

Q&A David Glaettli, Creative Director Karimoku New Standard



David, as the creative director of Karimoku New Standard, what is your role with the brand?

David: As an independent art director and design consultant I have been working with Karimoku for 5 years, in total 9 years, when I include the time in the design office where I worked before.

I'm responsible for the brand identity and appearance, the design & product strategy, the selection and the briefing of the designers and the supervision of the product development. That includes for example also the definition of products to be developed, the evaluation of design proposals, the mediation between the designers and Karimoku, the selection of collaborators like photographers and graphic designers for the development of catalogues, the exhibition- and stand design, sometimes also graphic design and copywriting.

Did you play a special role in the founding of

the brand Karimoku New Standard?

David: In 2009 when the brand was launched, I worked at the design studio of Teruhiro Yanagihara in Osaka and was assigned to the Karimoku New Standard project after the office got approached by Karimoku. Together with Teruhiro Yanagihara, I worked on the creation of the Karimoku New Standard brand, was involved in the selection of the first designers and the development of the first products. The time was very short at the time. We needed to have an initial meeting with Scholten & Baijings, so I flew to the south of France where they stayed on vacation and we had our first product meeting basically in our swimming suits.

Are you involved in the creative process of developing a new product with the designer?

David: Yes, it starts with the definition of the kind of product that should be developed, ba-

sed on discussions with Karimoku, sometimes dealers or architects. Then I include my own considerations and summarise it in a briefing for the selected designer. The next step is the discussion and evaluation of design proposals with the designers. Finally I review the prototypes, where the final decision is made to whether or not take the item into the collection.

During that process I have to mediate between the designers and the engineers at Karimoku - often what the designers intends differs from what the company needs - there can be misunderstandings in terms of design and in our case often in terms of language and culture. I act in between and try to make sure the collaboration works out successfully for both sides.

How are decisions on colour, fabric and the general brand aesthetic being made at Karimoku New Standard?

David: Probably different from other brands, I am not giving specific aesthetic or stylistic guidelines. In that sense I would call it more curating than directing. I indirectly choose the aesthetic of the collection by selecting the collaborating designers. Although they work all in very different ways, they all have a very good understanding of Karimoku's techniques and peculiarities, the materials we are using and a feeling for the brand as well as for the times we are living in.

In that way, we developed over the years a very consistent range of colours and designs. I believe that despite the variety of very different and unique designs, the character of the brand can still be perceived.

You studied product design yourself in Switzerland and are Swiss. What influence does that have on your work in general and with Karimoku New Standard?

David: Actually I studied industrial design in Milan for 2 years before I switched to ECAL in Lausanne, where I graduated. To be honest,

I think in Milan in some way I learned what design is not supposed to be, while in Switzerland I was thought about what design can be and the profession of being a designer.

It's hard to say what makes me Swiss. Maybe in regard to design and the way of working it is a kind of practical rationalism and pragmatism and a willingness to discuss things through to find a solution.

How would you describe the distinct identity of the Japanese brand?

David: The brand's identity is strongly characterised by the designers and their particular designs and of course by the unique situation of a traditional Japanese manufacturer collaborating with young international designers. The identity lies in between these keywords: innovative - sustainable, contemporary - long-lasting, joyful - functional, creative talent - traditional craftsmanship, east - west. It is defined by the strive to create a "new standard" in Japanese future making and in looking for a "new standard" for conscious living in the 21st century.

How are designers and designs being selected for Karimoku New Standard? What do you look for in a designer and a product design?

David: In the end it is a gut feeling. When skill, experience, talent of a designer comes together with a good, open, trustful personal relationship, in the right moment and in the right place. I'm usually very critical, but on the other hand I feel quite soon if a collaboration will work out.

Can you tell us a little bit about the presentation of Karimoku New Standard at Salone del Mobile 2018, please. Why will it be special?

David: In the past years, our concept was to exhibit in "real" spaces, in apartment buildings in the city of Milan as part of the Fuori Salone. It was important to us to show that our fur-

niture, despite its contemporary and unique character, is fitting into every kind of space, eastern and western, new and old, private and public. Also, the real spaces reflected our strive to make honest, quality wooden furniture that does not have to pretend, but that is made for everyday life.

Since last year (2017) we are showing at the Salone Del Mobile fair. Naturally, being at a trade fair, the exhibition stand is not a "real" space but a temporary mise-en-scene.

So instead of faking a real interior space, the stand is designed like a life-size architectural study mock-up. It is taking the shape of an unfinished house, walls, not yet connected divide the space into different areas, each with a different layout and colour that the visitors can explore. The design is abstract, consciously set in between fake and real - as fake as necessary yet as real as possible.

The colors are inspired by artworks of the abstract minimalism.

Why are the new releases presented in April 2018 distinct Karimoku New Standard products?

David: First of all they are of course all made of sustainably grown local Japanese hardwoods and they all reflect the spirit described above. While they appear minimal, almost simple, there is always an element to them that makes them unique and special. Often this element is also technically innovative and challenges the Karimoku know-how. In the case of the Panorama Chair for example, it is the seat and backrest that is bent on one end, while it remains perfectly straight on the other - almost like a sheet of paper. This was actually quite difficult to realise and it constitutes the key element of the chair that defines its unique character.

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