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designer profile

## héctor serrano

For Héctor Serrano, preciousness in design is anathema. Serrano's low-key but inventive approach is matched by his soft-spoken, unassuming personality. The young designer, who moved from his native Valencia to London in 1998, when he was 20, has made a name for himself by transforming lowly materials into highly desirable objects. His ideas crackle with innovation and wit. Take his Superpatata lamp, made of a squidgy latex balloon filled with salt and a lightbulb, whose shape can be changed by squeezing it and which can be easily picked up and plonked anywhere. One of its unlikely alternative uses is a pillow. The malleable lamp ended up in the catalogue of ultra-directional Dutch design group Droog, and scooped the Dxo/Peugeot Design award in 2000.

His work has two qualities that are typical of his generation's output. First off, there's its use of humble materials to create unexpectedly elegant designs. Secondly, Serrano's work is interactive. Today's designers, after all, are less inclined to create pretty status symbols, but objects that the user can interact with.

"My work is about the transformation and manipulation of existing objects," explains Serrano, who studied product design at Valencia college ESDI Ceu, then attended the Royal College of Art's Design Product course from 1998 to 2000.

At the RCA, Serrano hooked up with fellow Valencian postgraduates Alberto and Raky Martinez with whom he designed La Siesta - a jar whose hybrid form references both a traditional Spanish pitcher and a plastic mineral water bottle. It can keep water cool inside - even when it's 40 degrees centigrade in the shade.

Another charmingly barmy design is his Playboy lamp (2001), a coat hanger incorporating a lightbulb on which you can hang any shirt to create a quirky shade. The same year, Serrano created his lamp, Top Secret - a tangle of acetate strips made from polyester film passed through the shredder used to destroy top-secret documents.

Two years ago, Serrano dreamt up Rock-a-Bye-Baby, a wooden bed you can rock yourself to sleep in (commissioned by London shop Purves & Purves). Last year, he designed Waterproof, (manufactured by Spanish company Metalarte) a lamp combining a traditional lampshade and a lifebuoy which can float in a swimming pool, and which was shown at the V&A's recent contemporary lighting exhibition, Brilliant. He has also shown his work at the Valencia Furniture Fair.

Where does Señor Serrano get his ideas? "Everything is suitable for inspiration," he answers. "My ideas come from personal observations and situations that grab my attention. Sometimes they're things that are staring at me in the face, things I don't immediately register but which I eventually notice."

Serrano has long since settled in London, but he has a soft spot for Spain's design scene. "London's design scene is more fickle. There's a constant desire here to find the next big thing. Designers are treated as 'stars', but their reputations are fragile. They don't necessarily last. In Spain, things are taken more slowly. Reputations are more stable. Spanish design was overlooked until recently. But that's changing fast. It's being taken more seriously now."



(left)  
Product: Waterproof  
Manufacturer: Metalarte

(above)  
Product: Top Secret  
Manufacturer: Metalarte