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Contemporary Portuguese design

Lisbon-based designer, Frederico Duarte, comments on the state of the Portuguese design scene today

The first IKEA store in Portugal opened near Lisbon in July of 2004. It was visited by over 2.5 million people in its first year alone, and IKEA's results here have been so positive, the group is planning to open six more stores and one factory by 2015. This may seem quite unrelated to the state of Portuguese product design today, but it really is not. It goes to prove the growing appetite of the Portuguese to find well designed, affordable products for their living and

working environments, and that "design" doesn't necessarily have to be eccentric, exclusive, expensive, or a foreign word in their vocabulary.

So something is definitely changing; an awareness of design, both of its production and its practitioners, has been slowly growing in a country without a significant industrial past, and even less of a design tradition.

In the 1990s, the design scene was joined by a new generation of Portuguese

designers to emerge in the public eye including the likes of Pedro Silva Dias, Marco Sousa Santos, José Viana, Filipe Alarcão and also Miguel Vieira Baptista and Fernando Brízio. The talent and work of this group earned them the attention of clients and the media, both inside and outside Portugal. Many of these talents also attracted the attentions of design schools across the country, now passing on their expertise to the students for one or more days of the week in

addition to their usual studio activities. The success of these designers has been mirrored in the more craft-orientated world of jewellers as, indeed, jewellery education and practice has developed a growing reputation for itself.

A design-gearred producer such as Simpleforms, a manufacturer of modern bathroom accessories and furniture as well as tabletop items, things are looking good. The company has forged a high-end identity for

Clockwise from far left: Cocoon Lamp by Bleach Design; Candeeiro floor lamp by Bombaamor; Altamira chair by Pedro Silva Dias; 'La-Ga' bag by KRV Kurva Design; concrete furniture range by SIT Urban Design; cork soaptray by Simpleforms



itself and can now boast healthy exports, as well as being a provider of work to external Portuguese companies whilst playing a part in promoting their country's product skills. For the individual designer, however, it is a common problem across the globe to experience difficulties linking their skills to suitable manufacturers.

That said, it's not hard to understand why. After all, the introduction of innovative new ideas is often met with scepticism

