

**FURNITURE DESIGN AND DESIGNERS IN ROMANIA AFTER 1990
CORVIN CRISTIAN: INTERIOR DESIGN AND WORKING WITH WOOD (Part III)**

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Abstract:

A designer who really loves wood, Corvin Cristian succeeds to wield it masterfully and with dedicated craftsmanship, from interior spaces to seating furniture. This paper analyzes his activity during the latest decade, which marks a daring as well as prolific sequence of his creation. He focused substantially on interior design, mostly for bars and restaurants in the historic city center of Bucharest. The creative, original and innovative solutions he found brought credit to his vision and recognition in his profession. The sets of furniture, usually chairs and tables he has designed, either meant for these interiors or for other destinations, highlight his choice for wood, his creativity and his joy when working with it.

Key words: interior design; reused objects; chair design.

INTRODUCTION

Corvin Cristian is an architect, graduate of the University of Architecture and Town Planning „Ion Mincu”, Bucharest. After graduating in 1997, his career went through several important stages, spiralling daringly up toward succes. His debut happened at the end of the 90s when he had an important contribution to the visual identity of ProTV station studio. In this early phase he tried to capture the Hi-Tech atmosphere having various materials at hand, which were spectacularly enhanced by stage lights. Once this assignment was over he started to pay attention to and be attracted by various discarded objects he met on site while documenting interior design projects of the publicity agency where he was then working. Although collecting those objects was somehow instinctive, not on any immediate purpose, to reuse them was intentional and creative, remaining among his preoccupations in the years 2000. To research his ideas means, as Nigel Cross once expressed it so well, to show “his ability to produce efficient, effective, imaginative and stimulating designs...therefore important to all of us.”(Cross 2011)

Corvin Cristian is a personality whose cognitive abilities, professional ethics and creative thinking have to be better known and discussed.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this study is to present an innovative and highly original Romanian interior and furniture designer and to illustrate and analyze concrete and significant aspects of his body of work.

METHODS

This paper is the result of the two methods that I used over several years in my research, which are: a. the direct approach, that is a face-to-face dialogue and interview with the designer and b. the documented study and analysis of his design process, vision and evolution as member of the Romanian designer community. (Sabau 2017)

DISCARDED OBJECTS USED CREATIVELY

Endeavouring to define his own personality and find a direction in his profession, Corvin Cristian started to build up a special style for himself through recovering and making use of discarded objects. Initially without a previously established plan he had started to deposit many such objects, thus building up a huge collection of chairs, windows and doors, lamps, light switches, industrial inscriptions and items, etc. Charged with significant meanings, with personal and local stories, they attracted the designer immensely and made him investigate and develop this idea. He decided to reuse them in some „atmospheric” interior design projects and started to talk about the suggestive “memory of the place” where these heterogenous objects reunited in an adequate space pointed out mnemonic qualities (Ghenciulescu 2013a). The varied area of his creation in this context has to be highlighted, together with the novel approach of interior design, as well as the consistence and coherence of the solutions, from the design concept to the name of the place. The logo and the fine-spun details contributed decisively to the atmosphere and delighted many customers who savored them culturally.

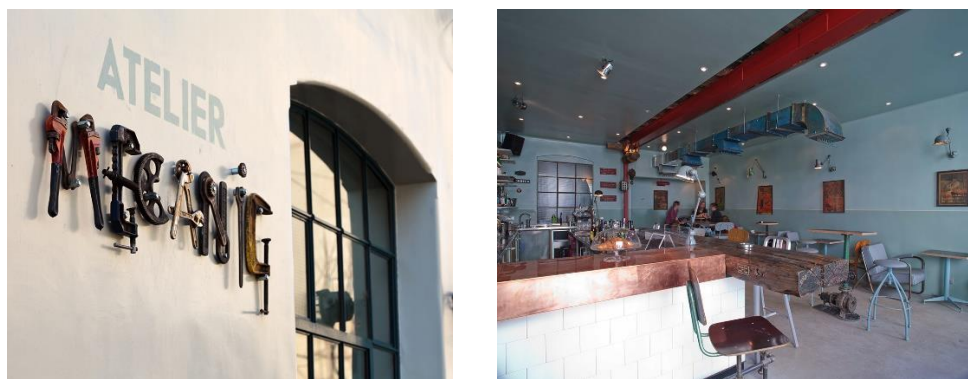


Fig. 1.
Bar „Atelier mecanic”, logo and interior, Bucharest, 2011.

A good example is the “Atelier mecanic” Bar, finalized in 2011. Located in the old city center of Bucharest, the bar is almost a reenactment of a repair shop, an idea inspired from the atmosphere of the 60s- and 70s city center, when such shops were blooming (Fig. 1). Just like in the case of „Papiota/(Spool)” Bar, also finalized in 2011, we are confronted here with a „scenic” intervention, where the selected props are functional and have a peculiar, obsolete industrial appeal: chairs with metallic tubular legs having their seat and back made of melamine plywood, pivoting industrial chairs, armchairs covered with synthetic leather, hinged metal lamps (Fig. 2).

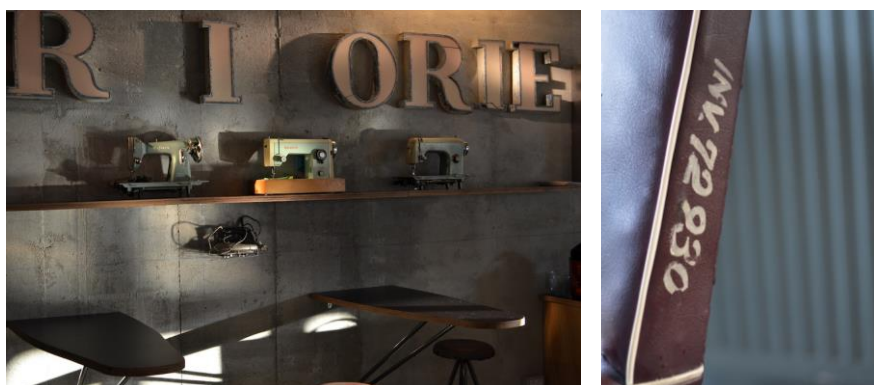


Fig.2.
„Papiota/(Spool)” Bar, interior and furniture detail with industrial-type inventory number, Bucharest, 2011.

The designer pays a lot of attention to various associations of materials (chrome and synthetic leather for example) and to juxtapositions of objects (blue-grey fayence and chairs with painted metal legs). At the same time he is extremely careful with the details that refine the interior and contribute to the undoubtable „flavour” of a repair shop from the socialist era: the color blue (a certain gloomy blue-grey), grimly painted metal parts, sad oil-painted lower parts of walls.

A project from 2012 announces the designer’s preference for wood. It happened at the „Bon” Restaurant, where the industrial inventory is replaced with the domestic one, that is with found/recovered wooden objects like doors and window frames. Here more than 200 various pieces were used to cover the walls. Observing this original way of panelling walls, one may take it as a good joke, while others would see it as an esthetic attitude. It may be seen as part of a Vintage trend, because the doors are old and keep the original paint layers (Fig. 3).



Fig.3.
„Bon” Restaurant, interior details, București, 2012.

Stefan Ghenciulescu, reputed editorialist of “Zeppelin - Architecture. Town. Society” magazine wrote in 2013: “Besides grand operations (generally stopped by the crisis) in Romania interventions multiply, through which humble things not only become useful, but get a special shine. Their recovery is an ethic action: almost always it is more sustainable to keep and add value than to destroy.”(Ghenciulescu 2013b)

WOOD DESIGN BECOMES AN OPTION

Towards the middle of 2010 the interest for working with discarded/vintage objects does not diminish but the designer finds also other modes of expression. Corvin Cristian starts to associate furniture created by himself with some of the recovered objects. A good example are the chairs ironically called „Takîm”/(Cutlery), designed in 2016 for the „Sardin” Restaurant, again in the historic center of Bucharest (Fig. 4).

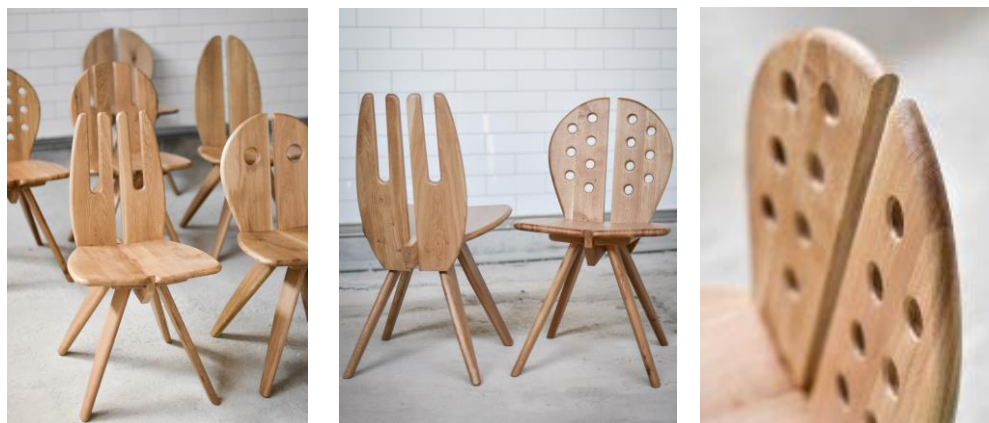


Fig.4.
„Takîm/Cutlery” chair set and details, oak wood, 2016.

Fact is he uses irony as a constant ingredient for his creation - he serenely mentioned that „fun and jokes are my main preoccupation” (Sabau 2017).

The „Takîm” chairs are robust, they show full forms and and fine finishing able to highlight the oak wood texture. These chairs are a result of the collaboration with a Romanian company specialized in traditional furniture, a connection which accentuates the interest the designer has for crafts: wood processing, surface finishing, wood joints and accessories.

The interior design of his „Sardin” Restaurant makes use of a huge amount of kitchen instruments. Various recipients for cooking and setting the table as well as instruments for preparing food are grouped either to configure lighting devices – a kind of „chandelier”, or they become decorative compositions organized on the walls (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5.
Interior „Sardin” Restaurant, interior restaurant, Bucharest, 2016.

WOOD AND WOOD AGAIN

The chairs created by Corvin Cristian until now emphasize the preference for wood, of which he feels so attached. He frequently uses solid wood in his chair design. The chairs „Takîm/(Cutlery)” are made of solid oak wood. They mark the moment when the designer becomes interested by objects able to highlight wood, seen as a natural material and bearer of specific joinery techniques.

The „Agape” set of furniture, created in 2016 for the „Pâine și Vin”/(Bread and Wine) Restaurant, composed of tables, bar chairs and dining chairs, the designer used solid ash wood. The construction of the „Agape” set of furniture located here uses classic wood joints, highlighting its natural, almost „raw” quality, alluding to a rural environment. Thus the entire furniture set is made of solid wood, with no finish, no lacquer, no chromatic intervention or diverse materials insertions. (Fig. 6,7).

The same happens with the „Yo” chair, where the designer adds more seating comfort by introducing two pairs of contrasting horizontal elements made of walnut wood between that connect the three components of the back. The subtle curve created at the back and also at the seat lends a softer, human-friendly aspect to the chair (Fig. 8).



Fig. 6.
„Pâine și Vin”/(Bread and Wine) Restaurant, interior with „Agape” chairs and table, 2016.



Fig. 7.
„Agape” chairs, front view and back view, ash wood, 2016.



Fig. 8.
„Yo” chair, solid ash wood with inserted walnut wood, 2016.

The „DCP” chair shows that Corvin Cristian started to choose, besides solid wood, veneered plywood, an economic option, given the large number of chairs who were going to be manufactured. In this project he joined modern design to an artisanal vision, the result being an object belonging to contemporary urban culture (Fig. 9).

Slightly inspired by Charles Eames and Jean Prouvé, the „DCP” chair reinterprets models that became symbols of the avantgarde 20th century design. Plywood, plain, bent, molded and/or veneered, is still a popular and ubiquitous material in the 21st century, used by important designers, either focused on function and minimal cost or on high-end sophisticated models. The „DCP” chair has ingenious, contrasting metal assembly elements which contribute to an innovative structure, highlighting every component and suggesting toughness. The front and back legs are made of solid ash wood, the seat and backrest are made of birch-veneered plywood.

The association of solid wood with plywood continues as we can see it at the „Mouton” chair. The result is in this case a supple, flexible and light object, a discreet presence with a friendly personality. The designer chose again solid ash for the legs and ash-veneered plywood for the seat and backrest (Fig. 10).

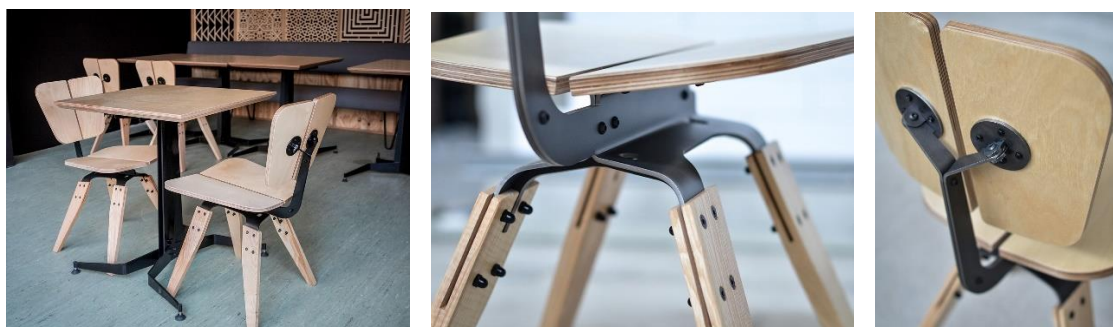


Fig. 9.
„DCP” chair, ash wood legs, seat and backrest made of birch - veneered plywood, 2017.



Fig. 10.

„Mouton” chair, solid ash wood and ash-veneered plywood, 2019.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Corvin Cristian remains a solitary figure when, due to his highly creative impulse to reuse discarded objects, he approaches the „recycling through reusing” design concept which lacks popularity among the Romanian design community, although it has strong supporters when seen from the perspective of professional ethics.

His skills with wood design, his knowledge and understanding of wood as well as his original and witty vision when dealing with interior design are widely appreciated, enjoying a well-deserved popularity. His important connections with traditional wood crafts and also with wood processing techniques and technology stimulate his further design experiments of form, composition, color and texture with wood, plywood and other wood-based products.

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