

domus

An Interview with Raphael Navot, the Luxury Artisan

The Israeli designer speaks about his artisan method that strives for excellence, his preference for natural materials and the importance of space in relation to the body.

By Paolo Briscese
June 6, 2019



Known as the “luxury artisan”, Raphael Navot is an interesting name in contemporary design. Israeli, born in 1977, he graduated from the Design

Briscese, Paolo. “An Interview with Raphael Navot, the Luxury Artisan.” *Domus*, June 6, 2019.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

Academy of Eindhoven in the Netherlands. Navot has always explored various ways to express his creativity, and likes to define himself as a versatile designer, with a multidisciplinary approach to the sector and to design. He moves with ease in interior design, associating artisan methods and contemporary savoir-faire, making made-to-measure furniture for each of his projects. And that's not all. For the first time, with the French brand Roche Bobois, the designer has created a complete furniture collection characterised by organic forms that echo body language. We met him to learn first-hand about his creative and design universe.



Domaine Des Etangs Hotel and Hotel National des Arts et Metiers

How did you approach the world of design?

A series of events led me to become a designer. In reality I was looking for an Architecture School in Europe, and I came across the Design Academy of Eindhoven by chance. I immediately feel in love with the school. Huge white spaces, students from all around the world, teachers with a solid career behind them. The place couldn't have been more attractive for me if it had tried. I realised that design was a sufficiently wide and varied field to allow me to grow.

What was the first object you designed?

I think it was a box. I was an adolescent, it was technically well-done but aesthetically horrible, because I tried to put as much detail into it as possible from all points of view; soft corners, complex hinges, metal covering and all

Briscese, Paolo. "An Interview with Raphael Navot, the Luxury Artisan." *Domus*, June 6, 2019.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

kinds of ornamentations. I didn't know where creativity ended and kitsch began. A part of my mental exercise was to know when to stop. This is still a challenge for me.

What fascinates you about this field of work?

One of the greatest aspects of this profession is that the objects, the furniture and the spaces are all used and experienced. Translating an idea into a physical element is a real pleasure, and the fact that the element is used in a positive manner further enhances that pleasure. Another interesting aspect is the possibility to tell a story, one that changes every time. So in reality, what these stories have in common is the values that we learn to protect a little better each time. I am still amazed by how many stories it is possible to bring to life.



Raphael Navot, Nativ Collection for Roche Bobois, 2019

From a creative point of view, how are your designs created? Where does your inspiration come from?

I tend to imagine that the spaces already exist, the designs already exist, and it is down to me to uncover them. This is true above all for interior design. I believe that space has its own will, that the environment has a wish it wants to

Briscese, Paolo. "An Interview with Raphael Navot, the Luxury Artisan." *Domus*, June 6, 2019.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

achieve, that history gives us clues and that artisans hold another piece of this puzzle. My role is to accompany the owners in discovering what expressions best adapt to their space. In researching and defining the values to focus on, we come close to discovering the general DNA, and once this becomes clear, the space reveals itself in a fluid design process.

How would you define your style?

I reserve the right to change and evolve. This is why I am not sure that my style can be easily identified with a material or form. I place “the person” at the centre of my work, and so the items or spaces need to exist in relation to the body and inspire a welcoming atmosphere. I am fascinated by the various crafts, even though I am particularly attracted by natural materials such as wood and bronze. (Smiling) They age so well. I am highly sceptical of “trend”, I think it is a passing and superficial energy and I avoid quick ideas or tempting impulses that might throw me off track. I believe that in opting for timeless objects and spaces, we take more care of a truly sustainable future.

What is your relationship with raw materials? How does the relationship between material and design develop?

It is a very dynamic relationship because the characteristics of each material, once valorised with the available knowledge, offer countless options. I try to add rough and little-processed materials into the designs and push the boundaries of craftsmanship to the point in which it becomes excellence, without losing sight of what really counts. I am aware of new production methods and I respect them when they become essential, I have no need to go in search of what is “new” at all costs. There are many traditions and manufacturing methods that satisfy all the requirements, and with which we manage to create the best.

It is in fact no coincidence that you have been defined as the luxury artisan. What relationship do you have with the digital world?

Nowadays it is a luxury to be able to work with natural materials such as solid wood, molten bronze or natural stone. We are in the midst of a democratic era in which furniture and objects are equally available for many, while precious objects often require craftsmanship and personalisation. In this way, luxury design can be defined according to the amount of time dedicated to the object. At the same time, I use the digital platform as a conceptual foundation for each project. In this sense, technology saves us a huge amount of time in calculating or simulating the ideas we have in mind. Once the element has been created, there is often a great deal of both manual and artistic work to be done that does not necessarily require the use of machinery.

At the International Furniture Fair you presented Nativ, a collection that you created for the French brand Roche Bobois. How did this collaboration come about?

Briscese, Paolo. “An Interview with Raphael Navot, the Luxury Artisan.” *Domus*, June 6, 2019.

I was invited by Nicholas Roche (director of the Roche Bobois collection), who had seen my work, to design furnishings for the company. It was a real challenge for me to pass from tailor made design to mass design. I began to design and exchange ideas with the Roche Bobois team, and what was supposed to be just a few pieces became a micro-universe of furniture all connected by the “Nativ” theme.

What is particular about them?

I wanted to create a surprising collection, something that was necessary and desired for the home. Comfort was one of the main aims. Another challenge was creating as many items as possible with natural materials, and this raised many questions regarding production times and budget. In the end we managed to use solid oak and walnut and unprocessed hides, and to combine cement dust and ceramics.



Raphael Navot, “Underline”, Nativ Collection for Roche Bobois, 2019

Are there any designers that you admire particularly?

I am fascinated by artists such as Byung Hoon Choi, designers such as Faye Toogood and architects such as Peter Zumthor.

Do you think design should respond to requirements of style or function?

Both! (Smiling) They go hand in hand. Choosing just one would lead to sterile design. I believe that combining both of these aspects is the very essence of design. Is this not its true nature?

Briscese, Paolo. “An Interview with Raphael Navot, the Luxury Artisan.” *Domus*, June 6, 2019.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

Lastly, what would you change on the current contemporary design scene?

Although the contemporary design scene is dynamic, exciting and very diverse, I sense a lack of simplicity. Good, old-style design, timeless. In general, it seems that the search for beauty of form is less important than the need to follow the trend of the moment. Maybe because of the demands of industry or marketing, designers don't spend time (or have time to spend) on taking their examination of form further. It is a subjective matter, of course, but I feel that there is a lack of the essential, of silence. Simple, welcoming furniture and interiors that don't require decorative comforts.

Opening picture: Portrait of Raphael Navot. Photo Vincent Leroux

Briscese, Paolo. "An Interview with Raphael Navot, the Luxury Artisan." *Domus*, June 6, 2019.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760