



MAKING HER MARK

EXPANDING HER REACH FROM THE GALLERY TO THE SHOWROOM, DESIGNER KIKI VAN EIJK LENDS A PERSONAL TOUCH TO HER FIRST PIECE OF FURNITURE. MONICA KHEMSUROV GETS AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE TALENT'S NEW STUDIO, CAPTURED BY PHOTOGRAPHER ILCO KEMMERE.

Kiki van Eijk admits she knew next to nothing about design until age 17, when as a high school senior studying art history, she applied to the Design Academy Eindhoven on the recommendation of a particularly perceptive drawing teacher. This was before the Dutch design scene took off in the late '90s—a time when design wasn't exactly encoded into the country's DNA. Neither was it in van Eijk's: her parents were both gym teachers.

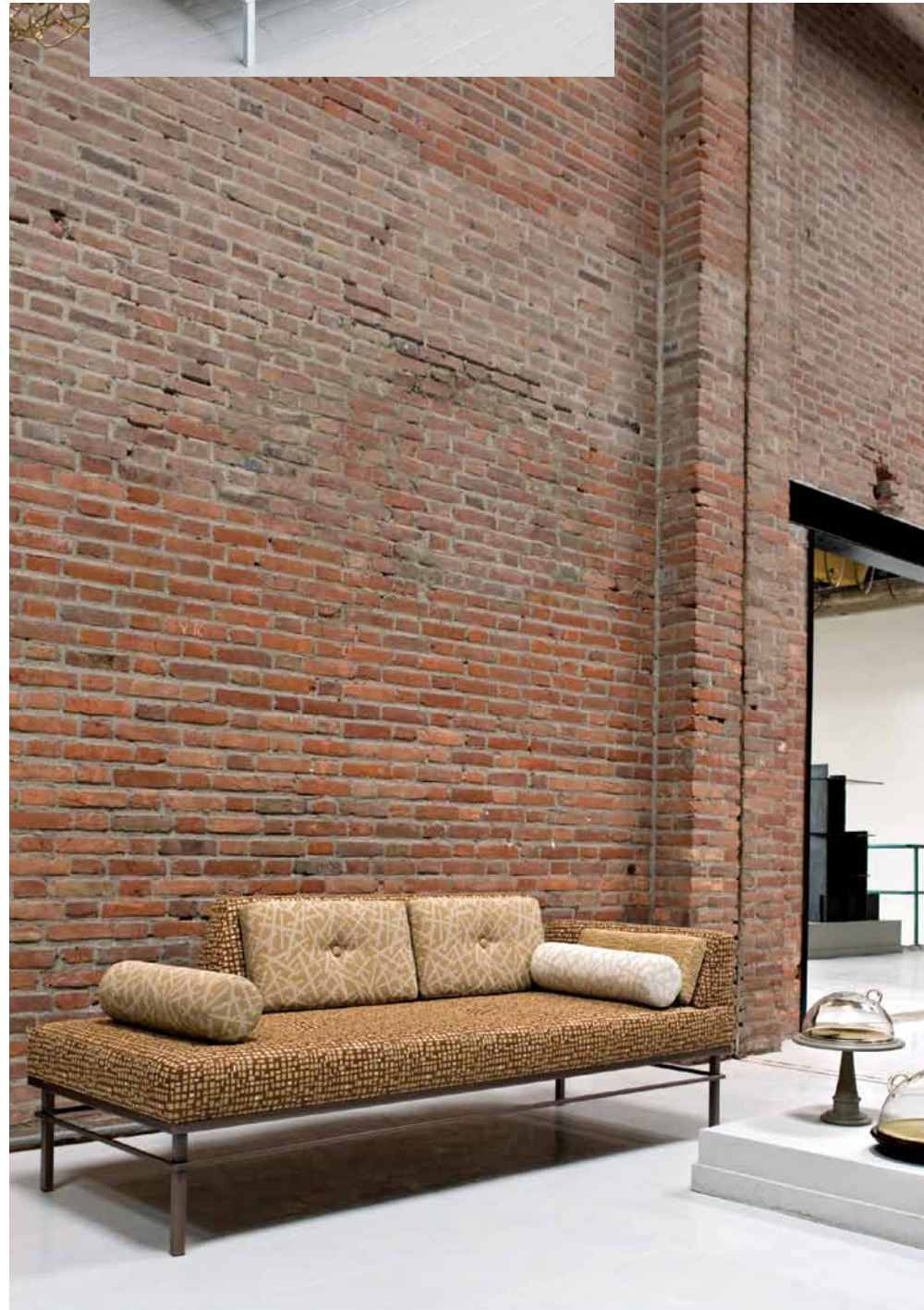
Yet looking back on her childhood these days, having become one of the design world's most successful up-and-coming talents, van Eijk realizes that her pursuits and approaches really haven't changed all that much in the years since. "I was always drawing and making things. Even when I had to buy a present for a friend's birthday, I would find a way to make it customized," says van Eijk, 33. "I still make things that are very personal, that come from my own thoughts."

In designs that range from room dividers (woven with the text of her great-grandmother's recipes) to dinner plates (modeled on her collection of vintage buttons), van Eijk has consistently found inspiration in her everyday life. Even more so than her feminine aesthetic or her typically Dutch preoccupation with handicraft, this diary-like quality is the thread that ties her work together. Her recent Allotment series of handblown glass objects—currently on view at the Venice Biennale as part of Glasstress 2011—offers a meditation on her feelings about the perils of industrial farming. Depicting a more traditional homegrown process, from seed bags to scarecrows, the work extols the joys of nurturing and harvesting one's own food. At the Venice Projects gallery last December, van Eijk's DRINK! EAT! FUN! REST! THINK! DREAM! LOVE! series, with its totemic glass pillows and soup ladles, carried a similarly instructive reminder. "It was about seven very basic things in life that we tend to forget," she says, "because we're all so busy and distracted."

It makes sense, then, that the designer, given the intimate nature of her work, would enter the second decade of her career exploring another personal storyline: her relationship with life partner and studio mate, Joost van Bleiswijk. He shares her interest in recasting historical and archetypal forms, but takes a much more



(OPPOSITE) Kiki van Eijk in front of her Nursery pavilion (2010). (ABOVE) Eat (2010), at left, and Love (2010) glass sculptures for the Venice Projects gallery.



(TOP TO BOTTOM) Workshop sofa (2011) for Bernhardt Design. Another version of the Workshop. Van Eijk and partner Joost van Bleiswijk.

(CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT) The interior of van Eijk's Nursery pavilion. Van Eijk handles dried flowers—the start of a new project. The Domestic Jewels room divider (2008) and Soft teapot (2008),



both in the background; a Stamped and Sealed XL vase (2010), Soft Sweet ceramic (2010), and blue Knick Knack pot (2009) in the foreground. Van Eijk rolls out fabric for the Workshop sofa.



technical-minded approach. The pair have shown together before, most recently when their two contrasting mantel clocks were presented at New York's Moss during ICFE. Van Eijk's was a spinoff from her Floating Frames series of freeform, hand-knotted wire objects, while van Bleiswijk's was from his No Screw No Glue collection of notched steel laser-cut sheets assembled using 3-D modeling software. At the London Design Festival in September, they're revealing the results of their first collaboration: the Workshop Collection of upholstery textiles and the minimalist Workshop Bench sofa for Bernhardt Design.

The fabrics, commissioned first, presented a peculiar challenge for two artists used to sharing nearly everything but a canvas. "We knew it would be a fight, because our work is so different, but we wanted to make it a fun fight," says van Eijk. Rather than sketching and comparing notes, the duo engaged in a kind of "exquisite corpse" exercise, whereby van Bleiswijk used spray paint to silhouette wooden sticks on fabric, then van Eijk added a layer on top using tape and embroidery. "We always say that design is not a democracy; we're not going to sit around and debate about what's best," says van Bleiswijk. "We try to keep things really personal and outspoken. Since we had to work together, we thought, 'Let's find a way of doing that without having to compromise.'" The results were scanned into a computer and turned into a colorful jacquard, which recalls some of the silhouetted motifs of van Eijk's 2010 Zuiderzee Settings and 2008 Domestic Jewels tapestries. "Textile design is the perfect canvas for combining two points of view," says Jerry Helling, president of Bernhardt Design. "A good textile has depth and layering and tells a complex story—it's like songwriting. Joost is very strong in structure and discipline, and Kiki is amazing at capturing fluidity and understanding texture. It worked because they have complementary viewpoints rather than competitive styles."

As for the Bernhardt Workshop sofa, it was conceived as more of a one-time set-piece to show off the textiles during the launch event at Bernhardt's showroom in Clerkenwell, as suggested on a whim by the couple. The two had actually custom-built a

(CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT) Van Eijk's Floating Frames project (2010) for Rotterdam's Vivid Gallery, made of brass wires and ceramic pots. Workshop assistant Nienke Janssen carries wood to make shelves for test models. One More Time mantel clocks (2011) for Moss, available in 14 different metals, including sandblasted brass and oxidized copper.



(CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) Van Bleiswijk's No Screw No Glue barbecues (2009), made from Cor-Ten steel. Van Bleiswijk with his Glass Stacks pot (2010) for Venice Projects. Workshop assistant

David Bruijgrom welds a recent book cabinet designed by van Bleiswijk. The No Screw No Glue Rough storage system (2010), made of blowtorched steel plates.



similar model for their own Eindhoven home. Says van Eijk: "A year ago we moved and couldn't find a nice sofa anywhere. Most sofas are solid and massive, and we wanted something light and airy." Their creation—which so impressed Helling that he put it into full production—is essentially a streamlined chaise-longue resting atop an open-steel scaffold, and it's not exactly what you would expect from a duo known for elaborate studio work. It does, however, prove two points: One, what designers make for the open market isn't necessarily what they would choose to live with themselves. ("If everything in your home is really outspoken, you go crazy in your own space," says van Bleiswijk.) And two, that the couple—who take annual month-long inspiration trips to exotic locales and enjoy vintage shopping together—apparently do their best teamwork outside the context of their studio.

Even given the successful joint effort on the sofa, the couple is still mostly "working apart, together," as van Eijk puts it. They've been doing so since July in an impressive new space in an Eindhoven industrial park. While their last studio was just as big—10,000 square feet—this one has staggering 40-foot ceilings and separate workstations for materials such as plastic, wood, and metal, allowing the couple to fabricate prototypes and limited-edition pieces under better circumstances and on a larger scale.

While van Eijk's interests hew towards materiality and detail, it's impossible to overstate the influence she draws from her surroundings and her past. And though it remains to be seen how her new studio will influence the talent's future endeavors, her desire to stay open to new possibilities is evidenced by her latest project: designing the annual Christmas cake for Häagen-Dazs. Design, it turns out, is nothing like what she pictured as a teenager—merely coffee makers and vacuum cleaners. "I realized during the last 10 years that design can have different meanings for different people," she says. "It's much more creative and loose and free." 