

# Interiors

## Smart materials for intelligent design

Interiors group Geppetto creates 'design without stress'. **Tibor Sáringér** homes in on walls with ears, breathing flowers and cloud nine for daily life.

Pinocchio's master, Geppetto, may have breathed life into wood, but this Geppetto, one of Hungary's most inventive and innovative design studios, has given their material brains. Twelve years old and now a group of seven, Geppetto has been experimenting to empower interior design by creating clever but functional household items, stunning and user-aware furniture, and smart personal and public spaces that respond to what's happening in them.

It's a long shot from woodwork. Currently on Geppetto's agenda is a wall, a 'sound-driven thermo chromatic surface', to be precise. It utilises an interaction between sound and heat to display an ever-changing space of movement and colour in synch with the volume of noise in the room. The surface is equipped with tiny microphones and heating pads that activate thermo chromatic pigments of various colours around them – the noisier the room, the more intense the change of colours and the more dynamic the shapes they create in the process. This wall really does have ears.

### 'When you imagine something, you can also make it.'

An almost unlikely launch, Geppetto, officially established in 1996, started as a home renovation project. Brothers Márton and Máté Elek moved into their first apartment, and designed and refurbished a home that their friends adored and wanted. By word of mouth, the brothers earned work to design and build lofts in Budapest's high ceiling apartments, and as the pool of ideas expanded, so did the learning curve.

'My father is an engineer, my mother a painter and photographer. We were brought up thinking that when you imagine something, you can also make it. Plus I have a background in IT, I also have a degree from the technical university, then I studied sociology and I even managed a band', recalls Márton Elek. 'As we were testing the boundaries



of interior design, we sponged knowledge from carpenters, welders, everybody. We'd get on their nerves and then in the end, some would admit that they actually learnt something new in the trade they'd thought they knew.'

Geppetto now focuses on three areas: product design, interior design and G-lab, a futurology division. Their first furniture was born out of a Singer sewing machine. Their signature egg cup, a delicate construct of three spoons bent to accommodate an egg, emerged as

### Cool but practical Márton Elek and designs he creates with his brother

Elek's brother Máté was fiddling with small spoons in a welding workshop, looking for a solution to create a brochure holder. Their lamp, its shade a comforting soft red, closes and opens by a zip to allow for more or less light and ambience control. 'It's not all furniture: at the moment, we're working on a pre-natal device that attaches to the stomach of pregnant women to play stimulating music to the foetus,' Elek reveals.

As the team encountered various client needs and requests, their scope broadened in the direction of full-service home creation. On display in the shop is a kitchen module, ideal for a small bachelor pad: the work station is compact but satisfies all basic kitchen needs, while the whole unit opens and closes like a cupboard, with its doors sliding into invisibility into the sides to reveal the kitchen, or covering the whole unit, hiding it behind a pleasant wooden surface.

For their briefings, the team first gets to know the client's lifestyle, observing the tiniest revealing detail, to 'find out what they want and need, and why they started a home creation process', Márton Elek explains. 'One of our projects took us to Islington, in London, to overhaul a

four-storey terraced house, complete with furniture. We're also busy converting an abandoned Soviet-era underground ammunition storage network into apartments in the Czech Republic. It's a complex commission from wiring and appliances to interior design.'

While Elek says they love all the work they do, the most sensational developments come out of G-lab, which borders on soft architecture, designed to make buildings more liveable. Besides the wall with ears, Geppetto also invented a wall with breathing flowers. Designed to aerate rooms, the venting is channelled through faux flowers in the wall, whose petals open up as more air is circulated. So far so simple – the wall however senses how many people are in the room and controls the air flow accordingly, creating a dynamic wall sculpture as the room load changes. Another room device, Cloud, is a modular system of ultrasonic humidifiers to wrap objects in a mist.

'We take inspiration from smart materials to create something that knows something', Elek concludes. Times and materials have changed but Geppetto's magic remains.

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