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MULTI-MEDIUM AXIS MUNDI

Design comes in many different forms. We at Spaces often find ourselves dealing with designers who work solely in one medium, be it architecture or interiors, furniture or art. Rarely do you come across a firm that transgresses these individual fields to work in all areas at once. But Axis Mundi is one such company.

WORDS: Fergal McShane
IMAGES: Courtesy of Axis Mundi





'I try to approach furniture design like an artist would, because otherwise you just get caught up in this plastic chair throw-away kind of culture.'



Founder John Beckmann explains that the New York-based Axis Mundi is a multi-disciplinary design studio. 'I don't draw divisions between different disciplines, they all inform each other,' says Beckmann. 'The same thinking goes into any of the fields. It's a continuum.'

Essentially the studio works in three fields: architecture, interior design and furniture design. When you look at the projects the firm undertakes, every aspect of their work

is treated as a separate entity. But these individual areas seem to inform and enhance each other, creating a cyclical design process, but one that is always moving forward to create something new.

With Beckmann taking on such a varied mixture of projects, the priority for him is not to get bogged down in one particular strand of architecture, interior design, furniture design or sculpture. The thoughtful way in which he appreciates each project is a

above & previous page
Each room in the Greenwich Town House has its own unique personality.

left
Car exhausts make for an interesting and unique series of lamps.



He declares himself on the 'artsy' side of design, with the desire to be positioned between the different mediums.

large part of what makes his multi-faceted company work. Like many of the great designers, he considers every fresh challenge in isolation, rather than adopting a blanket style or approach, saying: 'I don't like grandiose design theories. Each project is considered on its own terms, conditions, site, client and budget.'

The heart of Axis Mundi's work is in interior design. Anyone familiar with New York will be aware that most residential projects in the city come in the form of the numerous condominiums that have been erected over the last few years. Beckmann explains that there is little room for smaller-scale

residential projects, so interiors take over as the firm's creative core.

The range found in Beckmann's finished interiors is astounding. 'The styles we use are very contemporary,' says Beckmann, adding: 'We try to make every project different.'

Recently, the growing Axis Mundi firm seems to have entered its bachelor phase. 'Purely by chance, we've had a few recent clients that were all bachelors,' Beckmann explains. 'They tend to want a place that is pretty sexy. And I think that's something we do well.' The pinnacle of this 'sexy' style can be found in their design for the Greenwich Town House.

The renovation of this property resulted in sleek and chic interiors that are also very welcoming and colourful, quite a hard juxtaposition to achieve well. 'I think a lot of our interiors have a minimalist envelope,

but I like to use luxurious materials and fabrics,' explains Beckmann.

'I think a lot of our work has a glamorous feeling to it where a lot of minimalism doesn't. Many people come to us who like modernism, but they think it can be too cold. I think we do a more sexy kind of luxury in high-end works.'

One aspect of the multi-disciplined system Axis Mundi uses which seems to work in their favour is that everything they design, from larger projects like the Greenwich Town House to the soon-to-be constructed Weekend Retreat for a Winer right through to a simple line of lamps all has its own unique charm.

Because of the lack of available building space in New York, the location of their business could be considered a hindrance, limiting the architectural opportunities. However, there are a few standout designs soon to

left
Toy Soldiers adorn the Great Wall of China adding extra security.

centre
The soldier barrier may seem easy for when needed in this Partition plaza.

right
Larger-than-life statues standing at attention outside the US Senate building.



'I don't like grandiose design theories. Each project is considered on its own terms, conditions, site, client and budget.'

to be constructed. The previously mentioned Weekend Retreat for a Weiner comes in the form of a traditional American-styled 'salt-box' house completely covered in mirrors.

This is definitely a project to keep your eye on; with the exception of a few windows, everything on the exterior facade will reflect its environment. Beckmann muses, 'you can imagine, on a foggy day this place will almost disappear.' Architects >>

above
Mirror house: The Weiner's Retreat will perfectly reflect its environment.

right
A beautifully simple modern interior with an impressive bookshelf.



'The styles we use are very contemporary. We try to make every project different.'

we constantly struggling to create designs to match and reflect their environment, something that The Weekend Retreat will do with ease.

Architecture and interior design clearly goes hand in hand. But it is rare to find an architecture firm that designs speciality items like furniture and lamps on a completely separate

basis, especially outside of the design hubs like Milan. Beckmann explains that his furniture is often produced in relation to architectural projects he is working on, has finished, or even projects that may come in the future.

'I try to approach furniture design like an artist would, because otherwise you just get caught up in



this plastic chair throw-away kind of culture.' There is little fear of this happening with such a wide range of beautiful, unique and practical pieces. Nothing gives a better example of this than the line of lamps made from car exhausts.

The lamps perfectly showcase the design prowess of Beckmann and his team. It's rare indeed that something more recognisable for spouting fumes can be seen releasing something as symbolic as light, but it comes as a shining example of the art behind the design found in all of Axis Mundi's projects.

It seems only appropriate to finish this look at Axis Mundi with what promises to be their most unique and artistic project to date, the 'Toy Soldier Barriers'. Beckmann says, 'It's an art project and a statement really on America's hegemony and empire. The concept is that these are enlarged toy soldiers, larger than life which form a working barricade.'

The response to the threat of

terror has had a huge impact on American life over the past few years. Axis Mundi has taken this fear and turned it into both an artistic and practical concept. It is attempting to engage debate in areas that seem outside the realm and scope of regular architects or designers, but the possibility of this security barrier model being used in the future is definitely an interesting one.

At the end of the day, Beckmann's aim is simple, to be a designer. He declares himself on the 'artier' side of design, with the desire to be positioned between the different mediums. The successful execution of these aims is evident in any of the projects his firm, Axis Mundi have completed. And with the number of promising projects soon to come, we wait with assured anticipation. ■

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left
The Costa Rican Pool Pavilion has an unforgettable view of the sea.

right
Axis Mundi goes over and under with the Bridge and Tunnel House.