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PROFILE

# Designer You Should Know Jeff Miller



Jeff Miller established his own practice in 2002 and designed products for a range of clients, including Obo (left) for Baleri Italia. As vice president for product design at Poppin, Miller leads a team of designers and engineers developing products, like the QT Low Back Sofa (bottom), and designing interior spaces for the company (middle).

PHOTOGRAPHY: LEZIO MANICUCCI (TOP); COUTESY OF POPPIN (ALL OTHERS)



Drawn to Poppin's captivating story and colorful capsule collection of desktop and stationery items, Jeff Miller joined the company as vice president of design in 2011, a role he still holds today. Prior to joining Poppin, Miller was vice president of design at ECCO Design, a New York-based product design consultancy specializing in research-driven innovation; creative director at Itoki Design, the New York subsidiary of its global parent, developing products for the North American contract furniture market; and head of his own studio, designing for a range of clients in the areas of housewares, interiors, residential, and contract furniture.

### How does your background inform your design and approach today?

I try to borrow both from the service-oriented, collaborative side of my external consulting experience and the individual side of my solo work, because neither on its own is entirely fulfilling. At Poppin there is a bottom line, there is rigor, but there is also intimacy and common purpose between our teams with the opportunity to move fluidly toward a successful result. Each of us knows collectively what will work for our customers, for our factories, for our sales team, and for our own satisfaction as a finished product. It's at once extremely personal and intuitive but beholden to a vision bigger than any one of us.

### What is unique about your overall design approach?

I believe in common design principles established in the previous millennium, which really shouldn't then be entirely unique. I believe like peeling a proverbial onion, there is no level of simplicity too mundane to entertain. What is inside the beautiful outsides should be beautiful, and the things that make those things spin should be as well. I've been involved in a great many projects, the aim of which was to unearth an epic need, and the result of which was invariably an unremarkable conclusion, just slightly

and soothingly distinct from familiar. I believe as compared with a mountain of innovation, a basic thing with a little bit of clever can be as alluring, and potentially more enduring.

### Have you worked on any interior spaces recently?

All of Poppin's showrooms, from our original headquarters in New York to our Washington, D.C., location opening next month, have been designed by my team. Each fashioned from abundantly affordable yet inspired finishes—rich in natural texture and contrast, but neutral enough to future-proof viability for our evolving assortment. In some cases, staid and cloistered offices have been transformed into bright, open canvases enlivened by the juxtaposition of our colorful furniture and products.

### What, in your opinion, is important in product design today? What about in interior design?

I used to admire things and places that aligned with my own design approach. Increasingly I admire those that diverge from it. The digitally shared creative universe of the moment means anyone can access anything. Trend and innovation know no geological boundary. Novelty is revered over all else. Fueled with enough resources, increasingly anything can be done. So, considering all the challenges we face, from wealth inequality to climate change to technology's rapid advance, what is important to me is one universal question, given any design problem: "What's appropriate to propose?"

### What are you working on now?

A wide spectrum as always, from the most mundane, reinterpreted to offer Poppin's unique approach, to tech-incorporated desk accessories that aim to aid in privacy or conversation. We have a mix-and-match side table program in the offing that can use the same base and top to make four different tables. We're also actively researching the telephone booth category to best address Poppin's own response to the emerging market.

