

Karim Rashid

The irrepressible designer talks about changing the world, dream clients, and guilty pleasures.

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Job description

Industrial designer/cultural shaper

Current projects

I am putting final touches on projects for the Milan Furniture Fair: radiators for Caleido and Hellos, faucets for Fantini, doors for Dibi, bathrooms for Axia and Domovari, and a conceptual house for Corian. For ICFE, I'm showing some projects with Dune, Christofle, and Council. In June I'm debuting objects with Alessi. I'm also finishing detailing on a hotel for Nhow and a sex-toy shop for Fun Factory, both in Berlin.

Why do you do what you do?

I realized my life's mission at the age of five. I went sketching churches with my father in England. He taught me to see—he taught me perspective at that age. He taught me that I could design anything and touch all aspects of our physical landscape. When I was applying to universities in 1977, I didn't know that industrial design existed as a profession, but I remember seeing the *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* exhibition at MoMA with my family and knowing that I wanted to design objects.

First step on a project

After a brief with a client, either in person or via Internet, I can't stop thinking about the project. The subject keeps circulating through both hemispheres of my brain. I dream it, observe, think, research, and sketch profusely. I need to make sure we can create a marriage of my brand, vision, and ideas with their company culture. After 25 years, I now know the minute I meet a potential client whether we would work well together or not.

Last step on a project

Tweaking the first production piece or walking through the final space, then a launch event and interviews.

How do you break a creative block?

I have never had a creative block. I conceive more projects than my clients can produce.

Education

Undergraduate in industrial design at Carleton University, in Ottawa; graduate studies in

Naples, Italy. I interned in Italy under Rodolfo Bonetto and have received two honorary doctorates.

Mentors

Ettore Sottsass, Gaetano Pesce, Victor Papanek, Luigi Colani, Rodolfo Bonetto, Marshall McLuhan, Jan Kuypers, and my father

World-saving mission

I want to change the world! I strive for a beautifully designed world—from micro to macro, low end to high end, democratic to exclusive.

First act as “design czar”

My real desire is to see people live in the modus of our time, to participate in the contemporary world, to release themselves from nostalgia, antiquated traditions, old rituals, meaningless kitsch, and that we be conscious and sensorially attuned to this world in this moment that we are alive.

Dream team

How about dream clients? Fiat, Vespa, Trek bikes, Bose, Philips, Vitra, Motorola, Ikea.

Office chair

My design for Raynor Group, set to debut this year at NeoCon

Office sound track

Pigradio.com

Favorite tchotchke

The only small collectibles I have in my home are some design objects by Sottsass, Newson, Pesce, Mendini, Wanders, Colani, Sowden, Cibic, Thun, Munari, Starck, and others. My wife and I have a few sentimental objects from childhood, like her ballet slippers from when she was six, and my Panasonic wrist AM radio from when I was nine.

Most useful tool

MacBook Air, treadmill, my brain, and a pink leather sketchbook

Current read

Glimmer: How Design Can Transform Your Life, and Maybe Even the World, by Warren Berger

Something old

A portrait of my mother, pregnant with me, painted by my father from 1960, and a Memphis lamp from 1981

Something new

Brand new pink water Bobble on my desk!

Favorite space

Anywhere in the world if my wife is with me

Guilty pleasure

Organic dark Belgian chocolate

Underrated

The importance of realizing that chemical usage in our cosmetics, foods, packaging, buildings, etc., is killing us.

Overrated

Hollywood celebrities and the art world

Learned the hard way

I worked on “hardcore industrial design”—X-ray equipment, a mammography machine for Picker International, power tools for Black and Decker, laser measuring devices, military equipment—for eight years before

I started my own practice.

Command-Z (undo)

Long-term memory (although I think I have managed to do that already)

Dream job

Industrial designer or a musician or a prophet