

THE VINSON VIEW

Quality maniac and master shopper Nick Vinson on the who, what, when, where and why



BETTER WITH AGE

Fabrics

High thread-count cotton bedding and men's poplin shirts should improve the more you wash them - if they don't, change your supplier.

Tokyo's Second Skin has developed a natural silk without any silicone coating that stays soft even after extended washing. secondskin.tokyo

Wood

Look for items crafted from solid wood rather than laminate, from makers such as Ceccotti Collezioni and bed specialist Hästens. ceccotticollezioni.it; hastens.com

Finishing is everything: a wooden object from Bottega Ghianda (W'218) has more time invested on its hand-finishing than in its construction. botteghianda.com

Leather

Look for irregular grain in leather goods. If it's the same all over, it is likely to be stamped.

Vegetable-tanned skins are best for upholstery, as they are more tactile and improve with use.

Buy for the long term. As Jean-Louis Dumas once said, 'Hermès is different because we are making a product that we can repair.' hermes.com

01 Quality time

Picky Nicky and friends insist we should embrace ageing

During a lecture for her 'Breathing Colour' exhibition at London's Design Museum, Hella Jongerius, a lifelong campaigner for more diversity in pigment and colour in industrial design, complained that heavy testing requirements in the industry suck the life out of colours, which are designed to remain stable for decades. 'We all like the patina of second-hand furniture, we all like when it has a bit of life in the colours or the materials,' she said. Objects that hint at their past are so much more interesting, but many contemporary products will never deliver such pleasure.

Jongerius' point really resonated with me. Sadly, everywhere we look nowadays, nothing really ages. Every surface is flat, covered in a layer of gloss to stop it fading, scratching or coming into contact with human hands or life itself. Materials that should live and breathe are frozen under a coating of silicone, PVC or acrylic. Leather has its natural grain removed and a replica stamped in its place, to look more regular. It's then coated, so no client will ever return it because it changed colour with touch or time, even though naturally tanned leather deepens over time in a beautiful way. Wood, a fibre that absorbs humidity as it breathes, should never stay still, yet today is more often than not just a slither of laminate atop a composite such as MDF. It's then coated

so much that it loses its tactile quality and may as well be fake. Even silk is coated with silicone, as it is considered too fragile after being stripped of most of its protein to get to its glossy core during processing.

It was David Chipperfield who changed my perception on ageing in architecture when Berlin's Neues Museum reopened in March 2009, the building's complex history visible in its very fabric, which was repaired, conserved, restored and recreated so artfully. And it is Vincenzo De Cotiis, with his innovative appropriation of salvaged and reclaimed materials, complete with signs of age and use, who fine-tuned my appreciation of patina. His designs are often achieved through re-appropriation of used textile, metal, wood, leather and stone. Although the original pieces are often unrecognisable in his final work, the age and use is always left visible as he uncovers beauty in imperfection and life.

Needless to say, objects made of real and precious raw materials, crafted and finished with skill, will last and age well. Of course, this anti-ageing obsession starts with our own skin, pumped and injected full of nastiness to appear youthful. Designer Alber Elbaz is a rare voice when he says 'wrinkles are hypnotising', but I could not agree more. Ageing naturally may have to be the subject of next month's page. ★



02

Roman number

I'm currently craving a Roman marble bust, like this one of a young man, dating from around the 3rd century AD, from Mayfair's Kallos Gallery. kallogallery.com



03

Dark materials

This desk by Vincenzo De Cotiis is made of black recycled fibreglass, marble and antique silvered brass.

'DC1708' desk, price on request, decotiis.it