

A MAGAZINE WITH A FRESH VIEW ON HOLLAND

issue 3 | winter '08/09

Fresh Dutch Views

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FOOD DESIGN

Fresh

Food design is a relatively new design discipline. Katja Gruijters (38) was one of the first food designers in the Netherlands, setting the stage for an industry that is now booming. Gruijters is both an artist and a food professional. Her work was displayed at the Museum of Art and Design in New York but she also designs products, spots consumer trends and develops concepts around human desires for such big food companies as Iglo, Mora, Sara Lee DE and Heinz.

Grujters graduated from the Design Academy Eindhoven in 1998 with a degree in industrial design. Her passion for food led her to specialise in food and drink design. 'Food and drink are my materials. I cannot think of any other material which I could enjoy that much. Food is emotion.' Since 2001, Gruijters has been working in her studio in Amsterdam on designing food experiments, concepts and products.

Satisfying desires

Once a year Gruijters reviews long-term trends, which she continually fine-tunes over the course of the following year. This trend development process forms the basis of her concept and product development, trend lectures and inspiration workshops. 'Eating habits, culinary preferences and lifestyles are constantly changing. Human beings have desires; we are always looking for ways to make life more pleasant and enjoyable. Our daily choices must satisfy these desires. If you're able to observe this process from the outside, you'll discover patterns in these choices. Where patterns are broken, trends are created.'

Sensological product development

When translating these trends in the development of products that appeal to people's desires, Gruijters uses a method she

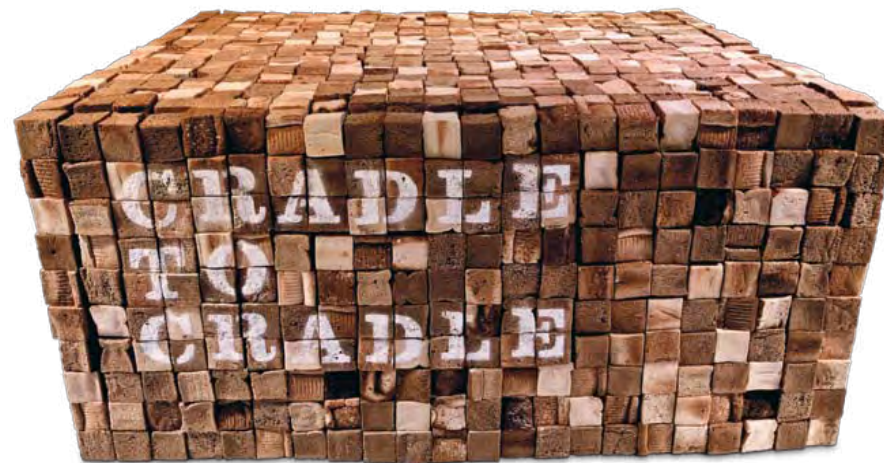
calls sensological product development. 'The sensory test is absolutely vital. What does a product or ingredient do to our senses? Does it appeal to basic human desires? Technology - industrial production processes - is the flip side of the story. It's the tension between these two that yields interesting results.'

Ander Kant

When not developing new products for companies, Gruijters expresses herself as an artist. A clear example of this is her product concept *Ander Kant*: a tile-shaped piece of chocolate with a lace texture, whose name means both other side and different lace. 'For my graduation I designed a series of concrete tiles with a lace texture. In 2006, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam wanted to display these tiles at an exhibition on lace-inspired design. I was really into food design by then and thought: why not combine the two?' For the opening, Gruijters did a series of edible lace experiments. 60 edible tiles made of chocolate, confectionery, shortbread and short crust pastry were presented to visitors of *Ander Kant*, where sculptors' tools were used to cut off the tiles to pieces. 'For the final product I decided to use chocolate, an appealing material because it melts smoothly in the mouth. In four weeks, *Ander Kant* had been translated into a feasible,

'Food is emotion'

Katja Gruijters



manufacturable product: lace chocolate tiles, for sale at Dutch department store De Bijenkorf.'

Redefining perceptions

Food in general is subject to lots of regulations in modern society. Some of these regulations strike Gruijters as odd. Given the sometimes extreme food regulations imposed by the EU, Gruijters is challenged to come up with concepts that force her audience to redefine the way they perceive food. 'There are EU rules stating bananas have to be curved, apples have to be of a certain size, potatoes cannot be deformed. I think that's odd. Nature isn't uniform. I feel there's a need for real and honest products.' This observation led to Gruijters' latest project: a restaurant based on disapproved food. Gruijters developed a *Cradle to Cradle* dinner, for which she decided to work with waste materials consisting of rejected food that did not meet the official standards. Disapproved vegetables and fruit, 455 loafs of bread that were one day past their sell-by date, six kilos of misshapen wine gums... 'I wanted to give these products a new lease on life, although not necessarily by eating them. The bread I turned into a statue, the wine gums into tablecloths, just to confront people with our daily practice of throwing away food. It was quite extreme but I got many positive reactions. This dinner led to

the idea to start a restaurant based on the same philosophy, which should open autumn 2009.'

Endless possibilities

Besides her work as a designer and trend-watcher, Gruijters writes a monthly column in *Food Magazine*, a trade journal for the Dutch food industry, and is currently developing a course on sustainability in food for HAS Den Bosch. 'I don't want to commit myself just to designing food; there's so many things I'd like to do. Maybe I'll start brewing my own beer or launch my own supermarket. The possibilities are endless.'

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