

INTERIOR DESIGN

A Design Legacy Lives on in This Eco-Focused Park in Brazil

By Michael Snyder



Nido de Quetzalcóatl is a snake-shaped apartment complex

When the brothers Humberto and Fernando Campana opened their eponymous design studio Estúdio Campana in São Paulo in 1984, their witty, daring sensibility came as a shock to an architecture scene defined by one of the world's most robust modernist traditions. Over the last four decades, they've invented a language all their own, making furniture with scrap wood and stuffed animals, cast bronze and bubble wrap.

In 2020, the brothers started work on a sprawling, 130-acre park in their rural hometown of Brotas, a 150-mile drive northwest of the city. Since his sibling's untimely death in 2022 at age 61, Humberto, eight years Fernando's senior, has thrown himself into that final shared project, slated to soft open in June as a place for conservation and study, but also, like all their work, of provocation and play. As Estúdio Campana looks toward its 40th anniversary, Humberto tells us more.

Snyder, Michael, "A Design Legacy Lives on in This Eco-Focused Park in Brazil," *Interior Design*, February 26, 2024.

A CONVERSATION WITH ESTÚDIO CAMPANA ON DESIGN, CONSERVATION, AND MORE



At Parque Campana, a 130-acre park in Brotas, Brazil, by Estúdio Campana, Humberto Campana stands within an installation of interlocking brick and local rough-hewn stones referred to as a pavilion, one of six so far, with six more planned.

Interior Design: Could you start by talking about how Brotas shaped your work?

Humberto Campana: I was very blessed to have been born and raised there because it has such a beautiful landscape. But at the same time, it was extremely boring, so Fernando and I created our own universe. There was a movie theater that screened American westerns and films from Federico Fellini and Pier Paolo Pasolini and we would recreate the scenery in our yard. We made an unconscious vocabulary that we would only discover years later.

We also avoided being contaminated by modernism. Brazilian architecture has such a strong connection to its modern tradition, but Brazil is much more than that. It's crazy and colorful, full of texture and even kitsch, and we wanted to bring that into our work. We're maximalists! We should be proud of *all* the elements of our cultural heritage.

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The late Fernando Campana made the first sketches of what would eventually become the eucalyptus pavilion on one of his frequent trips to the capital of Brasília, where he sketched Oscar Niemeyer's famous cathedral as an oca, an indigenous housing typology.

ID: When you founded the studio, who were your peers and mentors?

HC: My icons were Roberto Burle Marx and Oscar Niemeyer, but especially Lina Bo Bardi. She was a modernist but also interested in the countryside, in our African and Indigenous heritage. She pointed us to Brazil. Fernando and I tried to be industrial designers in the beginning, which at the time meant thinking in terms of utility and mass production, but we failed! We always looked for freedom in our work because we know what it is to live under a dictatorship. Our first exhibition, in 1989, a few years after the dictatorship ended, was called *Uncomfortable* and it was filled with that anger over all the brutality our country had suffered. Because that's the real Brazil, too.



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A newly planted coconut grove surrounds the concrete and agave pavilion.

ID: How did Parque Campana come into existence?

HC: My grandfather had used this property as a coffee plantation. Later, my father rented it out to cattle ranchers. From the time Fernando and I inherited it, we wanted to use it for conservation, but we were nomads, traveling all over the world, so we kept renting because we didn't want it to sit there abandoned. When the pandemic came, it put us right back in the countryside and we started thinking: *We've done workshops all over the world, why not in our hometown?*

Growing up, it took almost eight hours to get to Sao Paulo on the unpaved roads, and we would see wolves and jaguars and other animals. Nowadays it's a desert of sugarcane and soy beans. We wanted to seduce people—the families who work in the agri-businesses that are devastating the environment—with poetry, music, and film. We've planted over 16,000 trees, and the idea is to plant more, working with agronomists and environmental engineers.

Then we had the idea to create 12 architectural pavilions (there are six, so far) as spaces where people can have classes, meditate, and watch movies and concerts. There will be an educational program, too, both artistic and environmental, and it's important for us that all the park's furniture is produced in the countryside with local materials.

I want to create a school to preserve craft traditions with workshops for welding, weaving, painting, embroidery—all the things we used to have in Brotas when I was a child. Across the world, people are finally giving these crafts the respect they deserve. It's the right moment to invest in the countryside. Life has been so generous to me and, living in a country with such deep social divisions, I feel it's time to give back.



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An observation tower overlooks the canopy, regenerated from thousands of trees planted by Estúdio Campana, characteristic of the transitional biome between the Cerrado—Brazil’s interior savanna—and the Atlantic Forest, which connects the coastal mountains to the sea.

ID: What are your future plans for the park? For the practice?

HC: Right now in the park, all the poetry is there, but none of the logistics, so I’m working with a firm in São Paulo to complete all of that. In the studio, we’re working on a documentary that will launch at the Milan Triennale during the Salone and an exhibition at Friedman Benda in New York. I’m also working on a book about our way of thinking and making. But really, I’m focused on opening the park.



A pair of statues anchor the two ends of the cactus pavilion.

ID: Can you speak a bit about how the loss of your brother has affected your practice?

HC: Fernando and I had a wonderful relationship. There was so much trust and respect and intimacy. When I lost him, I felt completely naked, and thought it would be so difficult to keep creating. But I’m actually in a very creative moment right now. Creativity gave me a voice—I came from the countryside, I was supposed to be no one—and now it’s helping me to survive. The park is a memorial, an homage. All the energy I’m investing in it—it’s for him.



Mandacarus, used in Brotas as a kind of natural fencing, form a boundary around the connected circles of the cactus pavilion.



The columns of the piassava pavilion were originally installed at Estúdio Campana's 2020 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, titled "35 Revolutions."



The stones mark the spot where Humberto Campana plans to plant a ficus in his brother's honor.



Left: The first pavilion visitors encounter consists of columns of piassava straw, a palm fiber used commonly in Brazil to fabricate brooms, standing on fine sand that invites bare feet.

Right: The columns are capped by a flat concrete slab.



Left: The bamboo cathedral pavilion is furnished with chaise longues made of local stone and measures almost 10 feet across; in time, the bamboo will arc to form a continuous living dome.

Right: Each of the cactus pavilion sculptures are made of a tree stump and iron rods, melding an industrial material with the detritus of the damaged landscape the park aims to restore.