

Talks

Ondarreeta:

Nadia Arratibel
(Designer)

Nora Arratibel
(CEO)

talks with

Note Design:

Daniel Heckscher
(Interior Architect)

Malin Engvall
(Designer)

Topic:

The Supra Chair

The idea of the Supra Chair was conceived in 2018 when two families brought their creative forces together. One was linked by kinship and three generations of craftsmanship, and the other had gathered around a shared love of design and a longstanding design culture. One of them from the Spanish Basque Country and the other from Sweden. Both passionate about design, both excited to come together and create a piece of furniture that would be unique, yet so common, that it would have the power to make anyone feel comfortable, connected and happy. There is so much behind the experience of sitting on a fantastic chair, on a super chair – there's shared values, a love of aesthetics, thoroughness, honest communication, special materials, and a true will to bring enjoyment to people's lives. Nora and Nadia from Ondarreeta and Malin and Daniel from Note tell us all about it.

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Months before receiving the email, I was walking the streets of Stockholm looking to get away from the hectic environment of the Stockholm Furniture Fair, which had brought me to the city. I left the building looking for space, fresh air and inspiration. My eyes wide open, my senses fully engaged with everything that created harmony in little corners, open spaces, benches, shapes and surfaces. The air felt dry, snowflakes fell unhurriedly, my heart finally slowed down. Then a window caught my attention, and I stopped walking.

I am from the North of Spain, and, although that's to the south and warmer, it has taught me to feel comfortable standing in the cold for a while. I felt like I could have stayed there for a long, long time taking in this wonderful place that exuded such creativity and familiarity. As it turned out, behind that window lived Note Design Studio. Out of respect, I finally left, feeling deep inside that this wouldn't be our last encounter, and leaving it to that magic that makes like-minded people eventually cross paths.

Months later I received an email: "Hi, I'm Daniel from Note Design. I have plans to go surfing in the Basque Country this summer and would love to meet up and discuss a possible collaboration..."

Is it big data that brought us together? Is it creative energy that pulled us toward each other? I don't know, but for me, that's where it all began.



Nadia Arratibel
Designer at Ondarreta



So we just read Nadia's account of how this all began. Malin, Daniel, what's your side of the story?

DANIEL (NOTE): Well, when we started doing product design back in the day, the first company that took our products into their collection was a French company called La Chance, so we're pretty close to them. Last year, they were exhibiting next to Ondarreta in Milan, and that was my first encounter with the brand. I remember that I reacted because I'm a surfer and that takes me to the Basque region every summer, but I had never heard of a furniture company from the area before, so I was surprised to find out about them at the fair.

When I went back home, we started looking into their work, and then I got in touch with Nadia, telling

her I'd be going to Biarritz to surf with my kids and that I would love to meet. So last summer, not even a year ago, I stopped by their headquarters for a first meeting. That's when we began discussing a possible collaboration.

Let's discuss the essence of both your companies and also tell us what your understanding of design is, how what you do is influenced by where you come from – if it is at all – and also, what you think the role of design is in society.

NORA (ONDARRETA): There are three beaches in San Sebastian, and one of them is Ondarreta. That's where our grandpa started this business, which has now basically become a sort of philosophy of life for Nadia and I. From birth, we've been one hundred percent



involved with design. For instance, when we were children and travelled around with our family, we didn't usually visit the typical tourist spots but rather design shops and landmarks. Design is always present in our minds. It has always been a way of feeling and breathing for us, a way of being alive.

When our grandfather started Ondarreta, it was a small wood workshop. Several years later, our parents took over, and now it's our turn to do the same. Of course, the name stands, as well as lots of knowledge about the craft that was transmitted to us over the years, but we're also in the process of changing things and innovating, and that's a part of why we began working with Note. We want to create something special, something different from what other Spanish companies are making.

DANIEL (NOTE): We cannot say that Note is a family in the biological

sense, but we believe we are very much like one in the way we operate as a business, which is a little bit unusual. In other studios you have one name, the head of design - usually an old guy with a beard and grey hair - who makes all the decisions and everybody has to go with what he says. We don't work like that at Note. We like to do things in a multidisciplinary way. So we're fifteen people now - most of us hybrid designers - and we don't have a boss or CEO. Rather, we try to make decisions together as a group, understanding each other like family members. This means that our design process is very different from that of others and also that we can feel closeness with family-run businesses such as Ondarreta.

I think we all want to save the world somehow - but, of course, it's quite difficult. My goal is to make, through my work, one person a little bit happier every day, and if everybody

DANIEL (NOTE)

“So other than always thinking about sustainability, we try to contribute to the world by adding joy, by sharing the joy of working together as a group and with other families whom we appreciate, like Ondarreta. Working like this is a passion for us and one of our driving forces.”

NORA (ONDARRETA)

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at Note does the same, we can make fifteen people happier every day, and that starts a kind of movement. So other than always thinking about sustainability, we try to contribute to the world by adding joy, by sharing the joy of working together as a group and with other families whom we appreciate, like Ondarreta. Working like this is a passion for us and one of our driving forces.

What Daniel said about bringing joy to people's lives sounds so similar to the purpose of Ondarreta: this idea of making furniture that builds connection and makes people feel good. That seems to be a vision of design that your companies share and that goes beyond the purely financial aspects of a business.

DANIEL (NOTE): Yes, and that is probably why when we met Nadia and



Nora we felt a connection and knew we wanted to move forward with working with them.

NADIA (ONDARRETA): Yes, and it's part of the drive behind our focus on getting to know the world better so that we can create products that both are rooted and have an international reach. Regarding the origins, an important part of our connection with Note is that I feel we're both rooted in love and care for nature and respect for our materials.

MALIN (NOTE): Yes, that's also a part of Scandinavian design that I really like: working very closely with materials and being very honest about what they can do for the product. But I do like to challenge the typical Scandinavian minimalist language, so I think it's fun to work with international clients because they can often be bolder and more creative than local ones.

Let's talk about how that connection and common vision became a collaboration. How did you choose to make a chair? Why a chair? Why the Supra Chair? What does that mean? Tell us about the collaboration itself.

NADIA (ONDARRETA): We have a forty-five-year history at Ondarreta,

but right now we're in a changing mood. We're putting a new vision into our creations, and we want to share this with the world. We felt we had to design a new product to accompany that image shift, and that's when we began thinking about how great it would be to work with an international partner such as Note. Then we chose to create a chair because it's the most iconic piece of furniture in our catalogues, it exists all over the world, we all sit every day in so many places. So, even though it's a very difficult piece to design, making it a huge challenge, we thought that a chair should be the icon of our current change.

DANIEL (NOTE): On our side, we discussed everything from upholstery to an outdoor furniture collection. We liked Nadia's suggestion of doing a shell chair, but we were a bit concerned that it would be a big investment for a furniture company. Doing a shell chair is a big statement – it's saying 'Okay, we're really doing this, we're not just doing semi-important things on the side here. We're shooting for the bullseye'. We knew that this would represent a big investment from Ondarreta, so there was some pressure on us because we had to design something *really good*, we had to be up for the challenge, and we're super excited about what we're coming up with.



Why did you choose plastic as the material for this chair?

NORA (ONDARRETA): From the commercial point of view, I'd say almost every chair company has at least one seat that is made out of polypropylene, which is very functional and can be used in all types of spaces. That was something we wanted and didn't have yet in our collection, so we decided to go for it. But not in the usual way: we wanted to make something really functional and still entirely genuine.

MALIN (NOTE): People often do plastic chairs that are cut almost as if they were wooden. We wanted to make one that is really a *plastic chair*, to bring out the best the material has to offer, instead of just trying to make it look like a wooden chair but made out of plastic.

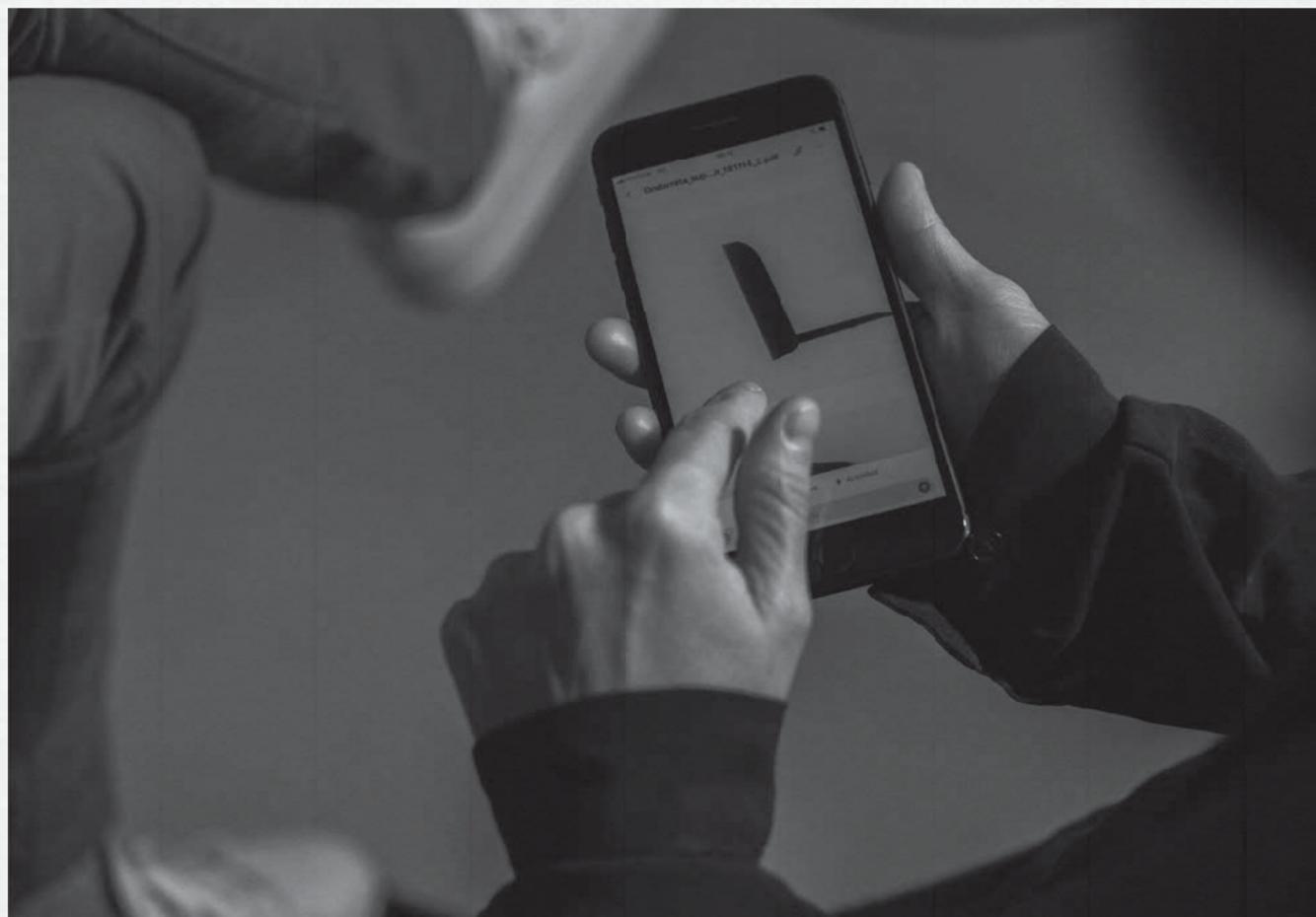
DANIEL (NOTE): During the joint decision process, we also did research on competitive chairs from other companies and found around two thousand versions of this sort of chair, all of them looking the same. And then there are five, maximum ten chairs, that have their own expression

and are different from the other two thousand. So the challenge was for our design to be amongst those five or ten unique pieces and to use plastic as an asset in the process. There are a lot of restrictions for production because you cannot stand out too much, but you need to find that small feature that will make your piece unique.

What features and details give the chair you came up with that unique expression you were seeking?

MALIN (NOTE): Well, it's still being developed, but I think one of the nice features is that it feels like the seat and the back are almost separated when, in fact, they're still in one piece. That's a really nice detail that makes it look more elegant and that can only work in plastic.

Also, since it's a super chair, it's supposed to work with many different bases. We had to come up with a shell that would function just as well with a central base as it would with a wooden one, both in a conference room and a dining table. Another good thing about plastic is that we can play with comfort more, so, even though it seems



NADIA (ONDARRETA)

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“I think the Supra Chair shows the multidisciplinary nature of the studio – it’s useful for all kinds of spaces and places because it was designed by both interior architects and product designers, and that’s precisely what we were aiming for.”

like the chair has the same thickness all over, its shell is actually very ergonomic. And, when we received the first prototype and actually sat on it, we were happy to feel how remarkably comfortable it was.

How has it been, working together on this?

DANIEL (NOTE): I think honesty is super important in all relationships. Being frank and direct is key. This is the first time we’ve worked together, and yet we still managed to maintain openness, to always be able to say and hear ‘this is good’, ‘this is less good’, or ‘this is actually really bad’ or whatever. If you can manage to do that in a nice way, I think the process will always move forward with ease.

NADIA (ONDARRETA): The reason we try to be as honest as possible is that it’s important for us to be confident about what we’re working on, to really believe in what is being created. Otherwise, it won’t really work. That’s the kind of communication we have with Note, so even though we’re still at the

prototyping stage, I do hope we’ll have a lasting relationship with them.

When will we see this chair on the market?

NADIA (ONDARRETA): The truth is that the process of designing a chair is actually quite lengthy. Of course, we’re used to that, but that doesn’t mean we have a huge range of products in our collections. For us, it’s not a matter of having hundreds of different products; it’s a matter of having the right ones. I guess that’s because we have a deep sense of what we do, so we try to think very thoroughly about every piece we decide to launch.

DANIEL (NOTE): It’s possible that the chair will be out this fall, and if it is, if it hits the market within one and a half years from the moment we began working on it, that will mean the process was actually very fast. It would normally take two and a half years to do something like this.

So when this chair comes out, how will it be a reflection of each

one of your companies? How will it represent Note, and how will it represent Ondarreta?

MALIN (NOTE): I think we’ve really reached our aim in terms of working with the material and taking advantage of its benefits, so I’m really happy with that. And also, I think the Supra Chair shows the multidisciplinary nature of the studio – it’s useful for all kinds of spaces and places because it was designed by both interior architects and product designers, and that’s precisely what we were aiming for.

DANIEL (NOTE): Joining Note and Ondarreta together is a step forward for all of us. On the one hand, Ondarreta is moving forward in terms of branding and products, and on the other, we’ve been struggling a bit trying to reach a different level of elegance in the furniture that we make. We’ve been trying to move away from a kind of cuteness towards more elegance and, hopefully, this will be our first product of that sort that will reach the market, so we think it’s great that we stepped up together on this.

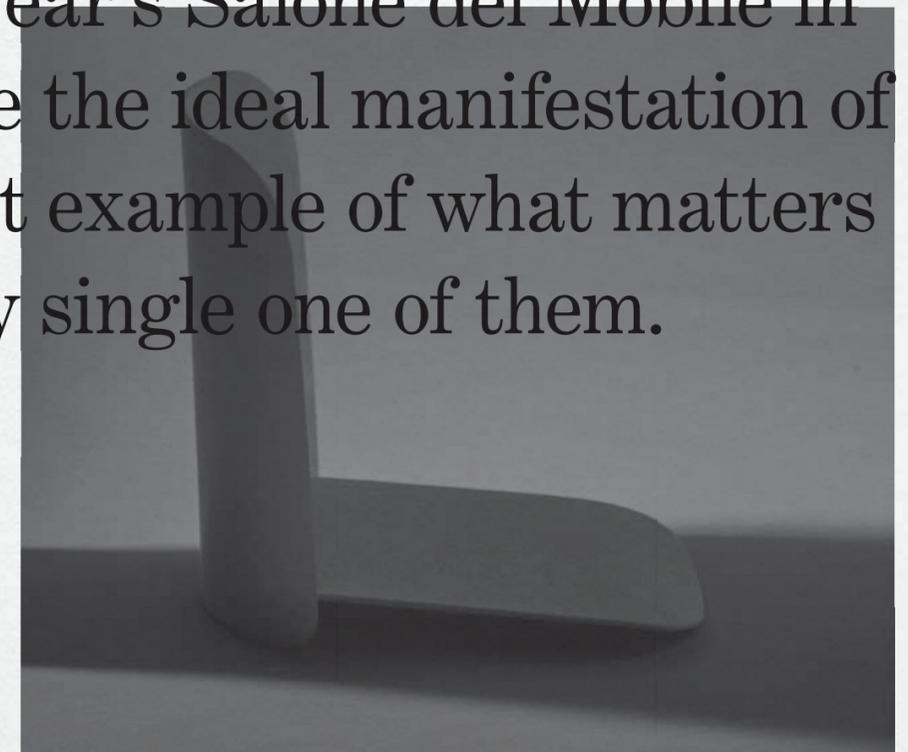


NADIA (ONDARRETA): We're one hundred percent confident and have faith in the materials. And at Ondarreta we always try to create products that are in harmony with the spaces in which they will be placed, so that means they must be subtle and fresh but still have something that makes them genuine. This chair really does that.

DANIEL (NOTE): I'd just like to add something. Going back to my story about me knowing the Basque Country because I go surfing there in the summers: we should never underestimate the value of finding work through our lives and things that are outside of work. This is how we do business at Note, based on the idea that you cannot build your life around work, but you should build your work around life.



The family members of Ondarreta and Note share, indeed, a conviction that work is a joyful part of life, a place to create filial ties and contribute to making the world more enjoyable. For them, life and craft are suffused with creativity and generosity, with a sense of openness to growing, changing and welcoming new experiences. The Supra Chair, which will appear for the first time in this year's Salone del Mobile in Milan, will be the ideal manifestation of this, a perfect example of what matters most to every single one of them.



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