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Where is Issue One?



FIRST-CLASS LOUNGE

(Interview, text and images by Merve Roseau
 (except main image by Laura Old)

When it comes to cutting-edge toy retailers there's a new kid on the block. After decades of being neglected on every level of innovative and fresh toy design here in cool Britannia, we've finally been rescued by Playlounge.

Stocking the sharpest designer toys and all the latest lines, Playlounge showcases the hottest new talent around. From the UK's usual suspects, James Jarvis and Pete Fowler, to other international heavyweights like Futura, Kawa, Erico So, Michael Lau, and such emerging hot names as Tim Teuf and Devil Robots. Kubrick designs, the Bearbrick series, ToyRH's Qee Series, Headlock Studio... some of the masters who have redefined cool toy design for adults, are also on the shelves. Toys

range from the very affordable and well-designed to limited collectables and signed editions for the more hardcore fan. Have you seen, for example, the new Kawa Kubrick bus stop?

Real kids (those under thirty) are not left out either as there are classic books from acclaimed authors and illustrators like J. Otto Seibold, Sara Fanelli, Tony Millionaire, Maurice Sendak. Innovative and colourful hand puppets, games, puzzles etc. fill the shelves. Bags and stationery are vividly and playfully designed, like smooth chewy bubble gum by Hyperkitt, who are also responsible for the striking and very effective kigs and webette. The space itself is well thought out and includes a small reading area. The interior was designed to be flexible, colourful and to evolve with its occupants. Organic shapes in light

and bendy forms and experimental materials form hive-like shelving and long snaky countertops, all by architectural firm [inside]OUT-systems.

So if you want to be sure to see where our childhood is heading to a second time around check out this newswoman. Come on, be a wild-eyed child again, let's PLAY...

Check out Playlounge's latest feature. A bubble gum mural by artist/illustrator Ian Wright.

WITH AIDAN ONN:

How long have you dreamt of this point and what gave you the idea? I grew up in Hong Kong during the mid-70s surrounded by that big cultural wave of Asian toy technology. Toys were unbelievably cool, sassy, sophisticated and wildly imaginative. Thirty years

on and I'm still driven by that same irresistible compulsion to own cool, clever and innovative toys. The only difference now is the pocket-money expenditure has increased beyond all sensible parental limitations. Who is drawn to Playlounge? London is supposed to be the sharpest edge of cool cultural innovation, with close to, if not the best, collective design output of any city. So how come this great design nation turns out such piss-poor toys for the new generations? And, in turn, why is good design so poorly represented in retail? I haven't come across one toy shop in London that, firstly, acknowledges toy culture for adults or, secondly, reflects any sort of sharp critical product awareness. Most lurch between kitsch gadget and bland homogenised merchandising with zero imaginative integrity. We have two agendas: to demonstrate that good, clever, imaginative toy design does exist and can be represented in London; and to encourage some of the great London and UK designers to give the toy industry a good kicking. Playlounge is a space for anybody who wants well-designed, unusual, clever, quirky, innovative, imaginative toys.

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From the super high-end collectable limited-edition products all the way down to the bubble gum balls. The collectable toy culture for adults used to be hard to access outside the preserve of Japanese, Hong Kong and American websites and the super-cool UK fashion shops - there's always been a culture of mystification attached. With Playlounge, I wanted to shatter this pretension... good, clever, imaginative toy design need not be intimidating, exclusive, restrictive, snobbish or elitist. Playlounge is there for absolutely everybody who appreciates good design, whether it be Kaws or Dr Zeuss. Will you remain an independent shop? Playlounge will remain an independent shop. London needs more independent shops to break this crippling monopoly of corporate high-street blandness and homogenised coffee-shop culture. What is the best part of what you do? The best part of what I do is opening the deliveries of toys and fighting the urge to keep them all to myself! The most tedious? The most tedious is the size of the workload and the realization that I'll probably never have a normal social life again. What is your favourite design?

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not necessarily a toy, but any 'useful' object? Lego is my all-time favourite toy product. I had boxes and boxes of the stuff and would create the wildest most elaborately sophisticated space-ships ever devised. Are superheroes dead? If superheroes sign up for mega-budget movies and lucrative global merchandising deals, they have received the big fat greedy corporate kiss of death. Do you ever dream of toys? I used to dream of Tetris when I was obsessed with playing it on my Game Boy. If I start dreaming of Michael Lau, I'll go see an analyst.

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