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**DESIGN
BY HEART**

**The best contemporary
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**by showing the reasons
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**and the process
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Stereotypes stick to some designers like glue. In the star-system of design, Marc Newson will forever be the Australian surfer, Starck is Pierrot le Fou, Jasper Morrison the reclusive British minimalist. Even though they are not always welcomed by the designers themselves, these stereotypes can be useful ways to (initially) carve a personal space in the memory of journalists, manufacturers and buyers. Stereotypes open the door, and once the door is open, the real fullness of a designer's universe can finally be explored.

Satyendra Pakhalé, as the name, appearance, and some of the products testify, is Indian. Yet he is not your romantic idea of an 'Indian designer'. He is a creature of the world, a 'cultural nomad', as he defines himself. His education began at the IDC (Industrial Design Centre) at IIT, the renowned Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay. The IDC was founded on the model of the legendary HfG Ulm School of Design, translated into the Indian context. His studies continued at the Art Center College of Design Europe, in Switzerland.

The next stop was Philips, the Dutch appliances manufacturer, where he was a senior product designer until 1998. His current practice is based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, but also comprises several trips around the world and long stopovers in India each year. If a stereotype is really needed, Pakhalé can be brought in as an example of the balance between nationalism and globalism, between product design and craftsmanship, between high and low technology. In other words, he is an exquisitely contemporary designer.

Local Culture, Global Priorities

Contemporary design thrives on eclecticism and diversity. The emancipation from the old-fashioned concept of 'absolute style' was timely and unavoidable, and it is certainly one of the biggest achievements of the past century. One of its best consequences is a resurgence of regional and national cultures, which has brought the public to appreciate local authenticity and to seek it as a way to acquire knowledge and to experience the world. Since the 1970s, local culture has proved to be, both for design and for architecture, the safest and most convincing way to move beyond modernism without giving up the great qualities of modern design.



A IIT-B Indian Institute of Technology Bombay is recognized worldwide for its engineering education and research. The institution was founded in 1958 at Powai, Mumbai, India. The IIT-B campus is situated between the Vihar and Powai lakes and is divided into clusters of 584 main buildings with a combined area of around 2.2 square kilometres. Courtesy: Industrial Design Center, IIT-B, IN.

B IDC Industrial Design Centre at IIT-B campus was founded on the Ulm model in an Indian context in 1969. Courtesy: Industrial Design Center, IIT-B, IN.

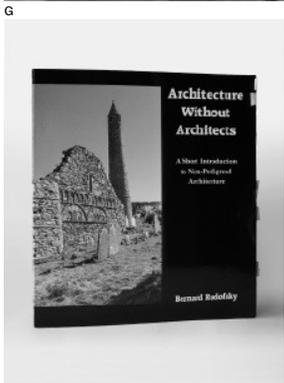
C Art Center Europe, (1986-1996) was a sister campus of Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California. It was located in Le Château de Sully, La Tour-de-Peilz, Switzerland. Courtesy: © Steven A. Heller, Art Center College of Design, USA.

D Farm building at the Art Center Europe campus. Workshops, classrooms and studio spaces for students and instructors. Courtesy: © Steven A. Heller, Art Center College of Design, USA.

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In 1964, Bernard Rudofsky, one of the greatest champions of local culture in architecture and design, organized the brilliant *Architecture Without Architects* exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. In the exhibition and in the catalogue, Rudofsky celebrated ‘vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, rural, as the case may be’ architecture from all over the world. Rudofsky’s declaration carried to a dramatic expression a sensible trend that had already started to happen. Architects and designers in many parts of the world were mitigating the modernist rule by interpreting it in their own dialect. And today, they mitigate the homogenizing power of technology by returning a human dimension to it.

Architects and designers all over the world seem capable of recognizing the most contemporary priorities: it is a global necessity to look at the built environment with an economical and respectful consciousness, and to thus establish global standards and criteria as common goals; while at the same time there is a need to salvage the legacy of local culture as a meaningful tool to achieve such common goals. Satyendra Pakhalé is a champion of this unique evolutionary trend, and his objects add to our experience of the world.

High and Low Technologies

Pakhalé is fluent in the international language of product design, as exemplified by his collaboration with Renault while at Philips, around 1997. At the same time, by delving into the material culture of the country that generated him, he is able to add a new human and spiritual dimension to design. With his Bell Metal lost-wax casting objects, especially his B.M. Horse and Playing with Clay family of objects – the symbolic totemic ceramics chairs he produced while at the European Ceramic Work Centre, so close to the technique and language of Indian craftsmen – he has added depth to his works, even of the industrial kind. His design has evolved into contemporary objects and industrial products for leading design clients such as Cappellini¹, FIAM², Bosa³, Poltrona Frau⁴ and Tubes⁵, in which the sensorial qualities are cultivated and innovated into more current materials and more universal forms, without losing their essence.

Pakhalé’s low-tech tendency, which is more an acquired training than a direct by-product of his cultural background, also

E-G Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects* installation views of the exhibition by Bernard Rudofsky. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. November 11, 1964 – February 7, 1965. Courtesy: © 2019. Digital image The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA / Scala, Florence, IT.

H Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects*, University of New Mexico Press, USA, 1987. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

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positions him at the forefront of contemporary design research. Contemporary design is in fact an extremely interesting composition of high and low technologies that offers designers a new, exhilarating freedom. Many advanced materials, especially fibres and composites, can be customized and adapted by the designers themselves, and some actually demand manual intervention, as do many low-tech recycled materials. It so happens that those designers who are not only conversant with materials, but also especially knowledgeable in hands-on techniques, have a cultural advantage in their approach to both crafts and industrial design.

The Expression of Consciousness

In both art and design, materials are chosen not only for their physical properties, but also for their metaphorical ones. Natural substances like wax, wood and mud can allude to creation at its most elemental level, while highly artificial or industrial ones like fibreglass and aluminium set a more contemporary and progressive tone. Moreover, materials old and new can be tweaked and changed to signify new directions and old rebellions. The designer's relationship with materials, on the other hand, which is traditionally tight, dialectic, and passionate, has also evolved dramatically during the past forty years. New materials have been introduced, along with new processes that have empowered designers and pushed them towards experimentation. Many design landmarks of the past four decades display the designer's surprise and delight in response to the unexpected creative freedom that new materials and techniques make possible.

Pakhalé's work exemplifies how crafts and industrial design can come together in the dimension of human nature. His work shows that the best contemporary objects are those whose presence expresses history and contemporaneity; those which exude the humours of the material culture that generated them, while at the same time speaking a global language; those which carry a memory as well as an intelligence of the future; those which are like great movies in that they either spark a sense of belonging in the world – in these exciting times full of cultural and technical possibilities – while also managing to carry us to places we have never visited before. The best contemporary objects are those which express consciousness by showing the reasons why they were made, and the process that led to their making.

i Full scale model of the B.M. Stool being made at the maker's studio, Nagpur, IN. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

j Third generation B.M. Objects model being made at Pakhalé's studio, Amsterdam, NL. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

k Test wax models of the third generation of B.M. Objects being made at the foundry near Milan, IT. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

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