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No passing fad: Carlos Motta celebrates 40 years of design at Espasso NY

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This week, Brazilian designer Carlos Motta celebrates his atelier's 40th anniversary with a new show at New York City's Espasso gallery. He chose to focus his design practice on sustainability and environmental conservation back in the 1970s and has since become the go-to name for statuesque, unadorned furniture that celebrates the natural quality of its materials.

Photography: Elisseu Cavalcante

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Working with reclaimed materials in the design world can often be written off as a passing fad, especially since it's become a fashionable calling card for style-oriented hotels, restaurants and bars. Yet way before the trend erupted, the Brazilian designer Carlos Motta chose to focus his design practice on sustainability and environmental conservation back in the 1970s. Motta, who began making objects from pieces of driftwood found while surfing, has since

become the go-to name for statuesque, unadorned furniture that celebrates the natural quality of its materials.

This week, the ever-youthful Motta celebrates his eponymous atelier's 40th anniversary with a retrospective exhibition hosted at the Brazilian design gallery Espasso in New York City. Armed with over 50 furniture pieces, including 11 new creations that will be revealed for the first time, Motta takes stock of the diverse body of work he has produced over the course of his career.

Ranging from bespoke creations and limited edition designs, to work created in collaboration with the larger furniture manufacturers on display, the retrospective presents Motta's unique place in the design world and highlights his creative process. An avid surfer, naturalist, yoga practitioner and craftsman, his oeuvre brings all of these facets together in physical form.

'Over the years, I have strived to create works that are honest and speak to my philosophy of designing pieces that are simple, respectful and long-lasting,' he says. 'This exhibition is extremely exciting for me because it allows visitors to see who I am as a designer by viewing a broad selection of my pieces at once.'

To complement the exhibition, Motta has also transformed Espasso's gallery space with photographs, sketches, hand-written notes and other ephemera to bring his process to life.

The 11 new pieces are particularly exciting – personal, almost fantastical creations that the designer developed over the last 13 months. From 'Pinda', an ergonomic chair that's smooth on one side and teeming with spikes like its namesake fish on the other, to the rotating 'Sergio' armchair – a loving tribute to the Brazilian design icon Sergio Rodrigues, a close friend of Motta's – the pieces are joyful, liberated and beautifully realised in lustrous reclaimed woods, native to Brazil.

'It's very hard for myself to end up with a group of pieces and feel as satisfied as I do now. It was a big pleasure to design and produce these pieces because I didn't have a client or anybody asking for this,' he explains. 'It was something very personal; from my mind and my ideas, something that I've been doing for a long time. I was so free to design and build, always keeping the same basic concept of reclaimed wood and reusing materials.'