

# False Flat



Why Dutch Design Is so Good  
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with Adam Eeuwens

PHAIDON



In Rotterdam, though, everything is bigger and farther apart. Kralingen Park is an oasis, a playground for the wealthy who live along its western edge. It is the green heart in miniature: a serene space bounded by small canals, industry, dense housing projects and redolent with the history of damming and digging, poldering and peat winning, production and pleasure, bombing and planting. It is the great front yard of the city.

As I leave the lake behind, the home to the largest port in the world announces itself over the trees with a distant view of bridges, office towers, and the cranes loading and unloading container ships. Here the scale shifts from the semirural and semisuburban to a crowded urban scene. The bucolic interlude was just a momentary pause in the urban rhythm. As I leave the park and ride up over one of the dikes that protects the city, I face the results of nineteenth-century industrialization. The houses here are three and four stories tall, the streets are narrow, and the patterns of both nature and human intervention seem to disappear.

As urban planner and historian Frits Palmboom points out, this particular part of Rotterdam, between the regular meadows where I live and the center of the city, still reflects the way the land was transformed by man. Around the dams and the bends of the river that converge here, the fields were not laid out in a regular grid but fanned out to make the most efficient use of the land. The patchwork nature of the first polders, before the more organized efforts of later centuries, is still evident in the street patterns developers laid out as they bought up polder after polder. There was little room for wasted space here, as every inch had to be rented out. Today, most of the families that once came to this neighborhood from the surrounding countryside in order to work in the city have long since moved on. Instead, I pass women in chadors taking their children to school. This neighborhood is now mostly home to immigrant families. Algerian, Moroccan, Turkish, and other predominantly Islamic communities occupy these rather grim rows of apartments. By the end of this decade, over half the population of Rotterdam will be *allochtoon*, from another place. A forest of satellite dishes pulls images of faraway lands into the cramped apartments of those forced to live in this urban structure so different from their homelands.

New Dutch Blue ceramic windmill, by Miriam van der Lubbe, 2003





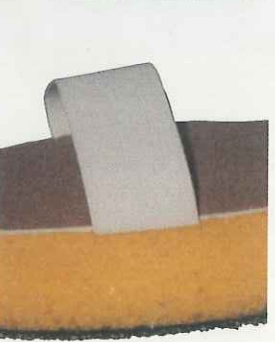
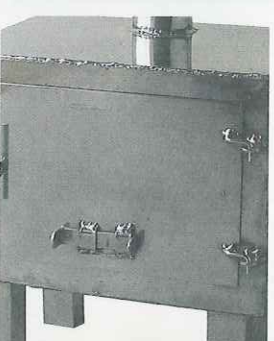
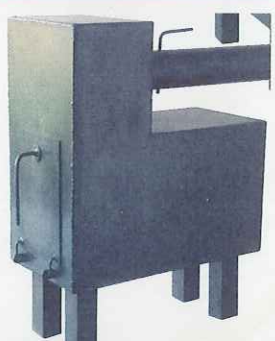
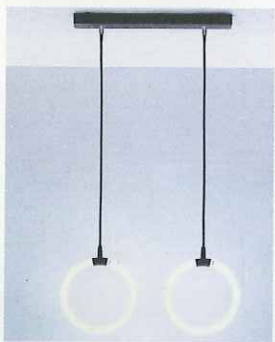
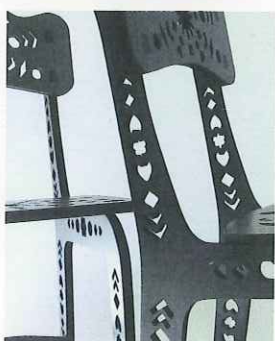
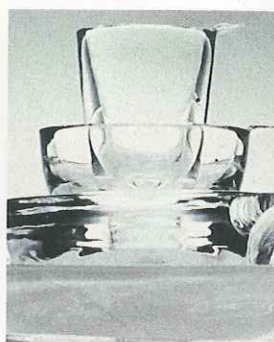
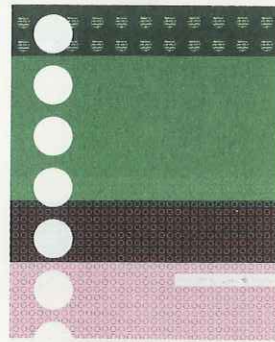


Poodle chair, by Miriam van der Lubbe, 2002



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**Hella Jongerius** — In 2003 Hella Jongerius won the Rotterdam Design Prize, had solo exhibitions at the London Design Museum and the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, in New York, cochaired the International Design Conference in Aspen, and saw the publication of a book devoted to her work. In *Metropolis* magazine, Museum of Modern Art design curator Paola Antonelli pronounced Jongerius a “unique talent who has no rivals.” In the same article, Jongerius is also called “the new Vermeer.” The cause for this praise and adoration is Jongerius’s ability to meld the old with the new, high tech with low tech, first world with third world, craft with industrial process, intuition with expertise, to create products she calls “new antiques.” These are modern artifacts that hold an ingrained value, foster an immediate emotional attachment, and are imbued with a meaning that does not merely reflect the latest design trends.

**Ineke Hans** — While working for three months at the European Ceramics Work Centre, Ineke Hans developed her “Black Gold Modular Porcelain” series, a “kind of ceramic LEGO system.” Allowing for infinite combinations, the easily reproducible vases, coffee pots, saucers, and so on are all cast in the notoriously sensitive black porcelain, a tricky material that exerts its own will in the final form. Architectural critic and curator Lucy Bullivant aptly describes Hans as a “designer with the impulses of a sculptor and the industrial experience needed to define products with a commercial life.” After working on mass-produced furniture and product collections for Habitat UK, Hans founded her own studio in 1998. Witty yet sober, her work reveals the interplay between function and form, exposing archetypes and exploring materials, techniques, and established codes.

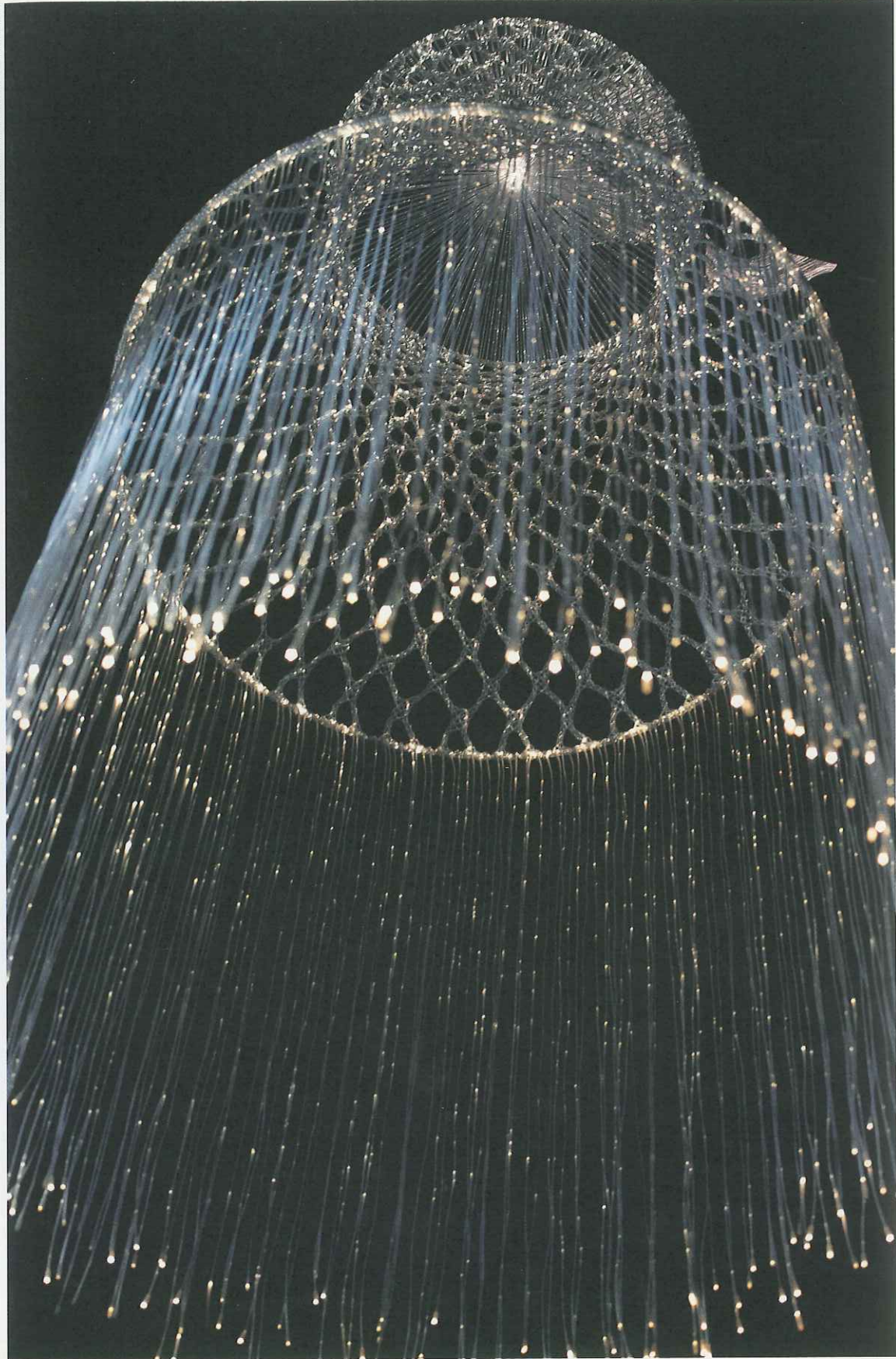
and in the process changing their function and their meaning. Celebrated examples include his Handbag Annie (two dustpans tied together with a piano hinge to form a lady’s handbag) and Coathammer Jut (a hammer with the head reversed and a nail attached to form a coat hanger). Stallinga cherishes the anecdote of a Russian cosmonaut meeting an American astronaut, the latter showing off NASA’s latest million-dollar invention: a ballpoint pen that could write upside down or in weightless conditions; in response, the Russian showed him a pencil. Stallinga sympathizes with the Russian. The practical runs much deeper than does the whimsical in his work. This is as much a social commentary against the wasting of resources as it is a fresh look at function and form. An independent designer ever since he left the Rietveld Academy in 1993, Stallinga is also principal creative director at Design Machine, a strategic brand-building studio with offices worldwide.

**Henk Stallinga** — An objector to the collective nature of Droog Design, Henk Stallinga is most likely the “driest” designer of them all, taking everyday objects, giving them a slight twist,

**Niels van Eijk** — WAT (Working Apart Together) was the title of Miriam van der Lubbe and Niels van Eijk’s 2002 exhibition at the Vivid Gallery in Rotterdam. The two share an old farmhouse in the countryside, each pursuing their own iconic ideas, while occasionally collaborating on exceptional projects. As students at the Design Academy in Eindhoven in the mid-’90s, they became immersed in the Droog Design school of thought and left as natural masters of its teachings. Van Eijk’s cow chair from 1997 became one of the classics of Droog’s collection. More recently, his Bobbin Lace Lamp uses not lightbulbs but glass fiber as a conduit of light, while his stoves evoke memories of props in a van Gogh painting. Van Eijk’s designs take the core characteristics of the source material and forge an intimate bond between form and function, past and present, raw and refined. The resulting creations are both elegant and enchanting.

**Miriam van der Lubbe** — A keen observer of the peculiarities of her surroundings and fellow human beings, Miriam van der Lubbe uses her products to reflect on the madness of our everyday lives. Wineglasses get a piercing, a lady’s handbag is pistol shaped; her furry Poodle Chair can be shaved to accommodate its owner’s aesthetic desires. She is not interested in creating new form; she wishes only to take what already exists and add her (often biting) commentary: she has rematerialized the iconic, disproportionately slim Barbie doll as a chocolate calorie bomb and decorated the ubiquitous Dutch windmill with Islamic, Chinese, and African symbols. When Van der Lubbe adorns napkins with historical Delft Blue figurines, the characters skate no longer on ice but on a skateboard, they light up not a clay pipe but a joint, and the classic bridge in the background is transformed into the unmistakable Erasmus Bridge.







Lady's Bag Me and My Beretta, by Miriam van der Lubbe, 1999