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## A Master of Usable Art

By Stefanie Glick

John Perkins, whose distinctive and elegant furniture show is opening at Bobo Design Boutique on Thursday June 23, is a man whose artistic talents seem to know no limits. The creative force behind Drala Design, a multi-disciplinary design studio located in San Miguel, Perkins draws together craft, restoration and technology into a unique expression of art, architecture, and design.

Perkins' new collection, that features tables, chairs, lighting and accessories, seems less like furniture and more like usable art. Reminding us to find beauty in the objects of everyday life, his one-of-kind designs are a harmonious study in contradictions: organic yet structured, simple yet sophisticated, traditional yet contemporary, handcrafted yet meticulously engineered.

I recently had the opportunity to share a cup of coffee with Perkins at Cafe Santa Ana in the Biblioteca:

Stefanie Glick: Congratulations on your new collection. The pieces are really beautiful.

John Perkins: Thank you. I'm really pleased to be showing at Bobo, a wonderfully eclectic design shop. It's an honor to be showing there with the other international designers they exhibit.

SG: You seem to be a jack-of-all-trades. Do you call yourself an artist, architect, designer?

JP: I call myself a designer because saying I'm a part artist, part-architect, part engineer, materials scientist, inventor, craftsman, product manager etcetera takes too much time. People seem to relate to "designer."

SG: The refined elegance of your designs... their shapes and forms...the colors and materials you use... all clearly have a Japanese feel.

JP: Two influences led me to the very "eastern" orientation of all my work. The first was meeting my furniture "guru" Alan Peters, a refined English craftsman in every sense of the words, but who studied in the East. He was amazed and humbled by what he saw in Japanese and Korean furniture. The other was Chogyam Trungpa, who introduced Shambhala Buddhism to the West. His vision of the joining of creativity with "inner wisdom" has had a deep impact on both my work and life.

SG: Can you tell me more about the specific influences on your new collection being featured in the show at Bobo?

JP: The Torii Collection of tables and benches is inspired by the iconic Torii gate, a symbol for entering sacred space. The Nensho pieces, a counterpoint, were inspired by serendipitously finding a trove of charred mesquite trees and stumps. Entirely different from the torii pieces, they explore the stark beauty of natural materials in a transient state. A kind of meditation on impermanence.

SG: Your work seems like useable, functional art, so-to-speak. Do you have an actual art background?

JP: My background is pretty eclectic but I've always felt drawn to art, craft and technology. After a time at the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, I restored wooden boats, studied furniture making in the UK, operated a violin and guitar restoration business, and then started my museum work as furniture conservator in Canada... all before ending up at the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles.

SG: What brought you to San Miguel?

JP: Mexico generally provides fertile ground a wide range of design projects. There are historic precedents to dialogue with, competent workers to execute plans, and a population that is interested in exploring new ideas.

This exceptional show opens at Bobo Design Boutique with a reception on Thursday, June 23 at 7pm, and runs thru August 29th. All of the pieces in the show are for sale. Anyone with an appetite for art and design should not miss this feast for the senses.