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PIRISM IN THE LAND OF DESIGN

Design is a tricky subject. Even as a concept, it is so complex and its true interpretation so carefully guarded that laymen cannot fathom it, not to mention joining the general discussion about it. It also seems that there is no room within the field of design if you have once been foolish or brave enough to laugh at the wrong place or at the wrong time. Laughter and joy have no place in Finnish Design. Neither do colors. They all disappeared simultaneously as post-war anxiety, disguised as functionalism and domesticity, engulfed both Finnish homes and public spaces.

Finland produces Finnish designers, and at least some of them are world famous in Finland. It is them we worship, it is their works we bring along as gifts and it is their fabrics we wear when we venture out to conquer the world. We are Finns, and we show it in both good and bad ways. We are the world famous Finns, the best Finns in the world – even as designers.

Creative people are a little rough around the edges, and in this respect, they are often selfish. They demand room for their individual quirks, but they are not eager to grant it to others. Co-operation is difficult, and it is especially difficult when one does not agree, or does not want to agree, about everything. It is a long road from an idea to a product, and in addition to designer talent, you need technical, organizational, economical and particularly commercial know-how. This know-how is just as valuable as the skills that the designer makes visible or tangible in a successful piece. However, commercialism, economical approach and entrepreneurship have long been considered curse words in the field of design and most likely will continue to be considered as such for a while. These words come in handy when you want to bash and label those who have done things in a different way, in co-operation with others or even outside the boundaries of Finland.

Markku Piri is commercial – always has been. Working in New York City in the 1980's opened his eyes to appreciate all kinds of know-how, even the wildest lobbying. Doors would not open by just doodling. They would not open with horizontal stripes either, not to mention

the black-and-white color combination. Success took a lot of participation, dedication and enthusiasm, as well as intense focusing and cheerfulness – everything we are accustomed to considering unprofessional and, above all, unconvincing. In Finland, successful people used to be blasé, grumpy, morose – sternly frowning champions whose only concern was that no-one understood them, or if someone did, then at least not the right way.

It is difficult to understand Markku Piri. What is particularly difficult is to understand why he does the things he does. Why does he have his hallmark shade of blue, and why does he have to do so many things? Why hasn't he stayed on his turf and stuck to doing what he received his education for? How are music, cakes, Barbies, gardens, interiors and country houses linked to his work? What do we need to know in order to properly evaluate his doings, and what is it exactly that we should evaluate in his design? Should you understand the American musical comedy tradition in order to comprehend the world that inspires him and helps him carry on both with his work and life?

Should you?

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