

BLOG: DESIGN BINDER

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The New Old Radicals: Paul Evans

ReadyMade

By Martha Mulholland

In my last blog post (http://www.readymade.com/blog/design/2011/05/26/the_new_old_radicals) I talked about being a bit bored with current design trends, and decided to feature several designers whose work is anything but, hoping to liven up my mind and awaken inspiration. Second to bat: **Paul Evans**.



Evans was an American sculptor, metalsmith, and furniture designer working primarily in the '60s and '70s who is best known for his influential Brutalist furniture and sculpture. Brutalism was

an early '50s architectural movement stemming from Modernism, whose buildings were characterized by their crudity and angularity. Stone, concrete, and brick were popular building materials, yet they were wrought in ways that gave exteriors a rough, craggy, sometimes puzzle-like complexity of form.

Evans applied these same aesthetic principles to furniture, creating chunky,





deeply textural works of art that masqueraded as utilitarian objects. He produced several lines for the manufacturer Directional, the most well known of

which is probably his Cityscape series, which comprised a range of furniture sheathed in a sleek patchwork of metal, mirror, and wood. Other works include highly sculptural armoires in cast bronze that resemble African textiles, compact, maze-like wooden table bases that seem both static and terrifyingly alive, and credenzas whose finish evokes the brushwork of Picasso's "Guernica."



These pieces are not for the faint of heart — they are, in fact, almost malicious-looking. But in that same way that something ugly can be beautiful, Evans' work is transcendental and captivating. It is likely that Evans' background as sculptor and metalworker precipitated his unique treatment of surfaces. He could make the front of a buffet look eroded and sinewy, like the inside of a dank cave; a bedroom set evokes a hall of mirrors,

each angle undulating into itself like a Frank Gehry nightmare. These are clearly rather polarizing designed objects — and I wouldn't want to fill a whole home with them, but one statement-making piece

can change the tenor of an entire room, giving it a depth and texture previously lacking.

Though his furniture was mass-produced, the days of running across originals at thrift stores (I've seen it happen) are likely over, and today his works typically carry a price tag as hefty as they



themselves. However, many other fabricators and designers were influenced by Evans' style and extended it to wares of all kinds; Brutalist-inspired pottery, lighting, and jewelry are quite easy to come by with a quick eBay keyword search, and are often surprisingly affordable. If you like the rough, primitive qualities of Brutalism but don't want to commit to something that looks like it came out of an Edward Gorey book in the middle of your living room, consider investing in a smaller item—you may find that it gives your space a certain sine qua non you never knew was missing.

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