

My Space: Mr Gustavo Piqueira.

Photography by Mr Robert Astley Sparke

Words by Mr Mike Hodgkinson

Football is not the only reason that design consultancy Casa Rex is headquartered in a remodelled 1950s house in the heart of São Paulo's Pacaembu neighbourhood, but it's definitely in the mix. "This is not a business area of the city," says Mr Gustavo Piqueira, 41, who started the company in 1997. "And that is very important for me. It's very close to Pacaembu Stadium, which is great because every time there's a match here it's incredibly noisy and lively."

Equipped with a keen sense of irony and an impressive range of creative talents, Mr Piqueira has taken Casa Rex international and maintains a satellite office in London (handy for Unilever, his biggest client). He's not just a graphic designer but also an illustrator, a typeface inventor and a writer - his books include *Iconografia Paulistana*, an exploration of his home city via images and fiction, and what he calls "a moderately accurate translation of *A Verdadeira História* by Luciano de Samósata". All of his projects can be connected by a strong hint of counterintuitive thinking, which extends to the rationale behind his office space.

"I have a big issue with what people call 'creative work space'. The basic principle here runs against these contemporary creative work spaces," he says. "I really don't believe that a pinball machine in the office will make people cleverer." There are no micro-scooters, beanbags or Ping-Pong tables at Casa Rex, but Mr Piqueira's office does great things with natural light, brick and reclaimed materials. "I don't need to seduce a very creative mind to come here."

Click through the slides, above, to find out more about some of the things in Mr Piqueira's office. casarex.com

Why do you choose to work in this part of São Paulo?

I can put my whole life on one page of a map. I was born right here in Pacaembu. I live right here. It's my neighbourhood.

What's your approach to graphic design?

We do many different things - it's a bit schizophrenic. That's why I became a designer. Because it gave me the opportunity to understand different worlds, different aspects of the world we live in. It's good to understand big companies and global brands, but it's also good to understand smaller projects and more sophisticated visual language. Sometimes I believe that I am really old-fashioned, but sometimes I think that I am a visionary, depending on my moods.

How do your theories about creativity relate to the Casa Rex work space?

People see creativity as having a good time, having fun, almost as if you're drinking with your friends. And for me creativity is the ability to

associate and join things that are not associated by anyone else, and to see things in a way that people usually don't see them. So it's a serious thing - serious doesn't need to be boring. But I don't see creativity as a magical thing. The idea was not to have a factory but a space that was open, without trying to entertain people.

What are the benefits of having a second office in London?

Even though people are seeing Brazil in a more positive way now (sometimes more positive than it really is) - but different from 10 years ago when we were still a synonym for football and drug dealers - the London office has helped us, and our clients, to avoid a cultural barrier.

Who inspires you?

Usually my heroes are writers, which is weird for a graphic designer. If you asked me for 20 names, they would probably be 20 writers. I think that [Michel de] Montaigne is great. He was able to mix every aspect of life in his essays - from the most abstract to the most mundane. It's brilliant. It's funny. He put everything together in his own way. And I like Marcel Proust as well. He did the same in a very different way, putting everything together and seeing life as something different but deeper than usual. Proust has this famous quote: "A work of art is an optical instrument: something that helps you see yourself better."

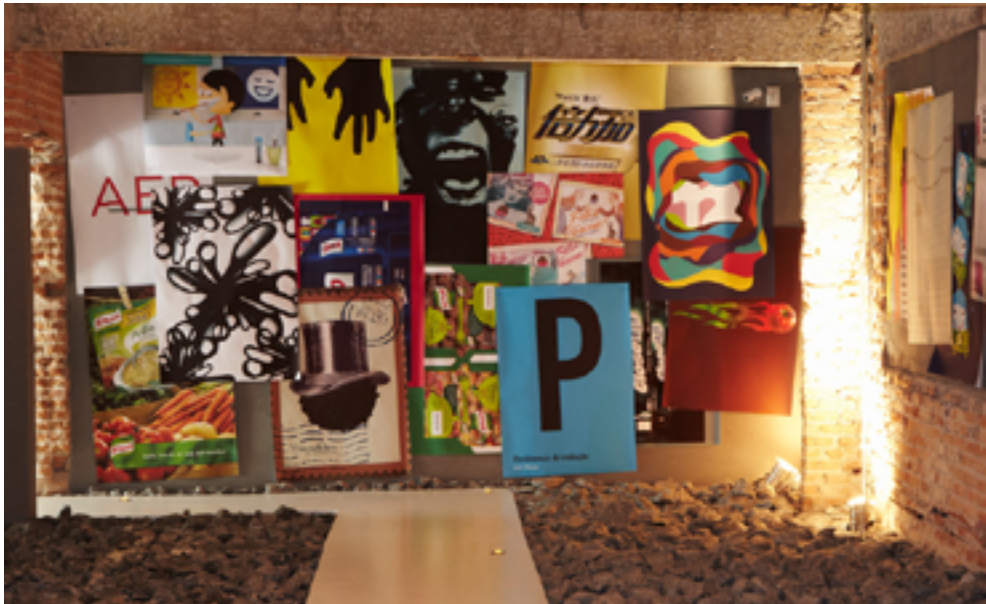
Why do you take on so many projects, in a variety of media?

William Morris, the arts and crafts guy from the 1800s, was asked: "How do you do so many different things?" and he said: "They are not different, they are the same. They just come out in different ways." And I thought, yes, that is pretty much it. There are some things that I can think better visually and some things that are better in written text. I'm not a great writer, but I will get there.

You seem to enjoy avoiding the obvious - do you think this is a Brazilian characteristic?

A French designer gave me the best definition of my work being Brazilian: "Your work is so Brazilian because it's so disrespectful." It was a compliment. I thought it was good, because for me being Brazilian, the good part - and the good part of São Paulo as well - is the ability to draw on many different cultural references. You just need to avoid staying in a box. The boxes are all the same. It doesn't matter if it is a trendy New York box or a folkloric northeast Brazilian box.

Publicado no Mr. Porter, em 30.07.2013.





MR PIQUEIRA'S SÃO PAULO HOT SPOTS

Estádio do Pacaembu

"The oldest big football stadium in São Paulo. Located in a beautiful valley, it's still the best place to watch a match here. On the ground floor there is a hi-tech and 'entertaining' football museum, but forget it and buy a ticket for the real thing."

pacaembu.com.br

Restaurante Fuentes

"The décor? Not charming at all. The food? Traditional Spanish dishes, such as puchero. But if you're fed up (like me) with São Paulo's obsession for looking edgy, then this family-run restaurant is a good pick. It is located just below Viaduto Santa Ifigênia, one of the city's most traditional landmarks."

+55 11 3228-1680

Museu da Cidade

"This small and recently opened museum is just across the city's founding site, Pátio do Colégio. Located in a nicely restored 19th-century house called House No.1, it usually holds exhibitions of the city's first photographers depicting São Paulo's chaotic growth since 1850."

museudacidade.sp.gov.br