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THE SPIRIT OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

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When Jean-Christophe Burckhardt talks of craftsmanship he speaks with great passion and conviction. A designer and craftsman for over two decades, he has come to appreciate the level of dedication and skill it takes to craft with beauty and care. To him, people who create hand-crafted pieces are the guardians of an ancient tradition, working with the same skill and spirit as those who came before them. They are artisans in the truest sense of the word, able to draw on the history of their craft with an attention to detail and level of originality that easily distinguishes their product from the factory produced goods that now fill our department stores.

“Since time immemorial, the artisan has been the keeper and practitioner of ancient traditions, as well as the carrier of the spirit of craftsmanship,” he said.

“This spirit carries with it a magic that has the power to fascinate and uplift. Most of all it connects to the part in all of us that wants to do our best with the skills our hands have learned.”

Clearly Burckhardt feels that the spirit of craftsmanship is a passion that everyone has experienced at some point during their lives. His rationale is that when we pen a letter, or build a cubby house for our children to play in, we share a common connection with the artisan – the desire to take what we know to turn it into something that will be used and enjoyed by those around us.

“We have all made something, be it a cubby house, a knitted jumper, written a beautiful letter to someone, or arranged our home to create a welcome feeling. In that sense, we are all craftsmen and women. All these will stay alive long after we are gone – they will carry out spirit into the future, even if only in the memories of others,” he explained.

Despite believing in this common bond Burckhardt, while working as an interior designer for both private homes and public institutions, has found that as consumers we lack a concrete appreciation of the importance of traditional craftsmanship. Perhaps manipulated by the marketing machinery, many of us fail to take note of the overwhelming global threat facing today’s artisans.

“One of the things I have realised is that there is a very low-level of understanding as to what constitutes quality and what an artisan actually does. The marketplace is being swamped with cheap manufactured imports and the issue for the artisan is that people don’t understand what the difference is, or why this matters,” he said.

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However, he asserts that there is indeed a spiritual and ethical distinction between factory produced objects and those made with care by an artisans own hand.

“There is something that a real artisan does that distinguishes the final object from the machine manufactured one,” Burckhardt explains.

“The machine treats all raw materials the same way, but the artisan selects by eye, feel and an intuitive understanding. The artisan sees the material as somehow speaking to him or her and in this dialogue the raw material itself - through its peculiarities and idiosyncrasies - it suggests its placement in the final work.”

“The artisan’s job is to mediate a number of elements... the difficulty for them being that some of these elements may be compatible, while some may create tensions that need to be creatively resolved in order to maintain cohesion. This is what I consider to be true craftsmanship, and it is something that a machine can never hope to replicate.”

Out of a desire to reconnect artisans and consumers, Burckhardt has been working on a new business that he hopes will be a gateway to the world of craftsmanship and interiors – masterartisan.com. The website is an online directory of the world’s best craftsmen and designers, as well as those who work alongside them, and its goal is to increase awareness of traditional crafts.

“I have been asked, what is the biggest threat to the spirit of craftsmanship? There is a real threat that some of the skills in craft and art are being forever lost as they are not given enough publicity. The true value of artisans, and the way they do things, is not being promoted appropriately,” he said.

“Artisans need to find a way to make the potential for global access an advantage, rather than the disadvantage it has previously been – and Masterartisan.com can help with that. The website will reflect the values and integrity of craftsmanship whilst educating the consumer market on the spiritual and ethical benefits of supporting artisans by purchasing goods imbued with a greater level of personal meaning.”

It is Burckhardt’s dream that, through masterartisan.com, he will be able to assist craftsmen and women to promote their role in providing quality designed goods. The key to doing this, he feels, is to make consumers aware that nothing will surpass the true beauty and spirit of traditional crafts.

“Today’s flat, modern, machine-made objects show a repetitive sameness. It all has its place, but we do not relate to it, and it certainly does not relate to us. And in this relational void we seek something that reflects our nature; something crafted with delicate care by a true artisan,” he said.

“In a world where we are so divorced from how the familiar objects are made, to see artisans making something somehow restores a connection - a feeling of belonging to a communal tradition, of sharing the sense of achievement that comes from making something useful and beautiful.”