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people profile

Industrial strength

Lunchtime, a week after opening, and the new Itsu sushi takeaway on London's Hanover Square is packed. 'Some seating had to be taken out after a couple of days to create more space,' says designer Afroditi Krassa.

Situated on the ground floor of Vogue House, Itsu's focus on fresh food healthy eating is the fifth Itsu outlet, but the first to feature the input of Battersea-based Krassa. Her consultancy was appointed as the project's creative director with an expansive remit encompassing kitchen ergonomics, packaging, interior design, food and PR. The design – think Tokyo neon, Hello Kitty, and traditional Japanese screens – should form the template for a roll-out programme that could mean buying a bento box at lunchtime becoming as commonplace as getting a ham sandwich.

With expertise in industrial design, Krassa is well placed to succeed in such a broad role. Born in London and brought up in Greece, she returned to the UK at 17 to study. A degree in product design at Central Saint Martins was followed by stints at consultancies Priestman Goode and Seymour Powell. Krassa returned to study on the RCA's product design course, run by Ron Arad, and launched her own business shortly after graduating in 2001.

Each year she produces her own batch-manufactured, limited-edition pieces called The Divine Collection. Presented at 100% Design, the designs often come from uncovering an interesting manufacturing process. The current range includes an aluminium signet ring, light fittings hanging from helium balloons, and a two-seater rocking chair. Krassa also works with retailers and manufacturers on larger schemes. 'A lot of people are ashamed to call themselves industrial designers these days,' she says. 'But I'm a real believer in mass production.' Krassa is working on a task light for John Lewis and furniture for the Japanese branch of manufacturer Cassina.

Fitting somewhere into the mix is Itsu. Krassa believes her consultancy was chosen because of its ability to see the bigger picture. Most interior designers, Krassa says, 'think materials, colours and finishes. It's a superficial way of thinking.' As an industrial designer, Krassa is more interested in systems, packaging, distribution, stock control – and from these the design for Itsu evolved.

There are some wonderful features, such as the pink neon ceiling installation and the open kitchen where the sushi can be seen being prepared. Every detail has been carefully chosen to fit within Itsu's brand image. And the tight timescale also meant that Krassa had no opportunity for procrastination. 'I've learnt a lot in a very short time,' she says. 'It opens up a lot of possibilities, things I thought I'd never do.' *Gareth Gardner*





GARETH GARDNER