

# CITY HACKER

As part of *EDGAR*'s ongoing support of the Middle East's biggest design fair, Design Days Dubai, Fair Director **Cyril Zammit** spoke to hot-shot Brazilian designer and architect **Guto Requena** to discuss emotionally attached design and how it can help bring a city to life



**Left:** *Noize Chair*, merging the structure of a chair with the sound of Sao Paulo's streets  
**Above:** Guto Requena

**T**he last couple of years have seen you designing the corporate headquarters of two of the biggest companies in the world, Google and Walmart, in your native Sao Paulo. How much of your personality do you put into the designs?

**GR:** They were both huge and different challenges, but were both inspired by Brazilian culture. For the Walmart headquarters, I had more scope to create a new identity. We wanted to mix the DNA of the company with local Brazilian tastes, so we researched some of the Brazilian behaviour related to lounging and relaxing in outdoor areas, such as rooftops, terraces, gardens, beaches, country houses and farms, while trying to steer away from clichés such as football, samba and caipirinhas. The final result was an open-plan office that creates a cosy environment to work in. Wood patterns and Brazilian furniture were used extensively throughout the interiors, as well as the use of vibrant colours.

**Is there a formula you try to follow?**

Not really a formula, no, but what connected the two projects was the influence of the digital era. We are quickly moving to a new way of working and the office space must reflect that. Flexibility, open floor plans, the "home look", better lighting quality and the challenge to infuse a strong personality into the space are all



Inset and below: The interiors of the Requena-designed Walmart.com offices in Sao Paulo

important elements. We spoke to several contemporary behaviour specialists, such as psychologists and professors, and we learnt that creating spaces of leisure in the office is fundamental, whether it is a music studio, videogame room or lounge. We were delighted to have won the “Building of the Year” from Archdaily in 2014 for the Walmart Headquarters project.

**Design tends to provide solutions, sometimes in the simplest of forms. You’ve previously mentioned that Sao Paulo has many problems to solve, what are you hoping you can change via design?**

I define design as ‘a solution to problems’ and Sao Paulo is a huge city that has many problems. I believe that good design can help improve the quality of life, through urban mobility, architecture, housing and more.

To me it is less about the beauty and more about the process and how quickly we are able to solve problems, in a cheaper and smarter way. It’s an idea that I have dubbed Hacking the City. This month my first big public design project will be unveiled in Sao Paulo, where I created an interactive façade for an old hotel. This façade has LED lights that turn on at night, but the colour of the building will change depending on the surrounding soundscape and air quality of the area. At night, when people walk past they can interact with it and by doing so, learn more about their own surroundings. When the air quality is degrading, lights will change to warmer colours with shades of red and orange. How amazing would it be if in the future buildings could inform, interact and respond to people’s lives? I’m currently working hard to develop this idea further with urban projects in the future.

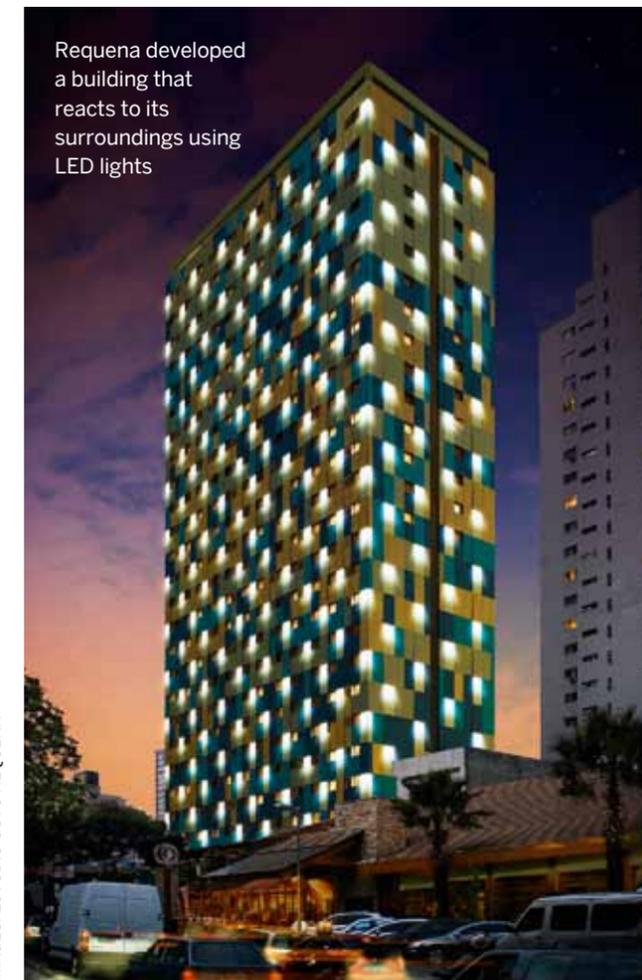


**Tell us about the Love Project that you conducted with help from the Dubai Design District. What made you want to do it?**

The Love Project took roughly two years to develop and is my most challenging project to date. What we wanted to do was to record the emotional responses of people as they recounted a personal story about love. We developed an interface that allowed us to see the patterns on the computer and from the patterns were able to produce unique objects that people can keep in the form of bowls or lamp shades.

The final result is simple but is filled with so much emotional attachment that it touched many people’s hearts. Some people cried while narrating their biggest love stories. It was beautiful to

“Design is a solution to problems. I believe good design can improve quality of life”



Requena developed a building that reacts to its surroundings using LED lights

IMAGES: ESTUDIO GUTO REQUENA



see how design combined with digital technology is able to involve a large audience and create a sentimental result. It’s a way to make us closer as people.

I believe that good design should tell a good story and by inviting the client to be part of the creative process, you insert a very personal memory into the piece, which will give the piece a longer life cycle. Shaping a design object through a personal love story, for example, is a way of increasing the emotional value of the final object, so that it’s no longer about beauty but more about the memories.

**In a way, it was similar to your previous project Noize Chair...**

We used different software. With the Love Project, we recorded emotional data using sensors. For example, when people are nervous, their bodies produce emotional data, like heartbeat rates, sweat, emotion in the voice and brainwave activity. For Noize Chair we collected soundscapes in the streets of Sao Paulo and merged it with a 3D modelling of a chair. In the Love Project, the results are more beautiful and symmetrical, whereas the final result of Noize Chair are more aggressive and noisy like the concrete jungle we live in.

**Dubai and Sao Paulo have many similarities with regards to business development and being a crossroad for many cultures. Would you consider conducting a project in Dubai?**

Emotions are universal, and factors such as skin colour, religion, age or gender don’t differ from city to city. We all love, we all have fears, we all have anger and passion - that is the fundamental base that makes us all equals. I would be extremely excited to develop my design experiments, performances, architecture, interiors or urbanism in a city like Dubai. I’ve visited the city many times, and have been impressed by how vibrant and international it is. Like Sao Paulo, people in Dubai are fascinated with strong artificial landscapes and the cosmopolitan way of life. Adding emotions in the space with digital technologies is a way of inviting people to reflect about their own lives. To me, the scale of my projects doesn’t matter, all it needs to do is tell a good story and make people emotional. ■

**Details:** Guto Requena will be represented by Coletivo Amor de Madre at the fourth edition of Design Days Dubai. March 16 to 20, 2015. For more visit [coletivoamordemadre.com.br](http://coletivoamordemadre.com.br) and [designdaysdubai.ae](http://designdaysdubai.ae)