

EASY DOES IT

TEXT BY GAYLE OLIPH. IMAGES OF MICHAEL YOUNG COURTESY OF X-TRA DESIGN.

A chat with Michael Young, revealed a casual individual who doesn't take himself too seriously.



Michael Young is quite the comedian. A first encounter with him would have you chuckling to his witty remarks as he comments on his designs, furniture companies, and his earlier years as a struggling designer. In town for the Furniture Design Forum 2006, accompanied by a wry sense of humour and spiced with welcoming candour, Young is affable, personable and laidback. Upon further scrutiny, one can't help but notice his casual "just pulled 'em out of the washer" getup. He is so laidback, it almost seems odd that he isn't knocking back a few beers right there. Indeed, life is like one big party for Young. He doesn't seem to care what other people think - directors of furniture companies included - and tends to lead life according to his own terms (which pretty much translates into his design style as well).

As one of the most successful and influential designers of his generation, almost all of Young's designs are intended to "put a smile on your face". Curvy, contoured and brightly hued, his work is invariably imbued with comic book humour. They subtly communicate with their audience through a lively, warm personality, which has undoubtedly granted them their success. Born in Sunderland in 1968, Young studied furniture and product design at Kingston University from 1989 to 1992. He went on to design for big industry names such as Magis, Cappellini and Rosenthal. Currently based in Hong Kong, he believes the future of design lies in China, where an abundance of opportunity awaits. He now shuttles between Hong Kong and Brussels, where he intends to settle down with his wife. ▶

DISCLOSURE

STEERING DESIGN

TEXT BY RACHEL LEE. IMAGES COURTESY OF THOMAS JACOBSEN

Thomas Jacobsen was in town in March to speak at the Furniture Design Forum 2006. We snuck him away for a minute to talk about his take on design.



"If you want to do something, do it," Thomas Jacobsen said during our conversation. The founder of Australian design firm, Thomas Jacobsen MDIA, is by all means tenacious – something he claims to have learnt from sailing. He doesn't believe in doing anything just for the sake of doing it, doesn't believe in decorating, and doesn't believe in following trends. And it shows in his design, which he describes as "clean, engineered and pared down". With his furniture pieces, Jacobsen works against the current of designs that, in his opinion, are becoming "too throwaway" and "too trend-based". But apart from furniture, his multi-disciplinary design firm has also dabbled in yacht design (not surprisingly since he says that sailing is in his blood) and interior design.

But believe it or not, Jacobsen was not trained as a designer. Instead, he spent four years studying building and CAD at the University of Technology Sydney, resulting in his hands-on approach towards design and his interest in how things are manufactured. In fact, he is involved in every stage of design, from conception, to prototype, to production. He admits that thriving in the design industry is not just about being a good designer, but being a good manager and a good businessperson. "There's no such thing as a smooth project. You just need good management skills to steer around the bumps." And from the looks of it, he has done a pretty good job of driving his practice. ▶

