

gods put a
smile upon
your **face**



We don't much care for jargon. However, we do like a bit of blue sky thinking, a bit of thinking outside the box, a smidgeon of moving the envelope. Only we like to call it plain and simple intelligence.

As we (hopefully) dust ourselves off from the economic turmoil of the last 18 months or so, we can't help but notice how a number of companies have never veered from the path of progress. Take Boss Design, for example. The Dudley-based manufacturer has continued to surge into new markets, has opened a stunning new London showspace, has continued to market itself aggressively and has continued to bring new product developments to market – and all in a period where the majority of manufacturers (and we're not just talking about furniture manufacturers here) have either consolidated or, unfortunately, suffered, culled and struggled.

It is the product development that we are focusing upon here – and, in particular, the recent launch of the Apollo and Pegasus table ranges. You see, these are not just tweaks or extensions to existing collections. These are brand new, fresh designs. These are fully-tooled, fully marketed bright ideas brought to market without compromise. These are worth more than a mere passing mention.

The two ranges of conference and meeting tables have been developed by David Williams and Roger Carr of Radar Design. Both ranges have been created around a single structural engineering

solution that results in a system that pushes flexibility, options and finishes.

Pegasus is characterised by refined cast aluminium leg with its soft shape and fluidity, whilst Apollo is defined by a linear aesthetic created using an extruded aluminium leg and rail components which complement a modern architectural feel.

Both ranges are available in 100s of variations – which is very much in line with the Boss Design philosophy of allowing specifier flexibility, and both ranges also come with integral cable management and offer the option of full power and data capability, whilst units can be positioned anywhere on table top and in multiple locations. In other words, these are sophisticated, flexible, contemporary offerings.

Now, here's the rub. Sophisticated, flexible, contemporary offerings do not come cheap – and we're not talking retail costs here, we're talking development costs. We're talking design, tooling, manufacturing. We're talking real money.

We headed out to Radar HQ in east London to discuss, in detail, the background and the process behind the table ranges with David and Roger themselves. Roger, however, immediately throws us





»»» something of a curve ball. ‘Unfortunately for your story, this was one of the easiest projects we’ve had in a long, long time. In many respects this was an ideal project for us. Boss has got a nice culture – they have a great design culture in fact. They know where they are going and they knew wanted to break into a new area for them – tables are obviously brand new for them – and it made sense when you looked at it on paper; you sell chairs, you sell tables.

‘When we heard about the project, we were extremely interested, but we had to think about how this was going to be done. We always like to start by doing some research – even in areas we’ve worked on before because it’s interesting to get feedback from end-users, from the people who are going to buy the product in the long run. This is not about letting them drive the design of course – more about getting feelers from them as where we could innovate.’

Before we continue, we should tell you that Radar is an industry specific resource offering a targeted approach to product development – a process it likes to call ‘informed innovation’.

Using research techniques, combined with a broad knowledge of products and trends in the contract furniture market, the design group then looks to develop products which exploit opportunities for appropriate innovation, combined with commercial reality.

This already sounds like an appropriate partnership to us. We ask how the relationship with Boss Design began. ‘I don’t know if we are naïve – we’ve always been poor at marketing ourselves,’ Roger concedes. ‘We used to be a large organisation and we found we had to do a lot of marketing, had to spend a lot of out time on it, just to keep that going. We then made a conscious decision to be smaller and really get down to what we wanted to do – the enjoyable part.

‘It’s very easy for us to make decisions – it only needs a cup of coffee for us nowadays. We have spent the majority of our time working in America, but we decided that we ought to do more work in the UK market about two years ago. We had a good look at what was starting to happen in the UK manufacturing sector and we did have a few projects in the UK and really enjoyed them – we worked with Ofquest on the Neo Evolution project, for example. It was a

really refreshing project – it was a change to get up early in the morning and drive to a company rather than getting on a plane!

‘We heard that Boss were looking to do this project, and a couple of people mentioned us to them. We met them at Orgatec and, a few months later, we were recommended to them once again and were told that there was a project there waiting for us.

‘We went up and had a meeting in Dudley – which was the first time either of us had been up there. It’s a really impressive facility. We sat down and discussed what we could do and then put forward a proposal for the way we’d like to work, which is to start with the research. Even though we’ve done a lot of table systems, particularly in the States, they often tend to be slightly withdrawn from end-users. You see them in focus groups, but you don’t see them right at the beginning. We basically spent a month pulling people together and went around the country and met with a lot of people we knew and had worked with previously – and Boss also had a long list of clients they liked us to talk to. We were able to have completely unbiased discussions with people, which was great for us. »»»»»»»»»»



focus

▶▶▶▶▶‘We had a view on what the tables might be and knew what the ‘competitors’ were. We wanted to find a new way to work it – look at developing new finishes, new ways of assembling etc, but we then had to check all this against the research. It’s no good designing an innovative table that no-one wants to buy.

‘Actually, a lot of the pre-conceptions we had were blown out of the water. For example, we asked whether people wanted a table that would suite in with the Boss seating products, but were met with a fairly resounding ‘No’.

‘The architects we talked to tended to fall into two camps,’ David recalls. ‘On the one hand they wanted something that was quite iconic looking, with a bit of a statement and personality, and on the other hand they wanted something that was paired down and simple, but still quite classical.’

‘If you could design a surface that would float off the floor and not have to go to the bother of putting any legs on it, then I think people would go for that,’ Roger chuckles. ‘There are, however, the functional issues to consider, as well as the looks. In a way those two issues and ideas are why we’ve ended up with the two products.’

We learn that the Apollo concept was almost immediately approved. ‘We refined the leg a little bit,’ Roger tells us, ‘but being an extruded product, the tooling issues are very slight. This is a rail, a leg and a couple of bits that connect it. This was the approach.’

‘We had developed an idea, speculatively – which is one of the first things we showed Boss,’ David takes over. ‘That was based on an

underframe system that could expand and then had a knuckle-jointed leg to allow it to create a dynamic or in-line configuration of various sizes. Part of doing the research was to validate that and to try to get some understanding of which direction Boss would want to go in. We didn’t think, at that time, that Boss would wish to tool up for two visual concepts to enter the table market. Originally we were doing a ‘single’ table range, and we thought this would be an either/or – either we go for something quite expressive with the cast leg, quite dynamic and quite a statement, or we go with something quite anonymous with the extruded leg, quite classic, quite muted.

‘The decision process was probably the most refreshing thing about the entire project with Boss and Brian (Murray, MD Boss Design). He is not afraid to put the investment in if he likes it. He was the one who championed the cast leg – the statement piece. We then had to make both legs work with the same frame components, which we developed to give two distinct visual expressions. This has resulted in the two separate ranges, Pegasus and Apollo.’

We make no apologies for focusing on such a ‘simple’ project. It just goes to show that if you take a diligent and innovative design team, a forward thinking client, a generous amount of feedback and, dare we say, more than a touch of bottle, you’re very unlikely to get it wrong.

We’ll bet there are more than a few people reading this who wish they had, are or could emulate it. They could begin by picking up the phone and giving Radar a call! ●

