

Impact studies

Studio Swine isn't the only firm thinking about design beyond floor plans and paint chips. These DesignTO shows explore the discipline's impact on everything from housing affordability to future cities



SURFACE TENSION

A dozen local and international artists and designers showcase work that explores the many dualities of water: its force and magic, lightness and dark, stillness and movement. The show engages visitors to think about water from a broad point of view, including topics such as waste, habitat, climate change, access, survival, power and beauty.

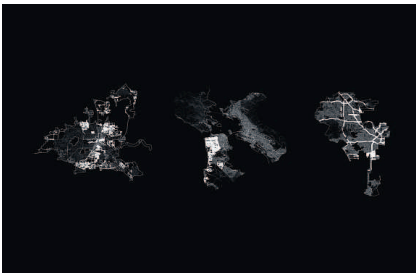
Jan. 18 to March 3 at Harbourfront Centre's Artport Gallery (235 Queens Quay W.).



EXPERIENCES OF AFFORDABILITY

So many forces batter housing affordability, with income inequality, rapid urbanization, global warming and geopolitical fragility at the top of the list. The rapid pace of technology is changing how we think about home, and this exhibition explores how designers can be at the forefront of helping to shape a more humane and inclusive world.

Jan. 19 to Jan. 26 at Institute without Boundaries (230 Richmond St. E.).



URBAN SENSORIUM

Sight. Smell. Touch. Sound. Taste. This project uses the five senses to anticipate what the future may hold for five cities (Shanghai, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Houston). Taking into consideration factors such as potential energy, ecology, climate, transit and food scenarios, field workers found New York might get brighter, Los Angeles quieter and Shanghai spicier.

Through to Jan. 26 at Urbanspace Gallery (401 Richmond St. W.).



IDEAS FORUM: WATERSHED TO WATERFRONT

The Ideas Forum features fun and fast-paced presentations of 20 slides that flash every 20 seconds exploring water and all its facets. The speedy pace is designed to get you guessing and thinking about water's relationship with humans and its impact on everything from aesthetics, culture, politics, poetry and ecology.

Jan. 24 at IBI's Multipurpose Room (55 St. Clair Ave. W.).



ECO-DESIGN SYMPOSIUM

With the eco-crisis unfolding all around us, ecological design has never been more important. Architects, engineers, designers and students begin with the premise that each action we take has a dramatic impact on fragile ecosystems and biodiversity. Participants share examples of how smart and sensitive ecological design can positively and directly intervene.

Jan. 19 at the Bakery (2 Fraser Ave.).

— G.M.

For more information, visit designto.org.

PHOTOS FROM TOP: PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIT LAB, INSTITUTE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES, XL LAB, LUCAS MURNAGHAN, ROB AND MICHELLE AVIS

Zac Posen and Monogram have teamed up to 'elevate everything.'
COURTESY OF MONOGRAM



Zac attack

Designer Zac Posen has made his mark in fashion with his glamorous eveningwear. Now, as **Matthew Hague** reports, the New Yorker – and Interior Design Show guest – has set his sights on lifestyle guru status

Zac Posen pays a lot of attention to detail. I know this not from the fashion designs that brought the 38-year-old New Yorker fame, although he does craft beautifully nuanced dresses for the likes of actors Claire Danes, Uma Thurman and a myriad other women who walk the red carpet at glitzy events such as the annual Met Gala and the Academy Awards. Instead, I gleaned his commitment to precision when I tried to follow the recipe for chocolate chip cookies from his debut cookbook, *Cooking with Zac*.

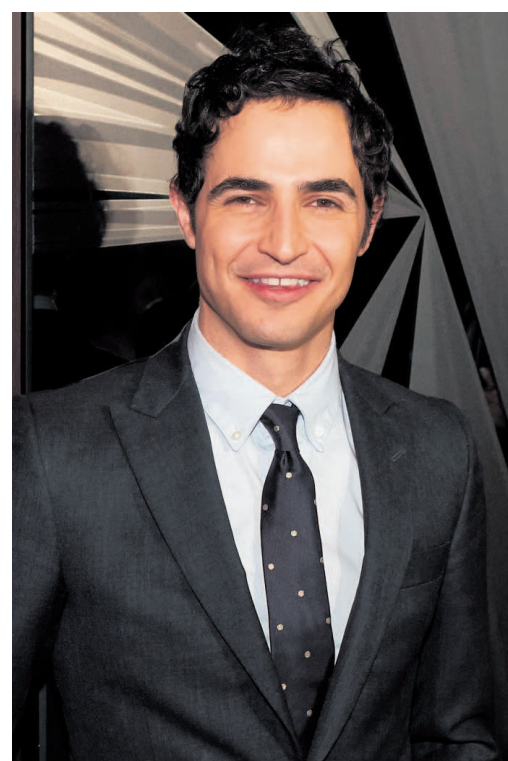
The first clue to his particularity was that I was instructed to brown the butter in a pan until it looked like “deep mahogany with a hazelnut scent,” a necessary extra step, Posen wrote, because “with so many cookies in the world, it's the fine touches that count.” The second indication was that I had to hand-press the chips into the top of the dough to achieve “a polished and professional look.” Clearly, this is not a treat for a lazy baker.

I made the cookies as a test. I had recently met Posen at a food and wine festival in Newport, R.I. The event was held at Marble House, a Gilded Age mansion decked out in enough gold leaf to make Donald Trump blush (it was built after some of the Vanderbilt family travelled to Versailles and decided they'd like an equally opulent abode). And I was surprised to see that Posen was headlining the event, not only promoting the cookbook but also a new fridge door produced by luxury appliance brand Monogram (the aspirational appliance, fabricated from mirror-polished, charcoal-coloured steel and etched with lines that look like draped fabric, is an interior-design equivalent to fashion's haute couture; it's not for sale at any retail stores but is meant to inspire decorators to come up with their own creative custom paneling).

It all made me wonder: Does someone who works in an industry that often seems antithetical to food actually know anything about cuisine? Not to suggest that skinny people such as Posen, who was looking trim in a hand-tailored Brooks Brothers suit, don't know how to cook, but there was a cynical part of me that thought: He's just left *Project Runway* and fashion can be intensely fickle (as outlined in the 2017 doc about him, *House of Z*, which showed how he was a fashion do one minute, a fashion don't the next), so maybe he's trying to capitalize on the celebrity-chef trend as a career Plan B?

But later in the day, when I got a few minutes to chat with him after he signed about a trillion autographs and ran a kung pao shrimp cooking demo, he quickly clarified that fashion people not only eat, but eat – gasp! – carbs. “There are many supermodels that I know – I mean, Naomi [Campbell], Heidi [Klum] – who can eat pizza,” he says. “But they also work out, so it's all moderation and balance.”

He also clarified that his kitchen conquests are less about pivoting, more about speaking to a broader audience. In part,



he's taking after people such as Martha Stewart, who transcended her original, homemaking genre to become a fully-fledged lifestyle brand. “I've watched her since I was a little kid,” he says. “I got her first book. I'm inspired by how she's built her empire.”

Pivot or otherwise, trying to move into a new space can be risky and often falls flat (does anyone remember Tyra Banks's music career?). But what might set Posen up for success in his new ventures is that “they are authentic to him,” says Natasha Koifman, a Toronto and New York-based branding, communications expert and Posen devotee. According to Koifman, the pitfalls of branching out “usually involve doing brand deals for the sake of brand deals [i.e., money]. But Zac genuinely loves cooking. It's all over his Instagram.”

Beyond social media, one of Posen's personal friends, Canadian philanthropist Suzanne Rogers, vouches for the legitimate interest. “Zac's dynamic flair isn't only reflected in his remarkable designs but also in his culinary skills,” she says. “Whether in his studio or his kitchen, it is wonderful fun watching him express his tremendous creativity.”

To Posen, who will be in Toronto showcasing his work with Monogram at the Interior Design Show's opening night party, on Jan. 17, the common denominator between food and fashion is that he does both largely by hand (and, in fact, that's why he agreed to work with Monogram: they hand-finish their appliances). “Being hands-on is so important,” Posen says. “I believe that what you put into a product emotionally actually extends into the final product and into the use by the consumer. They feel it when they put on the clothing, or, if it's an oven or a fridge, it comes through to what they cook. ... Not that the products always have full souls or character. But I honestly believe it makes a difference.”

In a world built for speed, that commitment to detail and craft might mean Posen's expansion into lifestyle takes time (his cookbook was close to three years in the making). But if his cookies are any indication, it will be worth the wait. Browning the butter and placing each chocolate chip took forever. But eating the nutty, sweet goodness was such an ineffable pleasure, I've made the recipe several times since.

Special to The Globe and Mail

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ZAC POSEN



MICHAEL BACA

Another creative chameleon

Zac Posen isn't the only multi-hyphenate poised to make a splash at this year's Interior Design Show (IDS), which runs from Jan. 17 to 20 in Toronto. Ahmir Khalib Thompson (better known as Questlove), the drummer, DJ, producer and musical director for *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, will headline The Globe and Mail's Jan. 19 programming with a talk that coincides with the launch of his latest endeavour, Creative House. Thompson, who penned the culinary interview compendium *Something to Food About* in 2016 and recently worked with housewares retailer Williams-Sonoma on a collection of gourmet popcorn seasonings and accessories, is part of a generation that's breaking down the walls between creative disciplines through constant collaboration. Creative House aims to bring together those diverse voices to develop products and experiences. At IDS, Globe lifestyle editor Maryam Siddiqi will moderate a discussion between him and his Creative House business partner Adam Sandow and Questlove will be on site after the chat to sign copies of his bestselling book, *Creative Quest*. For more information, visit interiordesignshow.com.

— ANDREW SARDONE