

HOME FURNISHINGS

New Portuguese designers: Interview with Carlos Joo Parreira, CEO of Lusitano 1143

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Hand it to the Portuguese

By [Ana Andjelic](#)

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The year 2008 was tough for Portugal. But Portuguese are descendants of the Lusitanos, the ancient warrior tribe, and take pride in their self-reliance, craftiness and entrepreneurship.

Enter the new Portuguese design scene made up of those who lost their white-collar jobs in the global financial crisis, but had their own hands and imagination to fall back on.

Inadvertently, they created a new moment in interior design, one dominated less by Philippe Stark or Jonathan Adler and more by the unknown, local craftsmen who work with sustainable materials and make everything limited-edition and one-of-a-kind.

The cult of the interior Designer with a big D, rife with conceptual ideas, may be giving way to a collective of creative experimenters obsessed with working with their hands.

Lisbon treatise

In an age where any Eames is replicated an nauseam and interior design accelerates to fast-fashion speed this summer was all about minimalism it is refreshing to recognize a movement focused on "slow making."

Anti-trendiness is in, and the most coveted pieces are those connected with the personality and the story of the maker, not a curator or a critic.

We are back in the era of social objects, where hand-made things speak to their own history and reflect a human, deeply personal narrative back to us.

The imperfection of the wood makes each glass decanter that is made in it unique the way one's grandmother made pillows from virgin wool scraps is different from how someone else's grandmother did it. No two things are the same, and no two ways of making them are alike.

The implications of these shifts for the field of interior design are massive, and to unpack them, I spoke with New York-based Carlos Joo Parreira, founder of [Lusitano 1143](#), a two-month-old direct-to-consumer site focused on

bringing Lisbon designers to the global scene.

Why did you select the makers you feature on the site? What makes them unique?

To be totally honest, I selected those that I connected with on a really personal level.

If their pieces would find home in mine, they were right for the Lusitano 1143.

Everything you see on my site is actually in my house. There are even a couple of pieces that were one-offs that I just couldn't part with.

What do you fall in love with when it comes to design? What makes a coveted design product?

Design that works.

I think even humble objects can be beautiful, and never design for design's sake or as an accessory. Design to solve the problem beautifully.

What do you think is the most inspiring thing happening in the interior design globally? Is there anything that you'd say is new in that it didn't exist 10 or even five years ago?

The respect for the maker is back.

As we again care about who the people are that grow our food and tend to the animals that feed us, we care about the hands that create the pieces that come into our homes. I hope it only gets better from here.

If you'd have to describe your business in three keywords, what would you say?

Warm, contemporary, human.

What are you offering to your audience that it can't get anywhere else?

Quite literally, most, if not all, pieces have never been in the U.S.

I also think it's the ingenuity that the artisans I work with do not feel a commercial pressure to create something that other people like. They are creating what they love.

From one artisan creating beautifully organic glass decanters hand-blown from the absent core of a tree to another that creates pieces from a marble, I've never seen before just north of Lisbon.



Handblown glass decanter, created from the absent core of a tree trunk

It's everything from aesthetics and our point of view to the long lineage and emotional charge of craftsmanship that makes us stand apart.

What are design connoisseurs willing to pay for today? What are they looking for?

I'd like to think craftsmanship. The appreciation of someone's talent creating something with their hands that is beautiful.

I also think that as home decor has become a bit more trend-driven on a quicker calendar and even seasonal sometimes, I believe design lovers really want to connect with unique pieces. Something they haven't seen all over social media, but something they had an emotional connection with through the discovery of it.

Who is your ideal global customer?

I'd like to think that they are someone that sees a piece and wonders where it came from. How it was done and what journey it has had by the time it reaches them. Someone that appreciates the creative process and loves being part of that process by bringing these pieces into their homes.

Christian Louboutin said that "it's part of the charm of Portugal the Portuguese do not know whether to sell." Is there anything you'd call uniquely Portuguese design style or, a design attitude, that you haven't seen anywhere else? I love that quote. I would maybe say that actually the Portuguese don't realize sometimes the good that is there.

Growing up always had the feeling that we were trying to compete with the rest of Europe on their terms, but thankfully now we are focusing on what makes us unique.

To me, it's the harmony between the ancient and the contemporary.

We are looking to the processes that evolved since before Roman times, but are now informed with a global and contemporary point of view.

What would you say that makes Lisbon a place to be right now in terms of interior design?

This may be a bit counter-intuitive, but how new the concept of interior design is in Portugal.

I feel like it's always been about collected spaces, and how personal the design of someone's home in Lisbon is. Never staged or artificial.

It shouldn't look like everybody else's space, so it's a bit more timeless and much less trend-driven than other countries.

So, interior designers in Portugal are much more like the really stylish friend that is helping you find pieces of your house. And just how incredible some of these spaces are. From apartment buildings built in the 1700s to brutalist modern buildings, it's all there.



Designs on Lisbon

How do you see your business evolving? How do you see businesses like yours, which sell unique, artisanal, limited edition and small-batch items scaling?

That's a question that I have been spending a lot of time with.

It is really important to me not to betray the ethos of the appreciation of small craft.

My goal is to embrace even more artisans. There so many that I've met with, but just haven't had the chance to work with.

I'll never have a massive quantity of any one item on the site, but I hope to bring even more artisans into the fold. They are out there.

There are so many people doing incredible things, and I hope to continue to give them the platform to encounter new audience.



Oaky bourbon on the customer

You spent years working in the beauty industry. Now you run a Web site that lets the global audience discover

Portuguese interior designers. Where's the link?

I think the thread has always been design.

I believe that beauty, fashion and home decor are all expressions of someone's personality.

Whenever I travel to a different country, like most people I think, I'm always on the lookout for pieces to bring home.

And whenever I was in Portugal and met some incredible artisans, my reaction was always to come back and try to spread the word. I think Lusitano 1143 is really an extension of that. It just felt natural to me.



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