

# A MARRIAGE OF WORK & LIFE: RAW EDGES

Littered haphazardly with wood cuttings and blue prints—all the necessary tools needed for conceptualizing creative ideas—the small North London studio is the backdrop to Shay Alkalay and Yael Mer's designs that run the gamut from cork lamps to plaid benches for their label, Raw Edges. In a partnership that merges marriage and work, the couple creates modern furniture fusions from their small, shared studio in London's quaint Stoke Newington neighborhood.

The Tel-Aviv born, Israeli two-some, who met while pursuing their BAs in design in Jerusalem and then aligned paths and moved to London to pursue MAs in design from the Royal College of Art, share their studio space with a group of international design friends. In this eclectic and intercontinental atmosphere, these young design wunderkinds conceptualize their fresh creations that within a number of short years have seen success in the form of wide ranging and highly coveted design awards including the British Council Talent Award, Dutch Design Award, Wallpaper\* Design Award 2009 and the Elle Decoration International Design Award for best furniture of 2008/09, to name a few of their recent achievements.

The couple worked on a project in China after graduating from the Royal College of Art marking their first time working together professionally. Once returning to London Yael and Shay set up shop together and initiated Raw Edges. The duo feeds off each other's experiences and talents to create unique objects that

defy any one defining aesthetic. "We have different skills. Yael is more into folding paper and origami style work. Her work is soft where as I am more mechanical and into movement," says Shay. "We don't have one language or one approach, but rather one spirit."

Their progression to working together as a husband and wife team was a natural one that mirrored years of already being influential on each other's designs. "It was really natural, we were involved with each other's work quite naturally already as a couple for many years and had studied together," says Yael.

From this collaborated project in China, where they designed suitcases, the team realized that all suitcases had very slick designs and they decided to create something rough, with "raw edges" using materials where they didn't have to trim the edges. Hence the birth of their name. "It sounds like a rock band from the '80s," says Shay. "It's kind of a joke for us."

Much like their moniker, the way the duo works together is raw around the edges and the progression of their creative process is a give and take of two individuals utilizing their distinct passions, "It's not about aesthetic as much as it is about principles and core ideas," says Yael.

This ideology can be viewed in their recent project, The Coiling Collection, which was exhibited at FAT Galerie in Paris. In this collection, long strips of colorful felt are coiled to form three-dimensional bodies. One side of the woven felt is kept in





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Clockwise: Pinha, Base for a Lamp Shade. PlaidBench, Bench10. The Coiling Collection.

its natural state, while the other is covered in silicone and it is pushed into a cone shape forming fanciful looking chairs and tables. The quirky and almost child like looking objects are at the heart of Shay and Yael's artistic concept. "It was a new way of using an object and combining materials," says Shay.

Another project that the pair recently presented in Milan for a company called Materia was Pinha, a playful approach to lighting made from cork. Their hanging lamp is made out of a cork outer fixture and then a printed paper shade is fastened alongside it. It has an interactive approach by allowing the user to personalize the shade by using whatever decorative paper they desire. "We got our inspiration from a cork board: we created this kind of base made out of cork and then you design your own lampshade and you can pin it to the cork. The idea is that when you buy it you get one template and then you can copy this template to various papers," says Shay.

The couple seems to have a fascination with colors and quirk. In a recent project called the Plaid Bench Collection, which they created for the London Design Festival in September 2010, their use of bright, woven colors are exemplified in a set of interlocked urban benches creating a plaid surface. These stripe arrangements are common elements in benches and Yael and Shay took that ideology to a whole new graphic level. "We realized there was a strong connection with benches and checked patterns in

textiles," says Shay.

In keeping with this color patterned theme and joining fashion and art, Raw Edges has been commissioned to create all of Stella McCartney's floors in her new stores revealing an amalgamation of patterns and colors. The floor is covered in wood blocks that are all meticulously painted in different colors creating patterns on the expansive store floor. "We did a similar version of the floor on our own installation at Basel Art Fair and Stella McCartney loved this concept so much that she asked us to do it for her store in Milan. Then Gucci Group who owns Stella McCartney loved it and they asked us to do every new store floor. It's great for us, each shop is different and we have a lot of freedom," says Shay.

From Raw Edges' various creations they have formed a working rendition of art and life both as a married couple and as a professional team. Being part of a team that always strives for new and exciting projects and innovative ways of creation, Shay and Yael's successful breath of work speaks volumes about their love of the craft and love of each other. Regardless of their success, Yael and Shay stay true to their original way of inventing, "I don't think our designs have changed much, maybe we are just working with big names now but our basic approach hasn't changed. We still work in a small studio and we don't have any employees. We want to keep it this way," says Shay. LENA VAZIFDAR