

# RON ARAD

WORDS Heidi Mortlock ◆ Courtesy Ron Arad Associates

*DESIGN MASTER RON ARAD SPEAKS TO HEIDI MORTLOCK ABOUT HIS LOVE OF LONDON, LEAD PENCILS AND BLURRED LINES.*

It takes an exceptional eye to decipher the trash from the treasure in a scrap yard, but that's exactly what industrial design guru Ron Arad showcased when he launched his career with a chair made out of old leather car seats. Since then, Arad has been the mastermind behind countless commercial products spanning bookshelves, tables, sofas, sunglasses, chandeliers and perfume bottles, as well as an anthology of architectural feats. His work and his imagination have no boundaries, and prove testament to his reputation as a revolutionary force in today's design world.

Born to artist parents in Israel, Arad has always been infatuated with drawing and all things visual. "My pencil has been my tool ever since I can remember. Everything starts with doodles," he says. A reluctant architecture student, upon graduating London's Architectural Association Arad briefly followed the path of least resistance and began working for a reputable architectural firm. But he made a swift departure from that vocation, which he attributes to a lack of time to execute his personal projects. "I was so busy I never had time to design. One lunchtime I went out and I just never went back. Then I had time," he recalls. This revelation prompted Arad to set up his first studio, One Off, in 1981, which he followed up with Ron Arad Associates in 1989.

Much of Arad's early success can be credited to his ability to capture the essence of Britain's emerging movement for individual and undisciplined art in the 1980s. A nonconformist by nature, one of his most notable characteristics is his refusal to categorise his work as an architect, product or furniture designer. "It's all one progressive kindergarten; I do all sorts of things. People have difficulties accepting this; they want to define you. We are not an exclusive membership in any one discipline," Arad says. Indeed, his most illustrious exhibition to date held at MOMA in 2009 was aptly titled 'No Discipline', which Arad also believes to be an excellent personal descriptor.

Together with his close-knit team, Arad works to challenge materials, technologies and processes in order to produce new and unique products. His work is a blend of smaller, underground ventures and significantly larger partnerships with mainstream manufacturers. He has collaborated with some of the biggest names in contemporary furniture including Vitra, Kartell, and Moroso, and produced exclusive fragrance products for luxury fashion house Kenzo. But it is Arad's Bookwork shelving unit that is largely responsible for his kudos in the design world.

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Originally unveiled at the Milan Furniture Fair in 1993, manufacturing giant Kartell was quick-off-the-ground to swoop in and merge its resources with Arad's creativity. The result was the revolutionary Bookworm, which remains one of Arad's best selling products of all time.

Another important product for Arad came by way of the Kenzo perfume bottle he launched at his MOMA exhibition in 2009. As anticipated, the bottle design included a unique internalised spray system and challenged the usual standards in perfume packaging. On the back of its success, Arad again collaborated with Kenzo in 2012 to create 'Madly Kenzo', a bottle that evokes a stylised butterfly wing in motion.

In recent months Arad has teamed up with PQ Eyewear on a range of sunglasses he hopes will "rest on the ears and noses of a great many people". One particular line has been named after London Underground tube stations, a concept Arad is most proud of. "We work in London. We have a map of the Underground with amazing names and memories so we loved the idea. It's nice to hear opticians talk about glasses in that way – 'Notting Hill will look good on you, better than Shepherd's Bush.'"

Although more prominent in the world of design, Arad's architectural achievements have remained unwavering over the years. Some of his most acclaimed works include the Tel Aviv Opera House in 1994, the technology floor of London's Selfridges department store in 2001, and the Holon Design Museum in 2010, a short distance from his birth place in Tel Aviv and one of Arad's favourite projects.

With such an incredible back catalogue and reputation to match it's easy to understand why the demand for Arad's work continues to rise. Arad concurs, saying, "the more successful a project is, the less it's possible to finish it." But he also maintains that despite the heavy workload for his 22-strong staff he wouldn't have it any other way. "We refuse to grow," he says. "I don't want it to become impersonal." But with all the accolades and successes of his career, the question still remains as to what Ron Arad's biggest achievement is. His answer? "I have never had to do a day's work. I like Mondays – there is always lots of things to do."

