

# Theo Williams

## The journey so far

Designer and creative director Theo Williams' career has seen him progress from designing products for Alessi, Lexion and Prada to a position as Head of Design for John Lewis Home via five years as Creative Director of Habitat following on from Sir Terence Conran and Tom Dixon. It's a path that's seen him demolish the boundaries between design disciplines, variously tackling product and furniture alongside print, packaging, retail and brand development. His skill is to provoke new and better ways of thinking that enable retailers and brands as well as buyers and manufacturers to better realise their goals. As such, he's currently bringing his extensive experience to bear on projects that are inspiring a broad spectrum of international brands and labels.

The studio launch marks the start of the exciting next stage of Williams' journey, focusing on creative direction and product design across a range of innovative and inspiring new projects. It's a journey that began way back in 1991 when, as a fresh-faced graduate, Williams spent weeks trudging the streets of Milan, portfolio in hand, cold-calling on design studios and designers like James Irvine, Achille Castiglioni and Marco Zanuso. Around that time, while attending a lecture by Alberto Alessi, Williams intervened, uninvited, to show his student portfolio. His tenacity – some might say, audacity - paid off; Williams received a brief from Alessi, leading to the design of the Alessi Honey Pot and Sugar Jar. To date, in excess of 150,000 have been sold worldwide and Williams remains the youngest ever designer to have designed under the coveted Alessi banner.

At the start of 1992, Italo Lupi, editor of the renowned Domus magazine, featured Williams' work in his final edition of the magazine – Williams was just 23 years old.

The article, written by Enrico Morteo, commented how, on occasion, "...British designers assume a very direct approach, and this enables their objects to capture all the complexity of a given situation, without overloading them with Baroque semantic implications. These much-esteemed young designers include Jasper Morrison, Ron Arad, Nigel Coates and Mark Newson. Theo Williams seems to have some relation with their approach." After seeing the article in Domus magazine featuring the kids camera and radio Williams designed at college, the owners of Technogym approached him, simply because they liked the design.



Domus 1992



Technogym 1993



Nava Milano 1995



Alessi 1995

# Theo Williams

Williams' early years in Milan, working for Technogym, where he designed the XT cardio fitness range, and as in-house product designer for Nava Design, exposed him to the working methods of in-house development and, importantly, the process of industrial printing. His experience at Nava Press, where graphics and printing were combined intensively to produce high quality materials for the Italian fashion houses, was career defining.

Williams explains: "I was fascinated by the guys at Nava, especially the printing and packaging production, their wealth of knowledge from the old printing methods being adapted to the new digital machine. When I arrived in '91 they were clearing out the old wooden blocks from the past, they were still using them! But it was the attention to detail and perfection the Italians taught me; they were simply perfectionists at the design, printing and production. I remember them fondly, they were my second family."

That desire for his designs to be simple, strong and straightforward has been woven into the fabric of Williams' design philosophy ever since. As Dario Moretti put it in his article in Ottogano in 2000, "In a few years, Williams has created a series of small objects that insert themselves into the daily scene with a tranquil but precise identity....Williams is a designer who makes materials talk."

He went on to develop packaging for Prada, Ferragamo and Armani. Indeed, Williams' understanding of how industrial methods underpin great design has remained a constant throughout his career: "I could see that design was about so much more than the product. I wanted to reach much further into the mechanisms of a working company; the construction of an image, the direction for the company as whole, how my products were made, produced, packaged and communicated."

That ethos was clear to see in his work for the French design company, Lexon. They lured Williams to Paris for two weeks a month to 'bring soul to their products', as their Paris based Art Director. Commenting on his influence at Lexon, House & Garden Magazine described how "Williams' design spirit has already infused everything from the packaging to the catalogue to the items themselves...." Intramouros. His 'OYO' computer cord for Lexon was later awarded the Design Plus Award in 2002.



Prada Milano 1995



Laurent Perrier 1999



Lexon 2001



Lexon 2000

His collaboration with Japanese company Mono Comme Ça incorporated the development of shop design, packaging and displays, as well as the products themselves. Meanwhile, projects for Salvatore Ferragamo, Giovanni Testino and – during a two-year stopover in Amsterdam – for Mexx, as Design Director, cemented Williams' credentials as creative director as well as designer, across the design capitals of Europe.

Williams's grand tour of Europe brought him back to the UK in 2006 to become Head of Design for Habitat. Notably, the SS09 collection received many plaudits; the season focused on pure design of the product and steered away from the high street narrative of a seasonal collection, focusing instead on well-developed and designed products representing contrasting production techniques.

His 2009-2010 catalogue for Habitat marked a turning point for Williams and for the company. It represented the culmination of all his experiences over the years, showcasing the home and the city as the Habitat we live in. Combining a real sense of honesty of observations about where we live, it met with critical acclaim and resonated perfectly with the heritage of Habitat.

An influential two-year spell as Head of Design for John Lewis followed. With a remit for the design strategy for home seasonal collections, Williams made his mark with the creation of the innovative and inspiring 'HOUSE' brand. John Lewis commented that, "... his work on the 'HOUSE' range in particular has created an important legacy for our home product assortment."

Williams is without doubt one of the few influential British designers who not only create a sleek and industrial style from furniture to stationery, melting graphics and materials together; he also understands the industry, the costs and the process of manufacturing, and applies that understanding of the market to his products.

Perhaps no surprise then that his journey has brought him full circle, with the opening of his own studio in Queens Park, London. His journey continues with a renewed focus on creative direction, brand building and product design across a range of inspirational projects.



Lexon 2001



Ferragamo 2003



Habitat 2006/11



John Lewis  
2011/13

# Theo Williams

Theo Williams Ltd  
Design & Creative  
Direction

Theo Williams Ltd  
The Studio  
5 Lonsdale Road  
London NW6 6RD

[thewilliams.com](http://thewilliams.com)

For further information

Please contact the studio: [info@thewilliams.com](mailto:info@thewilliams.com)



TW