

DESIGN FOR LIVING

MATERIAL, PROCESS AND EVERYDAY OBJECTS

CASA RIA

DESIGN FOR LIVING

At a time of change, we must reflect on what design is for. Every time we make something we make design decisions. These decisions are based on appropriateness, performance, technique, purpose and even beauty. Design is not an end in itself, it is a means to serve us, to improve our lives. For design to be meaningful, it needs to celebrate not only use but purpose and idea. It must also think enjoy about how it is made, its physical and visual presence.

In our contemporary society, design has been adopted to not only make things better to use but to make them more desirable. As the concept of design has become increasingly integrated into the consumer ecology, it has lost some of its innocence, purpose and integrity. In becoming a marker of exclusivity, the word 'design' has been stripped of much of its meaning. The growing desire for consumer products in an increasingly aggressive market has led the term 'designer' to become a marketing tool to give products a commercial distinction.

The growing environmental crisis of climate change and ecological destruction has revealed the irresponsibility of how we use our resources and the domination of global market is undermining intelligent, traditional and regional techniques of production. As a result, we are increasingly conscious of how and where things are made, and who makes them — not just what they look like.

With this in mind, what should the role of design be? How might a renewed commitment to regional traditions, local materials and an understanding of the consequences of industrial production shape the ways we design, make and distribute objects? What is design in Galicia?

"Design for Living" presents a selection of projects developed by our studio over the past 35 years. It reflects on how our work has drawn not only on precedents and techniques, but also on cultural and material references. As the studio has adopted an increasingly territorial perspective, the exhibition also considers how design might reinforce regional identities and values, and contribute to a more grounded and responsible approach to making.

Curatorship
Fundación RIA
David Chipperfield
Design

Curatorship of the
section *Design in Galicia*
Marcos Dopico
Cibrán Rico
Suso Vázquez

Graphic design
and video
Fundación RIA

Support
Agape
Alessi
David Chipperfield
Architects
FSB
iGuzzini
Kasthall
Viabizzuno
Wästberg
Zumtobel

Collaboration
A Cantina
Altavela
ANABAM
D-due
desescribir
Estar,
Giulio Iacchetti
Jasper Morrison
Sargadelos
Manuel Aldao
María América Díaz
Os Casares
Paula Ojea
Pal.lium
Xabier Iglesias

Acknowledgements
Cecilia Díaz Betz
Fundiciones Rey
John Morgan Studio
Picusa
Salva López
Sofía Blanco
Sograni

Production
Agencia Gráfica
Axeitos
Carpintería de Moreira
Galanas

DESIGN FROM GALICIA

As we all reconsider the effects of globalisation on our environment we are prompted to look more carefully at what is close to us. Design is a meeting place of making and selling, of influences, novelty and familiarity. The consequences of industrialisation encourage us to take pause and reflect more carefully on why and how we produce the objects in our lives. Within this context, this exhibition explore how the specific context of Galicia has been an inspiration to our work over the past 35 years, while also looking ahead to how we might better explore to the issues and potential of the Galicia, its traditions, materials, skills and opportunities.

The Galician territory has a long history of making, of traditional skills rooted in necessity, of useful objects made with skill, care and even beauty. This beauty emerges from honesty, purpose, process, material and skills refined over time. As we better understand the intelligence of these objects – and as the consequences of thoughtless mass production become more apparent – we turn to local materials and traditions not only for inspiration but for more meaningful ways of using our resources and protecting our environment.

At the same time, we should not underestimate the contribution of innovative Galician companies working globally, drawing on the energy and creativity of the local workforce and cultivating new skills and capacities.

The exhibition shows objects designed and made over the last three decades. In themselves they document an evolution in approach to technology and materials, yet from the earliest objects the desire has been to make objects that were appropriate to their purpose and context. As a studio we are increasingly interested in the potential that exists in Galicia to connect design and making, resources and innovation. This aligns with a broader global shift in our priorities: to see design as a process not only valued for its market success but by for its contribution to society and the environment.

MAKING AS DESIGN

Like many regions of Spain, Galicia has been shaped by the way things have been done in the past, and it also struggles to hold onto these traditions and their meaning in the modern world. Crafts can become anachronistic remnants of another time and another way of life yet we are not free of their importance. They remind us and expose the poverty of so much of what we chose to surround us in today's world. Galicia still values the provenance of its food products and its traditions.

In recognising the strain we have placed on natural resources – and the environmental cost of industrialised, highly efficient systems – we are compelled to think more carefully about how we make things. The so called inefficiency and labour intensive nature of past production methods now appear far more sensible in comparison. In liberating ourselves from drudgery, we have contributed to an ecological crisis. What, then, can we learn from the past that might apply today?

One clear lesson is the importance of sourcing materials locally, and the merit of natural materials. Many traditional economies were abandoned under pressure from global competition, yet we now see fresh demand for a new approach that could form the basis for new opportunities.

This table highlights materials and crafts that still hold meaning within the Galician economy. Some, like leather, retain a long and successful history; others, such as linen, have almost disappeared due to foreign competition. Certain industries have survived, though not without difficulty, while materials like aluminium and steel have demonstrated how to remain competitive in a global market. In a rapidly changing world, the act of making remains fundamental. Surely these sectors can once again form the foundation of a renewed and resilient product culture – one grounded in skills, techniques and thoughtful design.

Beginning with the house in Corrubedo in the early 2000s, our work has been inevitably shaped by the region — its geography, its climate, its nature and its history — and by the strippedback, physical directness of vernacular traditions.

After spending many summers in the fishing village, the house emerged not only as a project for the family but as an opportunity to reflect on priorities and to explore a simpler way of living. The conditions of a holiday home allowed questions to be tested more freely: what is essential, what can be reduced, and how architecture might frame a life guided less by possession and more by place.

The house occupies a narrow gap on the village's main street overlooking a protected bay. The extraordinary location allowed the design to take advantage of what was there, the relation to the sea and to the other buildings. Celebrating the existing replaces the need to invent and rather to create something new out of the context. The design of the house celebrates both the essential ideas of quotidian life and the natural privilege of the place.

The request to design for Sargadelos allowed me to continue my long-standing interest in bowls and ceramics with one of Galicia's most emblematic companies. Sargadelos has its origins in the late 18th century, when it emerged as one of the first industrial initiatives in the country, first as an iron foundry and, from 1806 onwards, as a pottery factory. After the factory closed in 1875, the restoration of Sargadelos in 1970 with the opening of the current factory was the most important project undertaken by Isaac Díaz Pardo and Luis Seoane through the Laboratorio de Formas.

'A well-made pair of clogs, a table, a chair — objects that are useful and possess the grace that comes from love of craft and knowledge — are worth as much as a drawing, a print or a poem. They open paths for a people, towards greater undertakings of other kinds, and towards progress. (...) Creating a beautiful object helps make the world a better place. That is why I always dreamed of making thousands and thousands of objects in Galicia — pots, if you like — objects that could give its people a new character and improve their lives. That was the programme of the Laboratorio de Formas.'

Letter from Luis Seoane to Isaac Díaz Pardo
Buenos Aires, 23 July, 1965



House in Corrubedo, 1996–2002
Photo by Salva López



Rede collection, 2022
Sketches by David Chipperfield

DESIGNING A BAR

Renovating a village bar that had been closed for more than 30 years was a chance to reflect on the familiar and the new and the role of design in a very small-scale local context. While designing such a space in the city might encourage gestures of modernity and novelty, the requirement here was to reinforce the traditional idea of a bar, not to undermine it. Like elsewhere, a traditional Galician bar serves as an essential social space for the community. The challenge was to make the space reassuring and welcoming, emphasising the familiar qualities without becoming a pastiche.

At Bar do Porto we able to consider the whole operation of the bar: the details of the menu, tableware and uniforms allowing us to see the design of the interiors not as a decoration but as a representation of the idea of the bar.

As a young architect, I had the chance to work with the great Italian designer and architect Vico Magistretti on the redesign of an Italian restaurant in London. At one meeting, when the client was looking forward to see the designs, Vico replied that he could not design around such bad food and that the work needed to begin there, then address the service, the table setting, and only after that the interior. It was a wonderful lesson for a young architect.

DESIGNING AN ATMOSPHERE

Both of these lights were designed with the project Bar do Porto in Corrubedo in mind. Developing a product for a precise context can often be more stimulating than designing for a general use and commercial sale.

While designing the bar, I felt that the lights could add to the character of the space, not just the quality of light but the fitting itself. The green enamelled shades recall the familiarity of traditional fixtures, and because the tables are fixed, each table could be given its own dedicated light. The ability to raise or lower the fitting introduces a small gesture of consideration toward the customer, allowing different lighting conditions as needed.

The Faro lamp emerged in response to the need for flexible lighting on the outdoor tables. It had to sit comfortably within the robust context of a village bar's exterior seating, while remaining discreet and purposeful. Loosely inspired by the small lighthouse in the harbour, its engineering provides stability and strength yet results in an object that is quietly elegant. It allows users to adjust the light for their table, offering a simple way to shape the atmosphere.



Bar do Porto in Corrubedo, 2020
Photo by Cecilia Díaz Betz



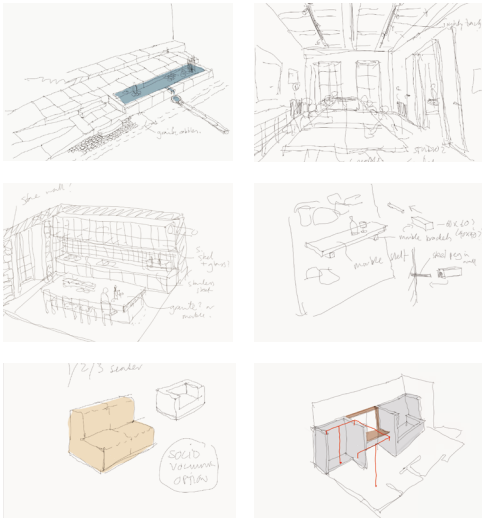
Bar do Porto in Corrubedo, 2020
Photo by Cecilia Díaz Betz

DESIGNING CASA RIA

The adoption of Virxe da Cerca 6 as the base for the activities of Fundación RIA involved us in its redesign after it had already been substantially renovated in the 1990s and had lost much of its original identity. The idea of Casa RIA — a home for discussion and meeting — needed to be reflected in the way we designed the building interiors: a house, not an institution. To make the idea explicit it was necessary to emphasise domestic qualities in the building and to avoid it becoming anonymous.

The process began by giving prominence to the kitchen and making the public areas, such as the conference space, more like a living room. The use of familiar materials, the careful approach to new interventions, the partitions, tables, kitchen and lighting all demonstrate a design idea grounded in the quality of everyday, of the normal, the familiar — but made special through attention to detail.

This exhibition draws attention to some of the elements we designed specifically for the house, and we hope this approach to design is seen as an appropriate response to place, to purpose and to meaning. Alongside these are other items such as cookware, ceramics and furniture which are independent commercially produced objects which we use on a daily basis within Casa RIA.



Casa RIA, 2022–2024
Sketches by David Chipperfield

DESIGNING LIGHT

Lighting plays a fundamental role in shaping how we experience our surroundings. Natural and artificial light are inseparable from the design of spaces. Space carries little meaning without daylight and although daylight cannot be replaced, artificial light can compensate for its absence, not only providing illumination but creating an alternative atmosphere. Artificial light is both a source and invariably an object. Much lighting design concerns itself with the object that provides this source. The lighting object plays other roles in the designing of space, by its presence or by being discreet.

In recent years, lighting technology has advanced enormously, offering an ever expanding range of possibilities. Yet lighting is not simply a question of performance or efficiency. It is equally about atmosphere, about working with darkness rather than eliminating it. Light and shadow are partners and together they give form, depth and nuance to space. Over many years designing buildings, we have not only specified lighting but developed our own fittings when needed. These explorations — technical, aesthetic and experiential — continue to shape how we understand and design with light.



Virxe Lamp for Casa RIA, 2024
Photo by Simon Menges & Nino Tugushi

We have too many objects and possessions. The predicament of the designer is that most of us would like to have a few selected objects around us and that they should be meaningful, purposeful and necessary. These objects should be reliable and beautiful.

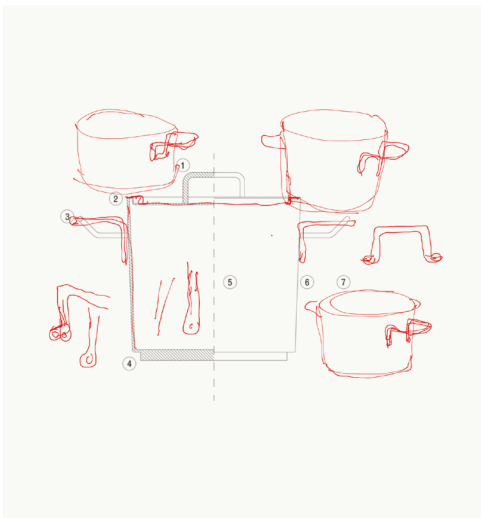
Paradoxically the design industry, including designers like us, continue to provide more options for the consumer. These options are always aimed at the intangible idea that this is the essential object.

In the case of the objects shown here — Tonale ceramics, Moka coffee pot, Convivio kitchen pots — each was considered first as objects that you might want to have and use in your own house and kitchen.

One of the most quotidian examples of design is in graphic design. It surrounds us and helps us in navigating every part of our lives. Carefully managed and considered images and text can have a powerful influence.

Over the last fifteen years, my collaboration with designer John Morgan has shaped the graphic identity of David Chipperfield Architects and also two projects linked to Galicia: Fundación RIA and Bar do Porto.

In the projects developed in Galicia, this collaboration was further enriched by the local context and the strength of Galician visual culture, in a region with a strong tradition of graphic design applied to consumer products. Galician industries have historically provided fertile ground for design and illustration professionals. On the central table, you can see a selection of objects from the history of Galician graphic design selected by Marcos Dopico, Cibrán Rico and Suso Vázquez, curators of the exhibition 'A Galicia deseñada'.



Convivio Collection, 2023
Sketch by David Chipperfield



Poster for "Common Ground", 2012
Design by John Morgan Studio



Between February and June 2026, Casa RIA considers design, from the specific work of David Chipperfield Design studio to a wider reflection of its purpose and social role.

Design is part of our everyday. Every time we make something, we design it. At best, this process is guided by care, thought and consideration, giving meaning and purpose to what we produce.

The sign for Casa RIA begins our story. Drawing on the traditional signs of the historic centre of Santiago, it acknowledges the importance of context and history while expressing them in a contemporary form.

Sign for Casa RIA
Design by John Morgan Studio