industrializing a creative name, she concentrates her efforts on a single product: throw pillows. Her little poufs of comfort are designed just as smartly as they look. She buys the feathers, cotton twill and linen for the cases locally and uses non-toxic inks for printing. The creative thesis behind

the 28-year-old's product is also just as simple and smart: play up Canadiana for all its worth. Each of her pieces incorporates Tarasick's "partially ironic, partially patriotic" design scheme, including screen-printed images of everything from national maps and maple leaves to moose and Canadian airport codes. Her quasi-kitschy Cancon aesthetic has proved to be so popular that Tarasick had to quit her job as a salesperson at Queen Street West design haven StyleGarage (where she first sold

her work) and open up her own company in 2008 to keep up with the demand. Labelling her newest pieces a take on Canadian coats of arms," Tarasick plans to unveil her latest collection at the Interior Design Show's Studio North exhibition.

"As Canadians, we are always looking outside of our borders for inspiration, but the more I travel and study, the more I find how diverse and rich our own culture is," Tarasick says. "My pillows draw on our own humorous stereotypes. I want

to get away from the [notion] of what Canadian design is. I don't want to just regurgitate Canadian design that everyone knows."

Although Tarasick's work is heavily influenced by Canadian iconography, her roots in Toronto's art and music scene make an impact on her work as well. A student at OCAD University, Tarasick is part of an art collective called AKIN (other members include fashion designer Heidi Ackerman and photographer Oliver Pauk). At home, Tarasick's boyfriend, Michael

Dellios, a member of the band Make Your Exit, also spurs her creativity, as she designs posters and disc sleeves for the group. Tarasick insists that being a part of both underground scenes gives her an upper hand when it comes to making new work.

"I want to add a modern viewpoint to Canadian design, hearing stories and getting feedback from a part of Canada most people don't see," Tarasick says. "With pillows, I can be bit cheeky and make a bold statement." — ELIO IANNACCI

WHERE TO CHECK HER OUT: Nicole Tarasick's throw pillows can be seen in the IDS's Studio North exhibition, which focuses on homegrown design. Her website is www.nicoletarasick.com.



Canadian maps, fauna and airport codes are among the motifs on Tarasick's throw cushions. Each pillow features a cotton case, feather fill and non-toxic pigments.





JODY ROGAC FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL



KATE HUTCHINSON FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Shawn Place/Prince George, B.C.

Don't bother Shawn Place with a hashtagged Tweet or Facebook alert on where the ever-evolving home-decor industry is headed in the next decade. The Prince George, B.C.-based furniture designer—who makes handcrafted pieces for living spaces both mini and mammoth—is far from interested in talking about the future of mechanically engineered decor. “The past is so much more interesting to me,” he says while on a lunch break from constructing an end table with his two

materials of choice: oak and soap. “There is so much power and art in finding out how an heirloom is made. Owning one can be just as interesting since it gets better with age. Something that isn't mass-produced should last longer than its owner and maker, so many generations get to enjoy it.”

While designers of Place's ilk are obsessed with creating the perfect studio space, the 41-year-old craftsman feels that his surroundings have little to do with his work. “You would

think that where I live in British Columbia would turn me on, but it doesn't in the least. It doesn't matter where I design. I value human creativity above everything else,” he says. For example, his dramatic owl chair, which will be featured at the Interior Design Show in Toronto this week, was inspired by a cast-iron interpretation of the nocturnal creature that Place stumbled on in an antiques shop.

Relatively new to the decor game, Place started making his one-of-a-kind pieces in 2008

while hunting for a dining-room table that appealed to his minimalist sensibilities. He had no luck finding affordable pieces and the items in the IKEA catalogue weren't exactly on his wish list. “We've been led to believe that the more you buy, the better; I don't buy that race-to-the-bottom-for-the-cheapest-piece mentality,” Place says. So he relied on his own carpentry skills and learned how to draft, design and assemble. With the help of B.C. design-scene stalwarts Niels and Nancy Bendtsen, he also be-

gan to get acquainted with many of Scandinavia's design heroes.

“The [Bendtsens] were my mentors and taught me how to go about making what I make now,” Place says, adding that his favourite types of pieces all come from the Danish Modern period. “Seeing a piece of furniture by Hans Wegner was an epiphany for me. After that, it wasn't long before I was studying his and Poul Kjaerholm's pieces, spending hours trying to figure out how they perfected their work.” —ELIO IANNACCI

Couper Croiser/Montreal

Comprising a relationship that appears to be just as beautifully mismatched as the custom carpets they make, Couper Croiser epitomizes the phrase “design imitating life.” Consisting of 30-year-old François Palmer (a downtown visual artist) and 33-year-old Jean-François Rousseau (a suburban commercial designer), the Montreal-based design duo couldn't be more different in personality and taste. Palmer, who is spokesperson for the brand, defines the collaboration

as “a yin-yang brotherhood” in which opposing points of view are what “connect each carpet, mat, rug or prototype.” Palmer's ying man, Rousseau, is charged with being the practical voice in their process. “I'm much more asymmetric and poetic with my vision,” Palmer explains. “[Jean-François] has a much more geometric, rational eye.”

Having stolen the spotlight at Shanghai's 2010 Design Expo, the duo recently nabbed Quebec's prestigious FERDIE interior design award for its latest

line of rugs. And now Toronto's style set can catch a first-hand glimpse of the pair's work when its award-winning Découpés collection is unveiled this week at the Interior Design Show.

Couper Croiser first cut its teeth with an environmentally friendly carpet collection called Ajusté. The Mondrian-meets-postmodern series was initially constructed as an experiment, which, thanks to word of mouth, became popular in hotels and homes alike. Soon enough, the line led to Palmer

and Rousseau officially opening up shop in 2006. “We were both out of work so the product was born out of necessity, practicality and whimsy,” Palmer says of Ajusté, made primarily from unused carpet odds and ends. Their eco-consciousness informed the firm from the start: “We were shocked to see that so many carpets were not being recycled in Quebec and wanted to do something about it.”

Weaving their environment-loving mandate with retro and cinematic sensibilities into each

square foot of their concepts (“fashion and sixties cult movie scenes inspire us most,” Palmer explains), the pair wanted to ensure their aesthetic didn't resemble the kind of enviro-decor that overuses wheatgrass and oatmeal palettes.

“Green design doesn't have to be swampy,” Palmer says. “We want to be part of the changing face of ecological design. We love green buildings [that] don't look like patchwork architecture and want our pieces to [be] the same.” —ELIO IANNACCI

WHERE TO CHECK HIM OUT: Shawn Place's furniture (www.shawnplace.ca) will be featured in the Studio North display.



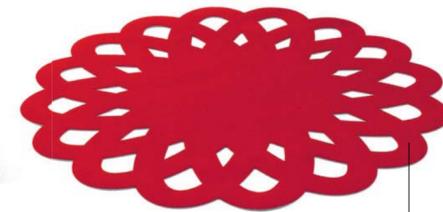
Place's white-oak side table is finished with soap, a trademark of the designer.



His Timber dining chair was influenced by both the look of unfinished lumber and Scandinavian design.



The duo's Règle doormat is made of polypropylene and recycled rubber.



The colourful nylon Tressé rug has a non-slip vinyl backing.

WHERE TO CHECK THEM OUT: Visit Couper Croiser's booth on the IDS's main floor. Their website is www.coupercroiser.com.