

World view

Working alongside the likes of Sir Norman Foster Furniture helped raise the profile of furniture designer **Joran Briand**

Working in New York has had a profound influence on Joran Briand. The young designer returned to Paris, enthused by the can-do attitude of Brooklyn's designer-makers and taking full advantage of the connections he made with the French design diaspora. His studio, set up from home in 2005, specialises in filling the gap between graphics and architecture or product design, exemplified by the lace-like concrete panels he created for architect Rudy Ricciotti's Jean Bouin stadium and other projects. The two practices have collaborated together since 2007.

Of no small importance in raising Briand's profile was when the then 27-year-old was chosen to work alongside Sir Norman Foster on a competition entry to design a new Ministry of Defence building for France in 2010. Briand's ideas for furniture, including his aircraft carrier desks, got him noticed. "It was a good adventure," he says, recalling the feverish activity of eight people working out of his 40sqm apartment. "We didn't win the main competition, but it gave me enough money to set up my own office."

A chance meeting with his present landlord, architect Nicolas Laisné, led to Briand being offered space in the small multi-disciplinary campus Laisné has built up within a former Montreuil print shop. Briand pinched his nose and took the plunge, crossing the Périphérique to Montreuil, a place for which he is now a keen advocate.

Visitors are buzzed in through a gate between two terraced houses and wander past vegetable patches to reach the studio. Inside are architecture firms, a photographer and Briand's practice, Trust in Design.

"It's quieter here and the rent is cheaper. It has the same spirit that I saw when I lived in Brooklyn," says Briand. For him this includes an interest in research and development: recent projects have included exploring stiffened jute to make eco-furniture in Bangladesh for the Saintluc brand, and creating Neurone, a web-like LED lighting system with commercial and museum applications.

He's also keen to make use of Montreuil's local artisan heritage in future furniture projects and to make prototypes – Philippe Starck's prototyper is just down the street.

"Montreuil doesn't exactly have a design community but it is part of a drift east –

especially for those in fashion, or movie-makers, or those working in the digital. It's cheap and the workshop buildings are already here – it is a lot easier than trying to work out of a Haussmann building." With no nightlife, however, he still lives in Paris itself and is more likely to go out in the nearby 20th arrondissement than Montreuil. "We have sometimes had parties here and people complain: 'Oh it is too far, I can't find a cab.' I'm sure it will change," he says.

"It is a great place to live if you have a family. You can have a little house and open the windows and hear the birds singing and church bells and yet it is only 10 minutes from Paris." Despite this affinity for the local landscape, his work perspective remains international, with ongoing partnerships with French expats Boum Design in New York and Boutique Design in Hong Kong.



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