

On Freehand, Industrial Craft and Moving On From Pad and Paper



Tom Lloyd (left)
Luke Pearson (right)

THE INTERVIEW

WHAT LED TO FREEHAND'S FINAL FORM?

LLOYD: We were interested in the manipulation of materials. Particularly, we were drawn to the idea of extrusion as a technology. Usually extrusions are used in mass-produced technical products, and we were trying to figure out a way of creating a more crafted object. The final product, which is this meeting point between the hand drawn—which is a very human, instinctive thing—and the technical aspect of the extruded parts, felt very lovely—a sort of meeting point of crafted industry. And that's something that is very much a part of our studio's thinking: How do you make the most of materials, but also keep a human touch in that making process? We were also really interested in the idea of assembly. And this particular product has a wonderfully simple construction technique using plastic clips with a top surface that drops in.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO INFUSE A DEGREE OF RANDOMNESS IN THE SCALLOPED DESIGN?

LLOYD: Somebody said something to me a couple years ago, and it really resonated. They were talking about a little bit of imperfection in this perfect world. And you know, everything now is mass-produced. Everything is perfectly the same as everything else. And so, there's a degree of randomness because of the way in which the hand-drawn line coincides with the next panel of hand-drawn line. It forces you to sit and question and think.

PEARSON: We often talk in the studio about how you might read a product, any object, from maybe 10, 15 feet away. As you approach it, you get one reading of the product, and then hopefully, as you get closer and closer, you start to enjoy a different aspect. We imagine that most people, when they enter a room and see this table in the corner, might not get any sense that it has this imperfection. But only when you get up close to it do you suddenly realize that it has this fluid line. And so, there's also surprise.

HOW DID MATERIALITY BECOME SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART OF FREEHAND'S IDENTITY?

LLOYD: We used to have a one-dimensional landscape in contract furniture; a very limited number of finishes. It was all about the systems culture. And that seems to have exploded into ever smaller and smaller elements where people can define, choose, and modify their settings by literally the smallest detail. Because it's so modular, it gives us this huge latitude to play with the surface finishes without any kind of drawback to the functionality of the object.

PEARSON: Rather than choosing a set of colors that might last five years, we know that the trends of interior space, just like in fashion, move so quickly. This allows you to actually respond to a customer's needs very fast. It's not about us defining what we think is right and wrong.

WHAT DESIGN TOOLS ARE CRITICAL TO YOUR WORK?

LLOYD: It's funny that you should ask. We always have a sketchbook and pencil in our hands, but we've both just moved to iPads and are experimenting with the drawing process. It's a bit like Freehand where you start to mix the quality of the hand-drawn line with a technical interface. It does begin to give you a completely—not new—but unaltered way of communicating and creating.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE OBJECT THAT YOU DIDN'T DESIGN?

LLOYD: The Arco Lamp by Castiglione—I think it was the first of its kind to solve the problem in the way it did, and it's the most masterful bit of engineering, industrial production, and folly all at the same time. It's full of tiny little details that you wouldn't know unless somebody pointed them out, which is a testament to the brothers' extraordinary humor, wit, and intelligence. So, for me it embodies everything I'd like to be able to do.

PEARSON: A Fiat 126—it's just a tiny little tin box really, but it somehow reminds me of when life was a little bit simpler than what we've created for ourselves. It's just the ultimate little city car. It's got a 700cc engine, which is almost like the size of a moped. It's a reminder of a simpler life from the 1980s and it's giving me a lot of joy currently. When it's not broken down, it's fantastic.

