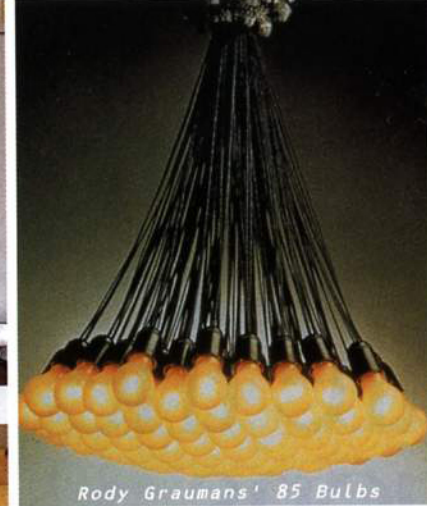


Frozen Fountain's Collection



Rody Graumans' 85 Bulbs



Eduard Böhlingk's Foldout Mobile Home



Villa VPRO



On the roof at Villa VPRO

Design: Going Dutch

To find out what's modern now, look to the Netherlands. Its bright new talents are showing the way to create normal things—splendidly. BY ARLENE HIRST

Every decade has a pivotal movement that defines its design sensibility. Does anything symbolize the indulgent, flashy '80s better than Memphis, Milan's radical design group? Today clean-lined simplicity has become the dominant influence, and it is a battalion of young Dutch designers who most exemplify the moment.

Droog ("dry" in Dutch) introduced its first collection to the international cognoscenti. Droog's wryly ironic sensibility immediately struck a chord. "Droog came at a moment when no one seemed able to tolerate redundancy anymore," says Paola Antonelli, associate curator of design at New York's Museum of Modern Art. "They ushered in what some have called 'neominimalism.'"

Droog specializes in reinventing the wheel; that is, taking ordinary objects and reinterpreting them with comment. Rody Graumans' chandelier of 85 bare bulbs, a signature Droog piece (above), is visually simple. But it's also technically sophisticated. Vincent de Rijk's colorful vessels (p. 90) are also more complex than meets the eye: A ceramic inner layer is wrapped in

an outer envelope of synthetic resin. Marcel Wanders' light fixture (below) seems just a haphazard stack of shades, but it's highly engineered. "In Dutch design, technology is secondary to the idea. The emphasis is on craft," says Murray Moss, owner of Moss, the influential NYC design store. "We went through celebrating high tech, now we're humanizing it."

Droog is very much an amoeba-like, open association with people and products dropping in and out. But Droog represents just a part of the new Dutch vitality. The usually cool Netherlands has become a hotbed of creative energy. Eduard Böhlingk's accordion foldout mobile home (above) is a striking example of the extent of Dutch inventiveness, skill and humor. "It's where >

New Dutch design makes the commonplace extraordinary—like the lightbulb chandelier and the foldout trailer (above). Netherlands Railways' design department produced this dynamic locomotive.

Netherlands Railways' Locomotive



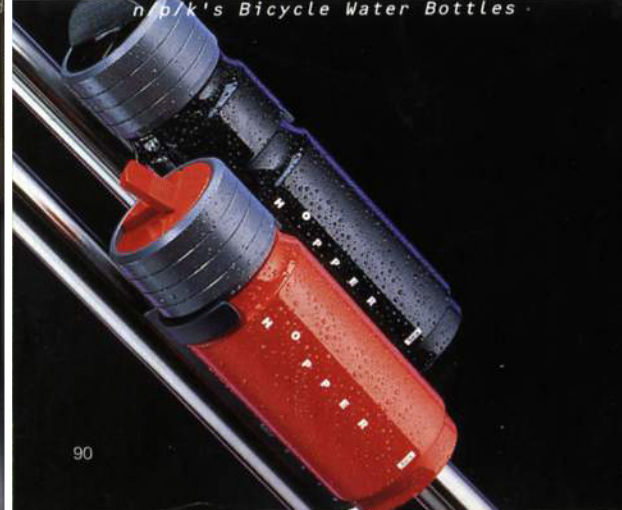
Richard Hutten's Chair/Table



Marcel Wanders' Set-up Shades



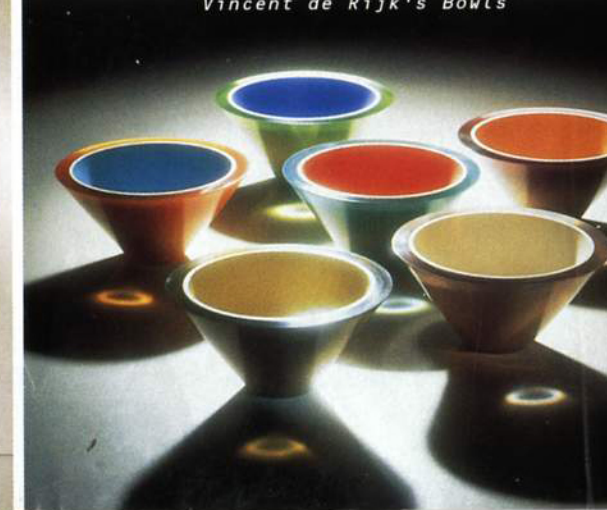
n/p/k's Bicycle Water Bottles



Arnout Visser's Milk & Sugar



Vincent de Rijk's Bowls



In all disciplines, young designers are creating things that look normal at first glance but that are subversive in a wry and knowing way.

the best design in the world is happening now," declares Aaron Betsky, curator of architecture and design at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, who was raised in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands has always been known for its design savvy. Virtually everything here is well designed, from trains and phone cards to highway signs and money," says Betsky.

Indeed, with the De Stijl movement of the 1920s (its members included painter Piet Mondrian and designer Gerrit Rietveld), the Netherlands was one of the first countries to promote modernism. "There is something in Dutch culture that embraces and is comfortable with modernity," suggests John Thackara, director of the Netherlands Design Institute, a government-sponsored agency. "It has something to do with being a man-made nation." (Remember that it was the low-lying Dutch who invented those famous dikes to hold the sea at bay.)

In fact, the Netherlands boasts a lengthy honor roll, from Philips, one

of the world's largest manufacturers of consumer electronics to ninaber/peters/krouwel(n/p/k), one of the country's top design consultancies, whose credits include Dutch coinage itself as well as the innovative Hopper water bottle for Tacx bicycles (below).

But it is the gang at Droog and their young, like-minded contemporaries that have really thrust Dutch design into the forefront. "Five or six years ago, there was a big attitude change in Holland," says Cok de Rooy, one of the owners of Frozen Fountain, a five-year-old Amsterdam store that sells these young designers' work.

This July, Betsky is staging a show at San Francisco MOMA, which he is calling *Act Normal*, that will focus on this generation of Dutch design. The show includes the notable new building (above) for VPRO, a major Dutch broadcasting company. It was designed by the young firm of MVRDV (Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs and Nathalie de Vries). The building at first glance seems handsome but unremarkable. Add up the details, though, and you

get a gigantic Dutch treat. Almost every office has access to a garden, balcony, terrace or patio. Huge panes of sliding glass provide easy access to the outdoors. Instead of the usual institutional wall-to-wall carpeting, floors are covered by an amazing patchwork of Persian and sisal rugs. Furniture is homey and comfortably mismatched. Perhaps its crowning glory is the roof, a verdant meadow of grass that whimsically symbolizes the land that was there before the building was erected.

Many more Dutch voices are waiting for the world to hear them. At the Milan furniture fair this April, Cok de Rooy will introduce a new group, Dutch Individuals. "At Droog, the individual designers don't get credit," explains de Rooy. "People want to be known for their own work." Look for surprises. Says de Rooy: "In the '70s, you had to be modern or you were executed. Now, you can follow whatever direction you want, but you have to be good. You have to do normal things—splendidly." **MH**

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VPRO EXTERIOR: © CHRISTIAN BRIGHTS; VPRO ROOF: HANS WERLEMAN