

Wallpaper*

APRIL 2007

*INTERNATIONAL DESIGN INTERIORS LIFESTYLE

UK £4.00
US \$8.90
AUSTRALIA \$9.99
CANADA \$11.50
DENMARK DKK 75.00
FRANCE €7.90
GERMANY €9.75
HOLLAND €7.90
ITALY €8.70
NORWAY NOK 79.00
SOUTH AFRICA RAND 69.95
SPAIN €7.90
SWEDEN SEK 69.00
SWITZERLAND CHF 16.00

INTERIORS SPECIAL

Sheet happens

We go undercovers

Art house

At home with the
Habsburgs

ODD BALL

The new Kazakhstan
capital that taste forgot

Safe as houses
How to be chic & secure

Meet the
mock-modernists

www.wallpaper.com

04 >



OKAY CORRALLED

From left, designers Tomás Alonso, Mathias Hahn, Peter Marigold, Hiroko Shiratori, Jorre van Ast and Oscar Narud at their London studio with a selection of their work



Crowded house

With half a dozen designers from as many countries, creating everything from coconut radios to moveable hooks, Okay Studio has six appeal

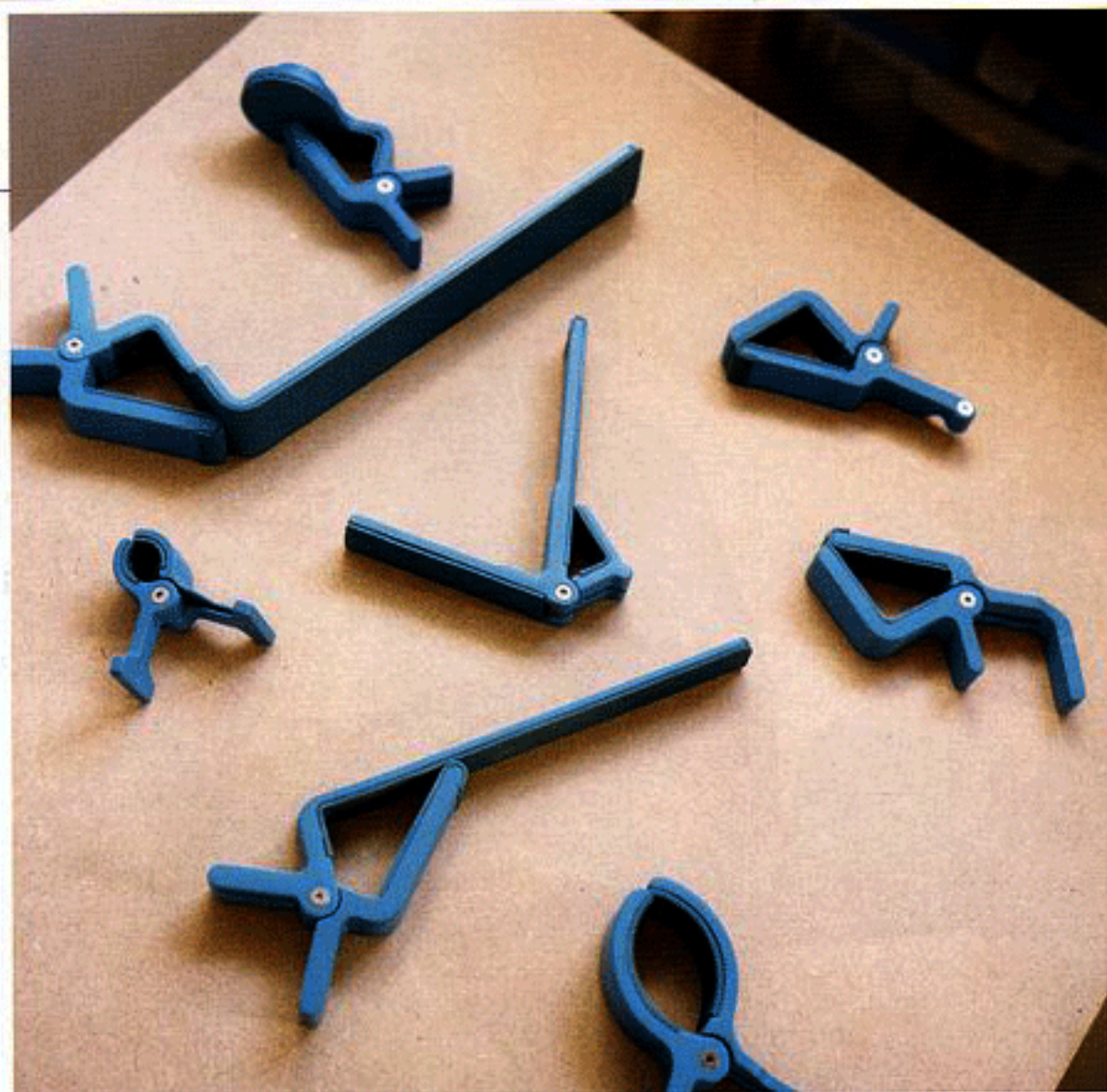
When is a studio not a studio? When it's also an impromptu playground and indoor garden-in-progress; a cavernous space that sports a single table football game in an area that could house a 747, and where an affable group of designers serve tea and biscuits with a familiarity that belies the fact they've just moved in.

And when is a design collective not a design collective? The six core members of Okay Studio (others come and go, often collaborating on specific exhibitions) turn their hands to everything from highly commercial industrial products to whimsical pieces that stray into conceptual art. Ron Arad, their course director at London's Royal College of Art, is a champion of diversity, and they cite as influences Roberto Feo of El Ultimo Grito, and Noam Toran, whose mischievous wit explores the identities we project on to objects.

Now, with the creeping gentrification of Hoxton and Shoreditch, it seems Okay Studio may have snapped

up the last affordable studio in town. Their Stoke Newington space is satisfyingly tricky to find ('Just as any serious start-up design studio should be,' says Belgian designer Jorre van Ast) and is where they work individually and collectively on everything from prototypes for Artek or Nigel Coates, to exhibitions for the British Council and interiors commissions. Fun it may be, but adaptability is the name of the game.

Following the success of their collaborative efforts at RCA's 'Platform 10' exhibition at the Great Eastern Hotel in May last year, the sextet have continued to work together, never ceasing to inspire and learn from each other. Briton Peter Marigold, for example (whose 'Make/Shift' shelves featured in W*97), loves how 'making do' can spur inventiveness. This kind of entrepreneurial thinking led him to install radios in coconuts to sell on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro. He is currently putting the finishing touches to a »



GROUP PLUG
Clockwise from top left:
'Clampology' hooks
and holders by Jorre van
Ast; 'Fruit Box Shelves'
by Peter Marigold;
'Handless Barber's
Tools'; and 'High-Heel
Practising Device', both
by Hiroko Shiratori

show at London's Aram Store and fitting out an apartment in Amsterdam with maple shelving, which runs seamlessly from the interior (where it's for storage) to the exterior (where it is transformed into a nesting box for birds). Ahh.

Meanwhile, van Ast explores the line between industrial design and what he terms 'the messy human world'. His clever clamp designs, 'Clampology', function as moveable hooks and holders; and he has reworked the trestle, creating a set of portable legs that clamp onto any flat surface to turn it into a table. He is working on prototypes for a project with Artek, headed by Tom Dixon, and recently scooped three major prizes at Interieur O6 Belgium.

The design possibilities offered by ready-made objects haven't escaped the attention of Tomás Alonso, a Spaniard, whose wall-mounted display of disposable cutlery not only gives a pleasingly lived-in feel to the

new studio, but also led to the production of his own take on disposable cutlery, made of aluminium.

'Honest, simple objects give us the freedom to project our own stories,' says Mathias Hahn, a German, who is captivated by everyday social scenarios. Using simple forms and colours, and driven by an obsessive attention to detail, he has worked with Volkswagen and Tom Dixon's design studio.

Norwegian Oscar Narud graduated from London's Central St Martins in 2003 and spent a year working for Munich-based designer Klaus Hackl, before joining the RCA course. His designs reflect his curiosity – he observes, daydreams, filters. The results often throw up as many questions as answers to the daily domestic rituals we perform. He's also a fearsome illustrator.

Japanese Hiroko Shiratori, meanwhile, straddles the worlds of design and fiction. Her 'Unusual Objects from Japan (1868-1945)' series, which tells stories

about a Japan that never was, includes an adjustable high-heel practising device and a set of barber's tools designed for someone with no hands, both presented in bespoke museum-style display cases. Balancing theatricality and realism, Shiratori (along with Marigold) will be one of the British Council's 'Great Brits' at the Milan Furniture Fair in April.

Okay's collaborative designers include Israeli Shay Alkalay, who linked up with them for the International Möbel Messe in Köln. He presents witty designs based on complex mechanisms, and recently exhibited with the British Council in Milan and Tokyo, where his cute, dysfunctional 'Bin Bag Bears' captured column inches.

Now they've a space big enough for their ambitions, not to mention the odd party, these talented young designers can start to revel in the superlatives that will inevitably be applied to Okay. No irony intended. ★
www.okaystudio.org