



ONTWERPDUO



Ontwerpduo on Novecento

Ontwerpduo is the company formed by Tineke Beunders (TB) and Nathan Wierink (NW). The interview below – about their ‘Novecento’ collection and new way of working – is copyright-free and may be used for publication purposes without permission being required. Visit www.ontwerpduo.nl for more information, or contact the designers in person. They will be happy to explain their work in full.

You are going to start working with thematic collections. What’s the reason for that?

NW: ‘To a certain extent, designing within a theme means imposing restrictions on yourself. You create frameworks you have to work and think within. They give you something to hold onto in one sense, and you are free to do anything within these frameworks. We’ve discovered that what might seem like a constraint at first is actually a very nice way to work. It’s only benefited our creativity.’

TB: ‘One of the nicest things of running your own design studio is devising the big picture: aligning texts, photography, shapes, colours and materials to project the same look and feel. We’d completed that process for Ontwerpduo as a business: everything was in the right place. Now it’s time for me to do the same for each collection – it’ll be a lot of work, but that’s what I love most.’

What made you choose the theme Novecento?

NW: ‘We had quite a few themes in our heads when we visited the Open Air Museum in Arnhem. You really travel back in time there, with little houses just as they used to be, complete with the furniture and products they would have had then. Volunteers, who are often pensioners, are there to explain everything. They do that mostly to other pensioners, because most of the visitors are elderly. A museum like that evokes all sorts of memories: Oh yes! We were especially taken with the things dating back to around 1900.’

TB: 'When the volunteers realised that we were really interested in life back then, they told us more and more. We were treated to tea made on a wood-burning stove, and the stampot (hotchpotch) was already being warmed up. We could hardly get away. I've always had a special interest in old products. You can imagine so much about them: how people used them, how the people lived, what the atmosphere was like then. But you'll never know exactly what it was like. That makes it a bit mysterious too.'

What appealed most to you about that period?

NW: 'You can see how products have changed. And of course: lots of things are now much more convenient than they were then, or they look snappier. But the products that were used around 1900 were often made to last a lifetime. Nowadays cupboards are made from plywood. You can't compare them with cupboards people bought back then.'

TB: 'The stereotypical idea is: in the past things were well-made but dull, unattractive. When we were in the Open Air Museum we discovered that shapes and colours those days were everything but dull. Take a blind used back then (converted into the Novecento folding screen, ed.). The underlying system is very transparent, clearly visible and understandable: a weight in the blind, a cord rolled around a spool, loops in the cord. That's all. But it's enough to enable you to hang your blind as high as you like. Simple, but ingenious and effective. And it looks good too.'

And when you'd finally chosen your theme, what happened next?

TB: 'Soon after that, I went back again with Jenna, one of our team. We sat there sketching so that we could put the shapes into our system. You only really start to see them properly when you draw them. And then slowly but surely you start adding more and more of your own touches and it begins to take on a life of its own. That's how Novecento eventually became a true Ontwerpduo collection.'

Where and when will be able to see the results?

NW: 'We'll start by presenting Novecento in its entirety, as a complete collection, in Dutch Design Week 2015. That will be the first opportunity to see all ten products together in real life. People who can't wait that long can take a look at our revamped website: www.ontwerpduo.nl.'

Your plan is to present a new collection every year. Can you tell us anything about the next theme yet?

NW: 'We've almost decided what the theme will be. The studio walls are covered in sketches and the first prototypes have been made. But nothing is set in stone.'

TB: 'It's not that we don't want to give anything away yet; it's more a question of: we know what we're like. We change our minds and prefer to keep the option of suddenly going in a different direction open. Who knows, something quite different might suddenly come our way.'

About Novecento

Was everything better before? Not really. But the sturdy and reliable utensils your grandparents and great-grandparents grew up with were well thought out, often put together ingeniously, and lasted a lifetime. Nowadays, we'd call these products functional, or minimalistic. And that's exactly what makes them so stylish.

Ontwerpduo went back in time for Novecento. The designers allowed themselves to be inspired by early twentieth century design and brought it up to date in a series of ten objects. The collection is imbued with the modest design language of the past but was produced using locally sourced materials - in warm, timeless colours (ochre, pink and creamy white).

More Novecento: www.ontwerpduo.nl/novecento