

ALTERNATIVE DESIGN APPROACHES FROM THE 2017 ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST DESIGN SHOW

by **Karen LeBlanc**

Cut the cord, embrace imperfection, mix in experimental materials and celebrate the “in between” – these are the prevailing design themes from the 2017 *Architectural Digest* Design Show, held in New York City. This carefully curated presentation of luxury brands, artists, designers and makers is an alternate narrative to mainstream ideas about design and decorating. Many of the show’s artists, artisans and designers are pushing the boundaries of material, craft and process in their works of art, furniture, lighting, sculpture and textiles. Open to the design trade and consumers, the annual *Architectural Digest* Design Show also is a platform to experience and discover design elements often emulated in the magazine’s glossy pages of glamorous interiors. This year, I discovered four design themes that pose fresh ideas about interior design.

IMPERFECTLY PERFECT

Just as Persian weavers purposely wove flaws into their rugs, and the Navajo left “spirit lines” in their textiles, artisans for centuries have been creating imperfectly, perfect works. The imperfection can occur naturally as uneven texture, colorations or asymmetrical forms. This is an idea celebrated in the Japanese concept of Wabi-Sabi, where the artist embraces such natural flaws in the work. Other artistic imperfections can be a calculated element that personifies the artist’s technique, such as the works of Turkish designer Feyza Köksal, founder and lead designer of FEYZ Studio. Köksal designed her new *Assemblage* collection of glass globe lights, each attached to a pole, with noticeable imperfections in glass thickness that create an interesting dispersion of light.

“As a designer, I am very interested in how certain objects activate a space and evoke different emotions. And I am especially inspired by imperfection,” she says. Using glass-blowing techniques learned in her homeland, each globe has gold leaf (inspired by the ancient process of gilding



and damascening) that is carefully added when the glass is still hot and malleable. When the globe is lit and glowing, the gold leaf detail resembles constellations.

Imperfectly perfect objects satisfy the design aficionado’s desire for one-of-a-kind works, impossible to replicate. There is a discernable consumer rebuke of the sea of sameness afflicting what passes for mass-produced design at major retailers. As a positive consequence, consumers are becoming more interested in process, material and craft in art and design as it relates to an object’s narrative.

Another compelling design story is found in the work of artist Kristaps Gulbis, of Kiel Arto Design, who teases out imperfect beauty in the unique patinas of his





functional art tables. Gulbis crafts his tables from reclaimed automotive steel and finishes with a hard, scratch-resistant glossy or matte top coat.

Design studio sachaGrace works with Lucite and metal to create furnishings with embedded objects that showcase the technique and artistry of suspended animation inherent in every handmade piece. The Room Collection features Lucite pieces meticulously embedded with gold or copper flakes, Azurite shards, or reclaimed metal coils. Each cluster can be viewed in three dimensions and draws inspiration from celestial and geological formations.



THE BEAUTY IN-BETWEEN

There is beauty to behold in the void of things, the provocative in-betweenness of space. At the show, I discovered several artists and designers exploring this concept, giving weight to spaces in-between. The interplay between positive and negative space is another ancient Japanese concept known as “ma,” meaning the space between, and it opens up our minds to think about and appreciate the artistry of the void.



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Los Angeles-based, contemporary furniture designer Jason Mizrahi debuted five new designs in his collection that juxtapose positive and negative space. The Loop Chair expresses movement through fluid forms with a seating surface that curves down seamlessly to envelop a series of loops that create a supporting base. Mizrahi's Denali Table, a limited edition design, creates a dialogue between circular shapes and linear planes with its surface draping over a base of sinuous curves. Mizrahi crafts his sculptural furniture from aerospace-grade materials.

Jason Mizrahi
Denali Table



EXPERIMENTAL MATERIALS

The show hosted a design talk about a “new movement afoot” known as the New Material Style calling out several key master makers using untapped materials “to take precedence over conventional standards of typology, usability and even beauty.”

I met up with experimental designer Kim Markel, on the list of key master makers, to check out her Glow collection,

Kim Markel
Glow collection



Kim Markel Waterway vases



Ara Tubular
Chair Group 01



crafted of reclaimed plastic. Markel's translucent chairs and stools have the texture and translucency of rock candy—my first impression, which was precisely the kind of childhood nostalgia she wants to convey. “I want the pieces to be evocative of those objects that were magical to you as a child whether they are candy or jelly shoes or popsicles,” explains Markel, who sources from a variety of recycled plastics, both thermoset and thermoplastic, sometimes blending plastics in large molds. Once cured, the objects are removed and polished to reveal their inherent translucency.

Artist and designer Ara Levon Thorose uses material innovations to create objects that are at the intersection of art and design. His Tubular Chair Group 01 looks as if extruded from a Play-Doh Fun Factory with its sinewy forms and shiny rubber surfaces. Devoid of traditional chair legs and a backrest, the Tubular Chair Group 01 looks more like a sculptural installation than a trio of chairs crafted from an upholstered neoprene surface using a three-dimensional line drawing.

Art and design created from reclaimed materials typically belongs in the experimental realm, as artists develop new techniques for coaxing unconventional materials into objects of beauty. Textile artist Alexandra Kohl creates genre-defying works that classify as both experimental and repurposed art. Kohl weaves horse hair from manes and tails reclaimed in the grooming process with cotton fibers in minimalist designs. “This collection amplifies the organic harmony produced when plant and animal nature is joined,” explains Kohl, who weaves on looms that can take as long as 10 hours to set up.



Alexandra Kohl
Woven Horse textiles

DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY MERGE TO CUT THE CORD

With the proliferation of wireless technology, good design has little patience for unsightly cords and wires. Companies such as Sony are breaking down barriers between technology and design with products that cut the cord and eliminate the fixed screen. At the show, Sony Life Space UX debuted a prototype of its 4K Projector that turns any surface into a multimedia screen projecting books, music, movies, even art as wide as 120 inches.



Sony Space Life
Portable Ultra
Short Throw
Projector



Sony Glass
Sound Speaker

designers making it an indisputable global design capital. The *Architectural Digest* Design Show is a curated gateway to East Coast design posing provocative alternatives to mainstream decorating. For more, check out addesignshow.com.

“It offers the opportunity to surf your universe of content and enjoy all different types of interests,” explains Tamica Fields, senior product marketing specialist for Sony Life Space UX Group. I gave the new model a test run, projecting onto the wall a virtual bookshelf holding a collection of ebooks that I could click to open and read in a large-screen experience.

The new concept model joins the Life Space UX family of home solutions that reimagine how consumer technology fits within the home. The line also includes the Portable Ultra Short Throw Projector,

LED Bulb Speaker and Glass Sound Speaker, all released in 2016.

“With the portable projectors, you have the option to watch content anywhere without being tied to a stationary screen,” Fields explains. The projector comes with a wireless unit that transmits content from various devices such as a PC, Blu-ray player or cable box via HDMI. “You spend so much time decorating your home to make it stylish, so why would you settle for electronics being obtrusive in your space?” she adds.

New York City is home to more than 7,500 firms that employ more than 50,000

Karen LeBlanc is host of The Design Tourist series. She travels the globe attending some of the world's premiere design events in search of the latest trends, tastemakers and unique finds. Learn more at thedesigntourist.com.




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Dana Hargrove, *Arcadia ii-viii*, 2016, acrylic on wood, 40 x 3 x 43 in. Courtesy of Snap! Orlando.
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