

CARIOCA POST



Hubert Zandberg

Curating comes intuitively to South African interior designer Hubert Zandberg.

Building small and humble collections as a child, Zandberg's fervour for sourcing and collating objects of interest has since been honed and now manifests in the work of his design firm, 'Hubert Zandberg Interiors' and his elegant collection of Brazilian mid-century furniture.

Like Jean-Michel Ruis, Hubert Zandberg stumbled across Brazilian design fortuitously whilst on holiday in the South American country and was enchanted by it instantly.

He expresses that he,

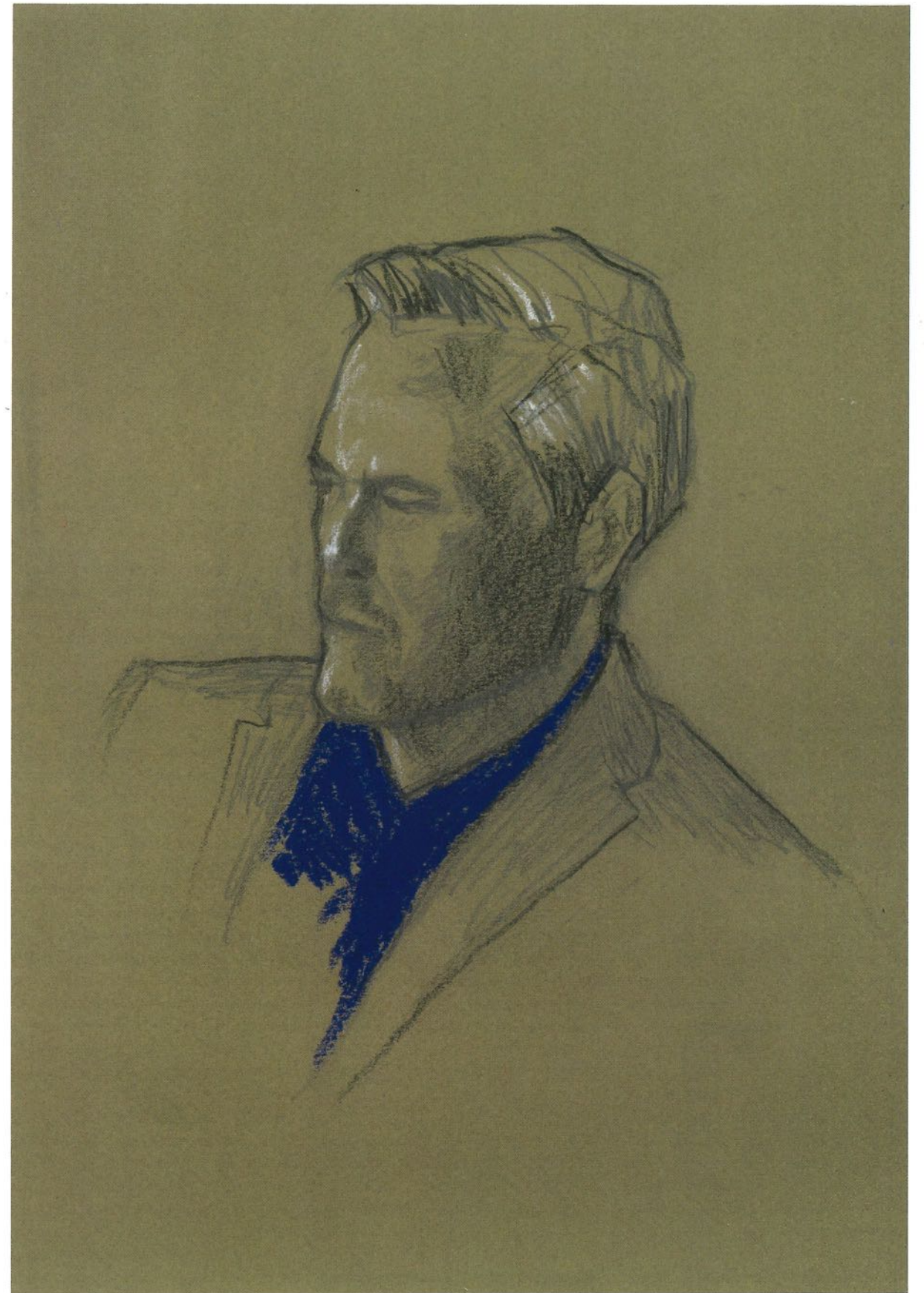
"discovered this incredibly buoyant and vibrant art scene but more than that,

this historic design scene, that came as rather a surprise. I was vaguely aware of it all, but I really immersed myself during the first visit and decided to collect."

Though most who have the opportunity to encounter Brazilian design in person are taken with the creative endeavours of the likes of Sergio Rodrigues, Zanine Caldas and Joaquim Tenreiro, Zandberg has an almost sentimental relationship to Brazilian design and even, culture. He talks of a serendipitous relationship between Brazil and his homeland, South Africa, citing similarities and differences that have effected their respective creative outputs.

"The South African connection has a certain relevance because, of course, socio-politically there are interesting

common points; they're both developing countries with a certain colonial history and emerging artists etc. Except there's one very important difference and that is that Brazil has this incredible fresh perspective that comes via the influence the varied European immigrants and the fact that the authorities, effectively, made it national policy to create what I call a 'national style'. This has created this incredibly strong cornerstone for the architecture and design community; particularly with these creatives embracing Bauhaus. Where I find the rest of South America and Africa, certainly South Africa, kind of went with what I call this 'tropics group' style, where they embrace that sort of tropical aesthetic, and whilst Brazilian designer show this in certain elements of their design – it's evident if you think of the work of Zanine Caldas there is also brutalism, a sense of the



tropics that's lifted with an underlying, modernist tone, which I believe anchors it and gives it a certain gravitas."

Continuing to explain,

"I find that designs from the developing world are often very tropical or 'ethnic', with pieces that are regarded as craft, and while I have no problem with craft—indeed there's some amazing craft that is wonderful to accessorise with—for me, proper design stands the test of time and has a certain rigour that you find in the Brazilian concept. Brazilian design is so heavily underpinned by Bauhaus or 'modernism'.

There was this interesting dialogue for me, as an African between what South Africa could be doing and what Brazil has been doing for decades. You can see the underlying brutalism of it in the modernist architecture, but you can also observe the juxtaposition of brutalism in a tropical environment, which makes it so aesthetically powerful and which emphasises what these designers do. I often say Brazilian design gives modernism 'a bossa nova feel', or 'bossa nova flow', and it does it with these incredible natural materials,

and always with a little flourish of the organic and of the free spirit of the people. I find that the Brazilian culture deals with suffering and political upheaval in such a free-spirited, positive way. When Brazilians face turmoil they simply say, 'Life is too short, let's just go to the beach', and it is that sort of optimism that appeals to me as a fellow Southerner, and someone from a developing country that has to deal with the complexities that the developing world throws at you."

Zandberg's earnest and very personal perspective on Brazil design is translated in the way he curates. He collects pieces for personal consumption, placing them in spaces that may seem unorthodox to some collectors of historical design, such as an apartment in Berlin, where they are juxtaposed with European designs from the same era. He states,

"You have this wonderful juxtaposition: the heritage of the German Bauhaus, with that of Italian design in Brazilian mid-century design. People like Guiseppe Scapinelli went over there and created this interesting dialogue between Brazilian modernism and mid-

century Italian design, where you can compare the work Sergio Rodrigues with someone like Italian designer Gio Ponti, and discover very interesting links or dialogues. People are now creating these comparisons more and more, but fortunately I did it 15 years ago, and saw the value of Brazilian mid-century design before the demand was there. As these pieces were cheaper when I was initially making these connections, I was able to buy an apartment in Berlin to house them and build a collection. I also bought Brazilian art and created my own conversations between this, South African, German art and Brazilian modernist furniture. I view this as bringing the Brazilian Bauhaus back to its origin, which is effectively Berlin, where Bauhaus began. This was a very intuitive journey for me, but it was also enriching; to be able to form these visual conversations individually and immerse myself in it by living with it was very rewarding. There's a real difference curating within my own space and viewing it curated in a museum or gallery."

As an interior design, Hubert Zandberg applies his knowledge and admiration for Brazilian design in a way that people

who solely curate a collection for a public space may not, considering how people live with the piece rather than simply observe them. He explained how he introduces his clients to Brazilian mid-century design and incorporates his love of the field into his work.

"When I started to collect I invited a number of our clients to join a club and suggested that we started to collect together because there are obvious advantages. For instance, there was an apartment in Copacabana that went up for sale and it was entirely designed by Sergio Rodrigues. One of my favourite Rio dealers contacted me about it, and said that they want to sell the entire apartment to one dealer, but he couldn't afford to buy it by himself. I put a little group together on my side, and between two or three clients, myself and this dealer we created a cartel and bought the entire contents, dividing it amongst ourselves, half to him and half to us, and it was wonderful to have. I got the big library, the drinks trolley, the chairs and one or two other things from the apartment, another client has the small library and a buffet in Scotland, and another has a set of chairs, a coffee table and a bench in Hamilton Terrace.

This wonderful diaspora happened in a very organic way.

We (Hubert Zandberg Designs) have a very eclectic style and we encourage our clients to be clever when they do the interiors of their houses; we advise that it's worth having a small amount of really good pieces that build a collection and start a certain dialogue, and they often buy into this idea. Of course Brazilian modernist pieces have to juxtapose and fit into a wider project for us, and they do that rather easily."

Another manner in which Hubert Zandberg compares to Jean-Michel Ruis is in the difficulty that one has in defining who their favourite designer might be, as both of their collections are so rich and varied. However Zandberg very quickly distinguishes a few for us.

"I love Zanini de Zanine's work, but it's the contemporary Brazilian artists that I'm really interested by, and I like to combine more classic pieces with the contemporary art.

The master of all architects

internationally for me is Oscar Niemeyer, he's always been my design hero, and I had the privilege to meet him before he passed away. And then of course, Sergio Rodrigues who I also loved meeting, but I'd say in terms of a furniture designer, Joaquim Tenreiro is really my ultimate, personal favourite."

Though Zandberg resides mainly in London, he is also enthralled with Brazilian culture holistically and applies aspects of their lifestyle to his daily life, stating,

"Whether it's with regards to design, or whether it's how you dress, there's a sense of freedom and lightness that Brazilians embrace. There's also a certain youthfulness in the culture, or agelessness rather, that appeals very much to me, and you can really apply that to anything, whether it's design, or how you express yourself—that sort of 'ageless optimism' that I experience there and that I hope I achieve.

Stylistically, even in dress, the texture and graphic patterns of Brazil emerge, which again are all about this marriage of nature and graphic design, modernism and nature."