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July/August 2011

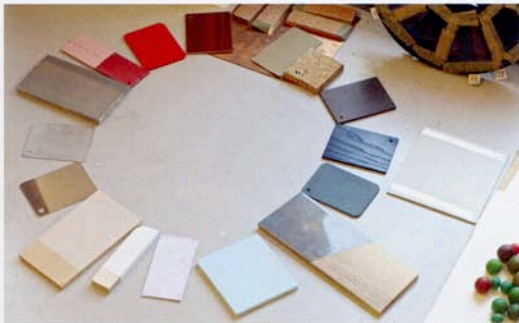
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The walls of Jongerius's workshop are covered with sample materials and colors, including a prototype for her new Borders textile for Maharam. A chromatic composi-

tion in progress (opposite top) includes an array of cards from the color system she devised for Vitra, ceramic samples, and other more obscure items.



# Hella Cool

In her Berlin studio, rogue Dutch designer Hella Jongerius creates colorful, covetable objects that meld the handmade and the mass-produced in surprising new ways.

"I came here to be alone," Dutch designer Hella Jongerius says, explaining why she moved to Berlin from her native Netherlands. "Questioning the limits of the design profession—that's my talent. So I wanted the space to research and study, to answer my own questions rather than the demands of the design industry." Up until three years ago, Jongerius ran a busy ten-person studio in Rotterdam. "But I didn't want to be a people manager anymore," she says. "I wanted to be a beginner again, an outsider." So she sorted through the contents of her studio and moved the essentials—and herself—to Berlin, glad to be alone with her work.

*Misfit*, then, was an appropriate title for the major retrospective of her work earlier this year at Rotterdam's Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, and the Irma Boom–designed book published in its wake. In many ways, Jongerius doesn't fit in.

One of the talented and successful Dutch designers to emerge with Droog in the 1990s, Jongerius is the female exception in the boys' club of top designers. Her genre-shattering work combines craft and technology, tradition and innovation, and high and low tech. Not for nothing does she call her studio Jongeriuslab; her work is more about conducting experiments than making design statements. She shows a stubborn reluctance to confine herself to a particular market: Her range extends from one-off design art pieces for Galerie Kreo to mass-produced (but still hand-finished) items for Ikea.

The term *misfit* also applies to Jongerius's delight in imperfection and irregularity. Her designs are often warped, scarred, or left partly unfinished. "Perfection is macho," she says. "And boring. I like to see the hand of the maker." Soft Urn, the 1993 Droog rubber vase that put her work on the map, has a simple form that retains jagged marks from its casting process. Her B-Set porcelain tableware is intentionally fired at too high a temperature, giving each piece a unique deformation. Thanks to her long-term collaborations with design companies like Ikea, Vitra, Maharam, and the porcelain factories Nymphenburg and Royal Tichelaar Makkum, Jongerius has helped spark a resurgence of handcrafted detail in manufactured objects. "Hella wins their trust," says Louise Schouwenberg, the curator of *Misfit* and Jongerius's longtime friend and collaborator. ▶

Story by Jane Szita  
Photos by Oliver Mark

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"And increasingly, she works directly with experts and craftsmen in those companies to take what's already there and bring it up to date. Her designs don't shout. She happily puts the work of others on show."

In her large studio in Prenzlauer Berg, a new series of dishes she's creating for Nymphenburg underlines her restrained approach. Combing through the factory's archives and pattern books, Jongerius extracted a detailed model of a fox, some ceramic makers' marks, and a thorny pattern. Then she arranged them on a simple bowl to create a fresh story from old elements.

As Jongerius's work progresses, she has moved from the monochrome simplicity of Soft Um and B-Set toward a more colorful, richly crafted vocabulary. The Polder sofa she designed in 2005 for Vitra features modulated shifts in shade and texture, and combines trail-

ing threads and hand-sewn buttons (modeled on thrift-store finds) with Vitra's expert cabinetry. "The marketing people said a sofa in six different shades would never sell," she scoffs. (It did sell, and well.) Salespeople often resist her work, she notes, because of its novelty. A 2002 Maharam fabric with a lengthy 3.3-yard repeat was considered unmarketable because it would be difficult to display in showrooms. Jongerius stuck to her guns, and the fabric remains in production today.

More recently, Jongerius has embarked on a mission to transform the design industry's use of and attitude toward color. "We need an alternative, because the industrial palette is so poor," she says. "Modern colors are stable—and that's about it. They don't change with the light, so they don't look alive. And if we want a darker color, we just add black, which, ▶



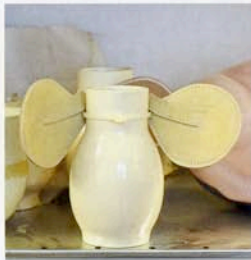
The book *Miafit* (top) was designed by the Dutch graphic designer Irma Boom to accompany the Rotterdam exhibition. Jongerius's studio (bottom) is a vibrant

jumble of prototypes, products, and samples, including a red Polder sofa for Vitra and, on the far right, a Blossom lamp for Belux and prototype for the Rotterdam Chair for Vitra.



**“Perfection is macho. And boring.  
I like to see the hand of the maker.”**

—Hella Jongerius



Jongerius's personal cabinet of curiosities (top left) includes miniature models of her designs. She rarely makes drawings, preferring to sketch in 3-D. Other pieces in her

studio include (clockwise from top right) *A Tribute to Camper* from 2009, two color experiments, and a ceramic-and-leather Mouse vase from her *Home Props* series.



sadly, makes all colors gray." For years, she has used pottery glazes to experiment with color recipes, culminating in the *300 Unique Vases* installation at the *Misfit* exhibition. Jongerius—together with the Royal Tichelaar Makkum craftsman with whom she collaborated—layered oxidation glazes with industrial and synthetic pigments in a spectrum of colors. The final circular arrangement suggests an alternative, three-dimensional color wheel in which each shade's inherent dynamism shines, thanks to its relationship to the others.

It came as no surprise, then, when in 2005 Vitra entrusted her with overhauling its color system. Her first decree: Produce the plastic Eames chair in three shades of white. "People mainly bought the white one, so I said 'If that's what they want, let's give them more.'" The overhaul took several years, and she remains Vitra's color consultant.

Currently, the busy designer is developing a new color system for shoe brand Camper. The challenge there, she explains, comes in creating a palette that lures buyers away from black and brown. Meanwhile, she is producing her own paints—starting with a range of 15 rich, velvety Colourful Blacks—with Swiss company kt.COLOR.

Though her color mission continues, "the research is done," she says. "I need a new research project and I have one: plastics." The material needs to be rehabilitated in a range of ways, Jongerius believes—from the aesthetic (currently "it looks either cheap or high-tech futuristic") to the environmental ("we need bioplastics"). She's looking for industrial partners to aid her experimentation. And so begins her next odyssey, in a new medium: the latest challenge for a design rogue with a remarkably broad comfort zone. ▶

Although Jongerius insists she had a major clear-out before leaving Rotterdam, her studio in Berlin (top) is as packed as ever. Note the Ikea PS Jonsberg vases on the top

row of shelves, each made using a different ceramic technique, with ornamentation inspired by different parts of the world. On a work table (bottom), a cluster of early

color experiments foretells her *300 Unique Vases* project.



## Hella Jongerius



**1993**

Graduates from Design Academy Eindhoven. Exhibits her Bath Mat and Soft Urn (right) with headline-making new collective, Droog Design.



**1999**

Embroidered Tablecloth (left) continues patterns derived from Ming vases across plates and cups.



**2005**

Introduces the Polder sofa (right), Jongerius's first industrial piece of furniture and her first collaboration with Vitra.



**2009**

Designs PS Pello, Mikkel, and Gullspira Wall hangings for Ikea (left), handmade by Indian women.

**2009**

Frog Table for Galerie Kreo (right)



**"For me, decoration is a bridge between user and object. With Frog Table, I was trying to see how far I could take it."**



**1997**

B-Set porcelain tableware (right) launches a long-running collaboration with Royal Tichelaar Makkum.



**1999**

Kasese Chair



**2002**

Repeat, for Maharam (left)



**2004**

Nymphenburg Sketches (left) brings the porcelain animal figures of the German pottery up to date.



**2005**

Cupboard (left), an experimental one-off for Galerie Kreo

**2006**

Worker Chair for Vitra (right)



**2007**

Office Pets



**2009**

Tribute to Camper



**2010**

Bob Garden Club chair for Kettal



**2010**

Misfit exhibition in Rotterdam introduces 300 Unique Vases and the Colourful Blacks paints. Hella Jongerius' *Misfit* (her second monograph) is published by Phaidon.

