



Canadian industrial designer Karim Rashid is responsible for more than 2,000 designs. PHOTO COURTESY OF MILOVAN KNEZIC

The prince of plastic



Famed industrial designer Karim Rashid will make a swift visit to Taipei to deliver a speech and preside over the launch of his new jewelry collection

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

Karim Rashid wants to change the world, one "blobject" at a time. The Canadian industrial designer — whose clients include Armani and Prada and whose work is in the permanent collections of museums like the Museum of Modern Art in New York — is visiting Taipei this week to promote a new line of jewelry and to address representatives of the country's plastics industry in a speech tomorrow night.

Rashid, 48, is a pioneer in creating blobjects, which science fiction author Bruce Sterling has defined as objects "with a curvilinear, flowing design, such as the Apple iMac computer and the Volkswagen Beetle." A blobject, according to Sterling, is "a standard 20th-century industrial" product "that has suffered a remake through computer graphics." Among Rashid's more famous blobjects are the Garbino can, a curved garbage bin made from biodegradable plastic; the Blobject chair, a plastic seat that resembles the classic Molar chair; and his New Move line of bowls, vases and other glassware, which are made to resemble plants.

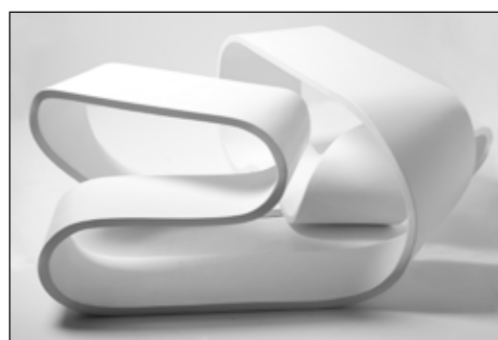
Rashid's approach to design can be described as functional and effective, simple in form and aimed at appealing to everyone. "I prefer to design inexpensive, accessible,



From left: Majik Cafe 9, in Belgrade; the Endless Table; and the Ryoko Range. Each was designed by Karim Rashid.

democratic goods — so that everyone can have and afford good design," he said in an interview with the Pure Contemporary Web site. "I hate the idea that only an elite gets to have interesting or beautiful things."

Albert Ku (顧奇明), chief operating officer for Uniques' Luxury International (奇松國際), said he hopes representatives of the local plastics industry who attend Rashid's lecture at the Chinese Petroleum Building can learn from the designer how to make products "with global appeal and marketability." Uniques' is a joint venture between Taiwan's Hsing Wu Group (興吾集團) and luxury jewelry brand Anthony's. The



venture is the exclusive distributor for Rashid's products in the Asia-Pacific region.

The company and the designer began working together two years ago when Uniques' approached Rashid about the possibility of creating a jewelry collection. "Rashid agreed to the project right away," said Ku. "Two to three months later, Rashid gave us some 20 design sketches." The sketches were artistic and abstract, according to Ku, so it took the company several months to turn them into manufacturable designs. The end result is two limited-edition series of gold and platinum necklaces, rings and earrings in organic and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROCK THE CITY PREPARATORY TEAM

snowflake-like shapes. Ku said Rashid has also started working with two other Taiwanese companies: Toa Lighting (東亞照明) and TFC Biotech Center (台肥生技中心).

Uniques' is organizing Rashid's presentation in conjunction with the Plastic Industry Development Center (PIDC, 塑膠工業技術發展中心), a research and development center funded by the private sector and the Ministry of Economic Affairs (經濟部). Chiu Cheng-wen (邱政文), a manager in the PIDC's information department, expressed hope that Rashid's visit would lead to collaboration with local companies, noting that Taiwan

has a long history and expertise in plastic manufacturing. "Most factories in central and southern Taiwan are still OEMs producing low-end products," Chiu said. "By working with international designers like Rashid, we hope to bring in the added value of designing in the plastic industry."

Although there are no seats remaining for Rashid's talk, some 100 of his more than 2,000 designs are currently on display at Comb (六角), a boutique and cafe in Taipei's East District (東區). The exhibition runs through Aug. 10. "Some slam Rashid as a businessman rather than a designer. But to me, one can certainly be both," said Kevin Chou (周育潤), a designer and the show's curator. "I remember when I studied in the US, I bought a trash can designed by him. It cost only US\$2, and it brought a good design into my life."

Comb is located at 5, Alley 35, Ln 181, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路四段181巷35弄5號) and is open daily from 1pm to 10pm. Rashid's lecture will be held tomorrow night from 6:30pm to 9pm at Guoguang Hall in the Chinese Petroleum Building (中油大樓國光廳), 3 Songren Rd, Taipei City (台北市松仁路3號). For more information, go to www.karimrashid.com.tw.