

The designers reinventing paper

It's cheap, fragile and throwaway, right? Wrong. Tom Morris talks to the designers who are reinventing paper

Tom Morris | August/September 2018

When Thomas Barger, a 25-year-old American artist, moved from Illinois to New York he had a problem: money. "I was really inspired by living in New York," he says, "but it costs a lot. I needed a way to make it work with little money involved." The solution he found was in paper. He took old copies of the Yellow Pages and bags of shredded paper from dumpsters outside Manhattan offices and pulped them in his kitchen blender. Then, using layers of paper, glue, resin and paint, he would encase old wooden chair frames and reinvent them as lumpy, cutely misshapen pieces of furniture evocative of a child's imagination (pictured). The pieces, begun out of penury, now sell for as much as \$25,000.

Barger is one of a number of artists and designers playing with our perceptions of paper. He turns something that is cheap and disposable into something artful. José Lévy, a French product designer, is making furniture from it to show that it isn't fragile either. Lévy was asked by Daiken, a Japanese materials manufacturer, to make a range of furniture out of washi, the traditional Japanese paper. Lévy, whose father had a company that manufactured kimonos, uses paper that has been woven like tatami matting to cover the surfaces of chairs and benches, cabinets and tables. "It's real furniture," he says. "You don't have to be afraid of it."

Octaevo, a Barcelona-based stationery company, is working in a similar vein. A homeware brand that began life in 2013 producing notebooks, it now sells paper vases perforated with polka-dot patterns or decorated with graphic floral and geometric prints. If you want to use them for flowers, they recommend putting a glass inside, but spillages aren't a problem. "We use a paper that includes fabric fibres, which makes its surface repel water," says Marcel Baer, Octaevo's founder.



Ingo Maurer, a German designer, prefers not to reinvent paper but to use it in its most everyday form in a disarmingly tongue-in-cheek way. In 1998, he made a chandelier called Zettel'z by hanging dozens of A5 sheets (either blank or printed with poems and quotes) from steel prongs. This April he unveiled his Koyoo floor lamp (above), consisting of a piece of paper softly swinging on a thin wire. It is at once magical and unapologetically papery.