

# Discovered

## **Mimi Shodeinde** – *Howard desk*

London, UK

Mimi Shodeinde took a little time to decide what she was going to design. For a while she toyed with the idea of creating a bench before finally alighting on a table. ‘The table is a very familiar item that I used during lockdown,’ she explains. ‘We’ve all been glued to our desks and I wanted to design something that was familiar and comforting. I think this new post-COVID world is all about comfort.’ The finished object is an extraordinary, curvaceous (and big) sculpture, which is accompanied by a couple of stools. ‘My design aesthetic is very fluid. I’m often drawn to organic, sinuous forms,’ she says.

Shodeinde was born and raised in London, but her Nigerian background plays a vital role in her work. ‘My heritage is hugely important to what I do, often more than I know,’ she confirms. ‘I grew up in a Nigerian household and whatever I do will be a reflection of that.’ Her parents were high school sweethearts who came to join her uncle in the UK in 1993 – Shodeinde was born a year later – and her father appears to be a pivotal influence. He trained as an architect initially, before becoming a pilot, and finally moving into telecoms. ‘I was always painting as a child,’ she says. ‘My parents really encouraged me, especially my Dad.’ Her finished piece is entitled *Howard desk*, after film director and pilot Howard Hughes, partly because its form has been inspired by aviation but also in tribute to her father (the fact that Hughes lived the final years of his life in isolation as a recluse is a happy coincidence too).

After taking A Levels in fine art, economics and English literature, the young designer initially decided to study



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advertising at London College of Communications but dropped out. 'I absolutely hated it,' she laughs. 'It just wasn't for me. I missed using my hands. It's a different sort of creativity.' She thought about trying her hand at architecture but, having already done a year, didn't want spend another seven at university. So instead, she opted for interior and spatial architecture at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh. Even then, she displayed a restless streak, painting and designing products when she should have been doing something else. 'I would sneakily skip my lectures, go back to my room and start sketching furniture,' she remembers.

Her studio, Miminat, was set up while still at university in 2015 and she quickly had a show at the The Gallery of African Art on London's Albermarle Street. 'There was a lot more interest in my furniture than my art,' she recalls. 'That's when I realised it was something that I could potentially push forward.'

Her latest piece for *Discovered* is made from hard maple because, she says: 'It can be more easily manipulated. The form of my table is quite dynamic.' While she has worked with wood in the past – primarily European oak and mahogany – this is the first time she has used timbers from the American hardwood forests.

According to Benchmark's co-founder Sean Sutcliffe, who was tasked with making the piece: 'Mimi's challenge was one of interpreting scale. She had this very fluid, organic form in mind and, initially, she drew it at a vast size – you could have landed a Harrier Jump Jet on it.' Because she lived near by, the designer had the opportunity to visit the workshop and, between them, it was decided to reduce the size. 'In some ways the project is very rewarding for us because we're able to assist the design journey. It's about learning as much as



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it is about showing off a piece of furniture and that's something that we can do together. That said, the desk is still huge,' says Sutcliffe.

Initially, Shodeinde wanted to paint areas of *Howard desk* black, before deciding to choose a natural finish. 'I tend to gravitate towards heavier, bolder, colours,' she says. 'But because the form of the table is very strong, I thought keeping it lighter would provide a softness that it needs.

Meanwhile, her mentor, Tomoko Azumi, was in the background helping her to build a narrative around the piece and enabling her to distill her ideas down.

'Because I work alone it has been an amazing experience, feeling part of a group effort and collaborating. It has been a massive learning curve. Tomoko and Benchmark have had such a huge impact on this project from start to finish,' Shodeinde concludes.

Next up the designer has an interior project in Miami, a couple of new furniture pieces for a job in London and she will be launching a new range of lighting. As well as all that, she's currently working on a new house in Kuwait. So busy then? 'I guess I'm just going with the flow really,' she replies.

*Words by Grant Gibson*



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