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the buys from brazil

Carlos Junqueira's mission is to infiltrate the US interiors market with Brazilian furniture, bringing a whiff of exotica and gaucho rough to the sanitised lofts of Manhattan

With its economy battered and its currency bruised, perhaps the only good news coming out of Brazil this year was its World Cup win. But somewhere between the real's sad slide and Ronaldo's goals came Espasso.

Espasso ('space' in Portuguese) is the US's first designer showroom dedicated to Brazilian furniture from the 1930s to the present day. Opened in May and

located in Queens, Espasso founder Carlos Junqueira hopes to take Brazilian furniture to the same level as its future-forward architecture.

Long associated with a heavy, chunky Old World aesthetic, it was this lack of knowledge of Brazilian design that gave Junqueira the idea for Espasso. A São Paulo native, he made his Manhattan mark 12 years ago



writer **david kaufman**
photographer **laura stojanovic**



wood you rather: from top, 'Rama' bookcase in Imbuia wood, by Etel Carmona; Silvia Prado Segall's 'Leque' magazine holder. Previous page, 'Anel' armchair designed by Ricardo Fasanello with cutaway seat for ventilation

importing coffee from his homeland. He saw an untapped market for top-quality pieces sourced directly from the designers and with his extensive shipping experience he delivered on time and in mint condition.

First off, Junqueira embarked on a series of Rio and São Paulo trips to select his debut designers, establish shipping and distribution channels and – most importantly – inspect his designers' manufacturers. 'I needed to be sure the pieces were made as great as they looked,' Junqueira says. He then developed an Espasso 'identity', complete with luxe logo, crisp catalogue and sexy showroom. Then he went public, setting up a booth at New York City's International Contemporary Furniture Fair just days before Espasso's première. 'People could not believe the work was from Brazil,' Junqueira says. 'The look, the quality, everyone was very surprised.'

More than six months later, Junqueira's role as Brazil's unofficial interiors' information attaché has only increased thanks to Espasso's success. His initial furniture foursome – Carlos Motta, Etel Carmona, Ricardo Fasanello and the duo Luciana and Gerson (W* 27) – along with pieces from São Paulo's Galpao de Design are pulling in architects, interior connoisseurs and socialites eager to discover design's next big thing. The appeal is a mix of the familiar – sleek lines, modern materials, functional forms – with a dash of the exotic.

A 1970 Fasanello armchair, for instance, has a cut-away seat for easy tropical ventilation. The modular 'Rama' bookcase from Carmona boasts the ingenuity of Nakashima, enhanced by the sturdiness of rich Brazilian Imbuia wood. The 1950s 'Katinsky' chair by Julio Katinsky sports the steely cool of Le Corbusier, but is augmented by a sheet of gaúcho-style black leather. Everything is custom-made, and unlike other galleries representing Brazilian designers, all the pieces displayed in Espasso's catalogue are on-site and ready for inspection.

Despite the nearby MOMA Queens – which Junqueira says helped break the borough's 'geography barrier' – Espasso is still a bit of a trek, though it has become a pilgrimage site for expat Brazilians looking for a stylish reminder of home. For gringos, Junqueira has dotted Espasso with Brazilian architecture and design books to help them fit specific pieces into a larger cultural context.

Scouting trips back to Brazil are already unearthing Espasso's next crop of designers, while plans for a future showroom – most likely in LA – are currently brewing. Most of all, Junqueira hopes Espasso will emerge as an artistic resource for design minds north and south of the border, an intellectual hub, perhaps, for Brazilian creativity. 'I want this to be a place of discovery,' he says, 'because everyone in New York loves to discover.' *

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