

## The pallet project

Nina Tolstrup



Amistad o Nada workshop

*'I am an admirer of Nina Tolstrup's direct, functional, no-nonsense design.'*

Engaging in issues of sustainability, and how I make a difference as a designer, is very important for the way I run and develop my studio. How can I use design as agent for social change and empowering local communities? The Pallet Project takes this philosophy to a newly interactive conclusion. It consists of pieces of furniture designed from reclaimed pallets: a project of up-cycling. These ubiquitous, rough piece of discarded packaging have been transformed into clean-lined furniture designed to be reproduced in a unique manner. The assembly guidelines for the pallet pieces can be ordered online for £ 10, in order that the furniture can be created from reclaimed pallets anywhere in the world. This collaborative approach bypasses costly and unsound supply chains, while establishing democratic, affordable, and open source design.

The incentive for do-it-yourself or homemade is rarely to save money or out of necessity as in the post-war years. It is much more about environmental issues, social connectivity, and the pleasure of making. An unsuspecting testimony to this has been the pictures of completed pallet chairs that have been sent to me by people from all corners of the world. As a designer, the incentive is to be able to spread my designs without going through the process of assimilating materials, manufacturing, and distributing the product. The connection I make with the consumer is not physical but lies in the transference of the idea.

A believer in the tenet 'Think globally, act locally,' I have given photographer and gallery owner

Cecilia Glik permission to use the pallet designs by Studiomama. Cecilia bought a set of instructions online from my website and contacted me afterwards asking about the possibility to use the pallet chair for starting up a charity project. The charity is based in District 20 in the Lugano neighbourhood of Buenos Aires. This is one of the oldest and most deprived slums in the city. The charity called "Amistad o Nada" teaches unemployed workers how to make this furniture in their cooperative using locally sourced pallets. The furniture is then sold through local networks, creating a source of income for the people in the slums.

Amistad o Nada is a non-profit artistic, social project that offers an alternative form of dignified work for those who are extremely vulnerable to economic and social disparity. The charity creates eco-friendly products and uses recycled materials while profits made from the project are used to expand the workshop and engage more unemployed people from the slums to give them a source of income and hope for the future.

When the project started, the pallets were transported from merchants and construction sites, collected in the street city. Today Amistad o Nada collaborates with a company called Biosciences, which donates its used pallets to the project. There are four full-time workers on the project and five helpers.

There is a great deal of diversity inherent in this project, especially in application. It has been used in middle class house holds the world over, in impoverished neighborhoods, and is

*The Pallet Project is a generous and humble venture that deserves support.* Rachel Whiteread

even gaining recognition by the more economically well-endowed. The well-know London-based artists Gavin Turk, Cornelia Parker, and Rachel Whiteread have supported the charity, customizing a pallet chair each, which has been auctioned off in support of the charity. A limited set of pallet furniture has also been made and sold through an exclusive gallery in London.

This project has a story and continues to evolve exploring this very encompassing situation where design can exist side by side as gallery editions, do-it-yourself instructions, and mass produced units as a community based charity. This multiplicity of use and appreciation should be attributed to the nature of open source design. I do not know if this is part of a shift in practice, but we have seen a lot of changes in other

creative industries, like music and publishing. I think that with this in mind, more open source will find its way into the design scene.

I am currently further exploring this notion, although finding sufficient funding will be an issue. There are setbacks, but this is an area I am interested in and I cannot see why design ideas are not traded as a source of inspiration and knowledge. As in my case, most designers have meters of ideas in sketch books that never will see that daylight once put away. However, with the element of accessibility embedded in open source, and the mantra 'think globally, act locally' the best ideas will not be limited by current systems, and individual ideas will connect with the masses.



*Untitled by Rachael Whiteread*



*Beach Chair by Cornelia Parker*



*Pollocky by Gavin Turk*

