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# Young blood

We travelled to Nottingham to meet up-and-coming design trio Lime Studio, fresh from exhibiting at 100% Design Tokyo with a number of dynamic pieces for the workplace



■ The guys at Lime Studio have barely left the doors of higher education swinging behind them, but already they are wasting no time in getting themselves noticed in the professional design world. Matthew Dabbs, 23, from Chelmsford in Essex, Cypriot-born Panos Vasiliou, 24, plus 23-year-old Oscar Tange, who is half Japanese and half Swiss, make up this multicultural trio currently based in Nottingham.

I've made the trip up to see them in a city that regularly makes the top ten of worst places to live in the UK, but the panoramic skyline viewed from their office window on a sunny day makes it seem quite the opposite. "It's the best light to sketch in," says Vasiliou. Their working environment is lined with their respective computers against one wall and filled with the fruits of their labour in the centre of the space where I interview them. I've barely had a chance to take off my coat, get my notebook out and had a strong espresso placed in my hand before the trio have launched into where they want to be and how they're going to do it.

They've just come back from Japan, where they were exhibiting at 100% Design Tokyo, and it's gone well. They talk of scribbling down their contact details on anything they had to hand as their stash of flyers rapidly disappeared to interested parties from across the world, and have since found themselves an agent in Japan.

Much like Nottingham's best known design luminary Paul Smith, who famously developed a penchant for bringing back objets trouvés from his early trips to Japan, so Lime Studio was fascinated by what it found there too. "We'd just walk around the city, kind of deliberately not knowing where we'd end up," says Dabbs, with Vasiliou adding, "At the shows, the student stuff was amazing, and there was some great architecture and design shops. You kind of get inspired without realising it and I really want to go back again."

All three have just completed a Furniture and Product design degree at Nottingham Trent University. "We met in the first year when we were in the same group and I remember pulling an all-nighter at Oscar's house," says Vasiliou. Instead of completing a placement year with a manufacturer or designer, they decided to form Lime Studio, a move not wholly endorsed by their tutors. I doubt this initial lack of support crossed their minds when they found themselves rubbing shoulders with the great and good of design at the launch of the Puerta America hotel in Madrid. The trio had designed a bathroom accessory for Holger Kehne of Plasma Studio, which was responsible for the fourth floor of the building. They've gone on to do similar work for a number of architects to supplement their main furniture design enterprise. ▢



Top: Heirloom is designed to function as a stool and as a table

Above: Prototype for a wooden desk with tapered legs

Right, clockwise from top left: Leaf low-height rocking chair; Frame floor light; Nonagon triangular coffee table

Left: Oscar Tange (left), Panos Vasiliou (middle), Matthew Dabbs (right)

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Unsurprisingly, given that they all live and work together, the design process is highly collaborative. "Sometimes we'll be sketching the same things in our sketch books, or we'll have a big sheet of paper and work together on it," says Vasiliou. They seem happy to work under the umbrella of Lime Studio rather than their individual designer names, perhaps having seen the success that Leeds' based Naughtone and Newcastle's Deadgood, both made up of similarly ambitious twentysomethings, have enjoyed.

They first came to my attention at the Freerange exhibition for graduate design this year with their triangular Nonagon coffee table, composed of powder-coated steel. "For us to make prototypes being based in Nottingham really helps, as there are quite a lot of metal companies around," says Dabbs. Aimed more squarely at the office market is Piano, a storage unit in polypropylene, which was shortlisted for a design competition for Greek office furniture producer Dromeas. "I don't know why more young designers don't do office furniture," Dabbs continues. "It's a very big market." Both Leaf, a low-height rocking chair, and Heirloom, which functions as both a stool or a table, could be possibilities for a brainstorming area or lobby, and the studio is currently putting the finishing touches to some new office furniture entitled The Butterfly Series. The trio is also half way through prototyping a wooden desk with "legs that taper down like toothpicks," says Tange. He then shows me the Frame floor light, which, with its 14mm-thick frame, is really rather elegant given its height.

Lime Studio was also part of the inaugural 100% Futures – 100% Design's emerging talent zone. "We really didn't know what was going to happen," says Dabbs. "We just wanted to get our name out there. Afterwards it gives you the motivation to keep on going." Their persistence is beginning to pay off too. Post 100%, they caught the eye of Spanish stone company Levantina, and are currently exploring the design properties of ceramics for a range of furniture concepts to be exhibition in Milan in 2008. I wouldn't be surprised if other manufacturers soon follow, such is their ceaseless enthusiasm (combined with a healthy dose of self-promotion). It's a good job they've got the talent to back it up. Dabbs sums up their approach: "We've just got to go out there and do it ourselves." ☒



Top: Leaf allows the user to adopt multiple positions

Above: Filing cabinet prototype for the office market

Right: Medusa light, which features elastic glowing stems

