

Wallpaper*

In memoriam: Fernando Campana (1961-2022)

We remember Brazilian designer and architect Fernando Campana, who died on 16 November 2022 aged 61

By Rosa Bertoli
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(Image credit: Getty)

Brazilian designer and architect Fernando Campana passed away on 16 November 2022, aged 61. His death was announced on the studio's social media channels, prompting a series of tributes from the global design community.

Fernando was one half of Estudio Campana, which he founded with his brother Humberto in 1984 in Brotas, outside São Paulo. Together, Fernando and Humberto combined their disruptive design practice with an innovative look at Brazilian culture and craft traditions, and an approach that merged furniture-making with social outreach.



Wallpaper* July/August 2004, photographed by Tuca Reinés in São Paulo. (Image credit: Tuca Reinés)

Working on furniture editions as self-taught designers, the duo has created some of the most iconic furniture pieces of contemporary design history, often in collaboration with leading brands including Edra, Louis Vuitton and Cappellini. 'We don't want to repeat what others do,' Fernando told Wallpaper* in a 2003 interview. 'We don't even want to repeat ourselves.'

Among their best-known works is the 'Favela' chair from 1991, simply made of wood strips of varying sizes assembled into an archetypal form, and the 'Vermelha' chair from 1998, its seat made of interlaced red rope inspired by Brazilian weaving techniques – both designs were put into production by Italian furniture company Edra. '[It was] the first time that designers from South America became leading lights in the European design industry,' reads a tribute from design gallery Friedman Benda, a longtime collaborator of the studio. 'They constantly pushed the boundaries of what design could be, and look like – as in their much-loved chairs “upholstered” in stuffed animals.'



Left, 'Vermelha' chair, edited by Edra, 1998. Right, 'Cadeira Plástico Bolha' ('Bubble Wrap Chair'), 1995. (Image credit: © Andreas Heiniger)

In 2020, Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio) celebrated the studio's 35 years. Titled 'Campana Brothers – 35 Revolutions', the immersive exhibition offered a panoramic view of the duo's unique approach to design, and their revolutionary way of embedding local vernacular, craftsmanship, diverse points of view and contemporary thinking into their work.

Among their most important and long-lasting projects is Instituto Campana, founded in 2009 to preserve the studio's legacy. Working locally, the not-for-profit organisation uses design as a tool for transformation through social and educational programmes and partnerships with national and international institutions and both private and public organisations, and was inspired by the Campanas' local community. 'It was the proximity to the different realities that gave the initial impetus for the creation of an organisation with three main areas of work: the rescue of artisanal techniques, the development of social inclusion, and the preservation of the brothers' work for future generations,' the studio explains.



'Man's Best Friend' sofa made in collaboration with Kaws. (Image credit: Fernando Laszlo)

The tribute from Friedman Benda continues, 'At no point could one have predicted what the brothers would make next, yet it has always seemed totally right, and totally them. With Fernando's passing, we can only reflect on how much he has given to those around him, to Brazil, and to the whole world of design.'

'Fernando Campana was a special person. He was special in anything he did. He was special in anything he thought. He had a special and unique approach to life: he deeply loved his work, and together with his brother Humberto, he conceived it as a mission to help other people through creativity and fun,' says Maria Cristina Didero, *Wallpaper** Milan editor, curatorial director of Design Miami, and a close friend of the pair. 'Empathy was his fire, and his dream was realised with the Instituto Campana. With his contagious smile, Fernando was able to shape things, and address problems in a way that only he could. The world will miss a great soul, a generous person, and an excellent designer. We were, and still are, very close. I am deeply missing a unique special friend, whom I thank for every moment we spent together.'



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