

# A PRESENT FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

The future is in the past and the new way to decorate is to collect and curate.

So says designer Neil Stemmet, and that's exactly what he's done with his inspiring installation at Freeworld Design Centre in Cape Town

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LEFT: Black chair, Twice. Red coat, Farmer's Daughter.  
RIGHT: Long bench 1886 by Koncept Design for Wunders. All other, Koncept Design.  
BELOW: Neil Stemmet of Koncept Design, neil@konceptdesign.co.za.



## “DECOR IS DEAD”

It's a statement that's made quite a name for Koncept Design's Neil Stemmet – along with his extraordinary talent for curating the most unique and inspiring spaces.

Décor is dead. These three bold words were etched in chalk on a wooden table at Neil's Bos Tea House stand at Decorex Cape Town (which won the show's Green Award this year), and they're now the writing on the wall in an equally enticing “pod” at the Freeworld Design Centre. But what do they really mean?

“Department store, warehouse and shop-bought furniture and objects, curtains and scatter cushions that match are dead,” says Neil. “They're soulless, tell no stories and will not be the heirlooms of the future. Instead, you should get away from the forced decorated look by telling your own unique story.”

His latest installation does exactly that. As South Africa's first gallery space dedicated

solely to interior design, the Freeworld Design Centre hosts a new exhibition every three months. Says curator and Head of the Centre Lauren Shantall, “We invite four leading local designers to tackle an umbrella theme in their own distinct design language. So viewers get a varied range of styles and a real sense of each designer's signature.”

## INSPIRATIONS AND INSTALLATIONS

Occupying a floor space of just a few square metres, Neil's pod combines antique and heirloom pieces with more contemporary elements for a rich, textured look. The old-new theme and future-heritage amalgam is made complete by his choice of colours. He marries dark purple with deep, emerald green – a colour combination that also made it onto the radar this year for well-known trend forecaster Li Edelkoort.

“We all think alike,” marvels Neil, “all over

the world. The green shade I used is a ‘future’ colour. It'll go well in a kitchen, bathroom or outside room. The purple is a ‘heritage’ colour and the lemony yellow is a ‘pop’ colour that will work well in one piece of furniture or as a thin dado line. The rest of the colours are timeless: the red exuberates energy and style; the black Hermès bag, vases and chair say ‘timeless elegance’. The beautiful green table is one of my favourites – I love the simplicity in its design.”

Moving away from “matchy-matchy” décor, Neil's installation expressly states – and demonstrates – that “the future lies in the past”. But more than design-forward, it's also eco-conscious to scour secondhand stores and auction houses for lived-in furniture and well-loved pieces. “Recycle old fabrics into quilts, curtains or cushions,” he explains. “Show heirlooms in your home – re-use and reinvent them for they are timeless.”



“In terms of colour, a heritage palette will take people back to a more authentic past, while also shifting them into the future. It’s a bit like the Polaroid app on the iPhone!”



LEFT: Long bench 1886 by Konzept Design for Wunders. Mobile, Lyall Sprong. Photographic art, Konzept Design. OPPOSITE: Black vases, Hemelhuys. All other, Konzept Design.

• Address book on page 86.

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#### A NEW WORLD FOR OLD-WORLD

It’s a return to the era of the trousseau. “We will buy good quality plates and collect dinner services again – even if it means one plate per month,” says Neil. “Whatever we buy must have at least the same lifespan as our own and must be so simple and beautiful in design that future curators will treasure our treasures for generations to come.”

It seems Neil has touched on a general trend that prizes heritage and authenticity over mass production. “We’ve seen a similar shift in food thinking, with the resurgence of traditional cooking and natural, organic

produce,” Lauren concurs. “In terms of colour, a heritage palette will take people back to a more authentic past, while also shifting them into the future. It’s a bit like the Polaroid app on the iPhone!”

Lauren also agrees that over-produced and impersonal schemes say nothing about their creators. “This no longer reflects our Zeitgeist,” she adds. “We’ve moved on culturally – both in how we think and how we express this thinking in our homes.”

Clearly, old is new once again. Yes, décor may be dead, but innovation, self-expression and colourful creative story-telling have never been more alive.