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Central to success

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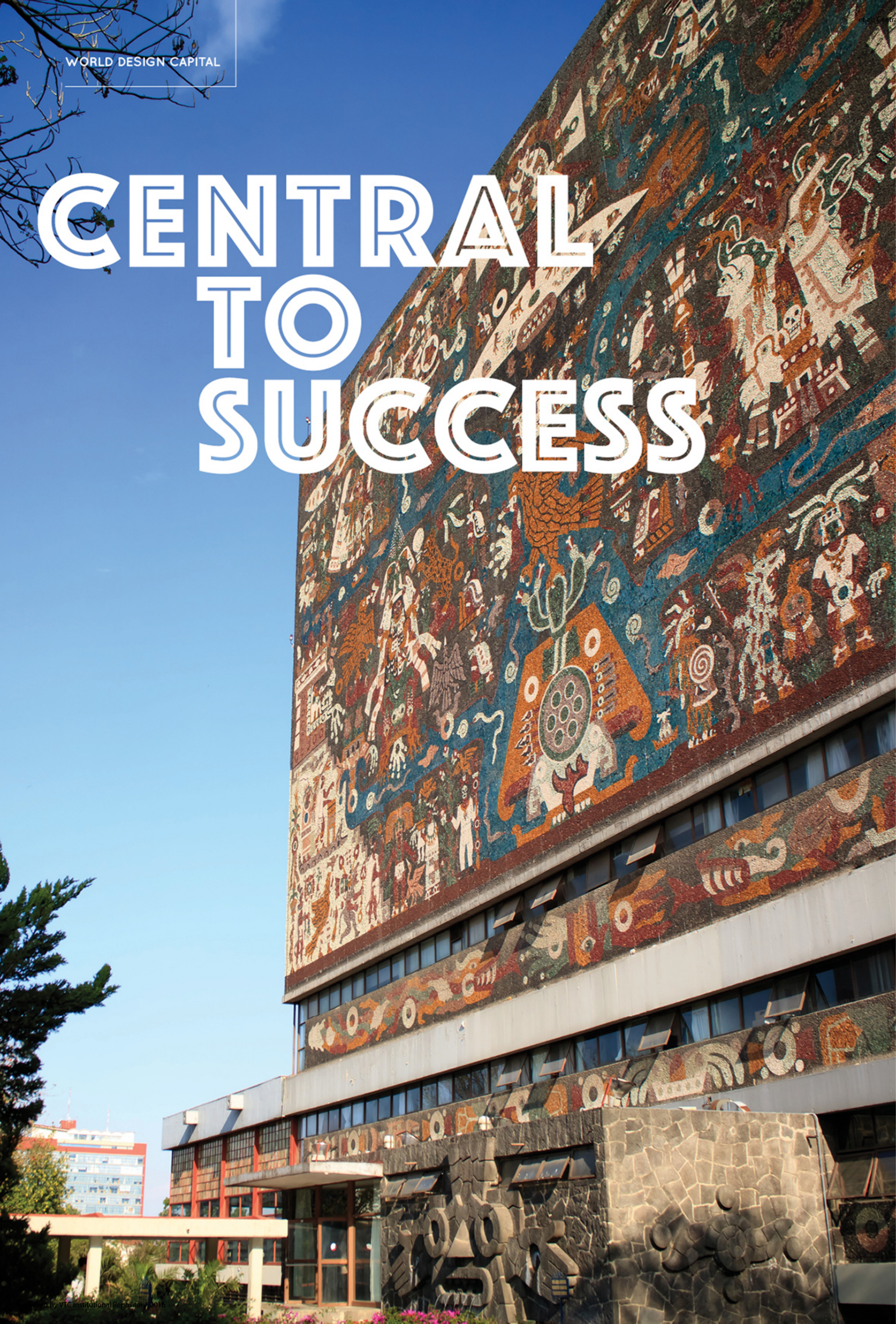
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CENTRAL TO SUCCESS



David Pompa's lighting collection and lino tiles



PICTURE CREDIT: DAVID POMPA

As Mexico City prepares to take on the mantle of World Design Capital in 2018, we take a look at the city's art scene and some of its successes

Opposite: Main library in the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM, UNESCO World Heritage Site. Murals by Juan O'Gorman
Right: The remarkable Satellite Towers are a symbol of Mexico City's urban development. These towers were built in the mid-50s. The designers are the painter and sculptor Mathias Goeritz and the Mexican architect Luis Barragan

From 17th century Baroque artists to 1950s authors like Jack Kerouac, Mexico City has long been a hub for artists, even if not the most salubrious of locations. But today the Mexican capital – once better known for its vast population, crime and pollution – is smartening up its act and is considered a desirable tourist destination. So much so that it was named number one in the *New York Times*' 2016 'Places To Go' guide. The sprawling metropolis boasts more than 150 museums and a mass of cultural centres, from the National Centre for Arts to the Mexican Film Library, as well as many small independent galleries and art spaces. But art in Mexico City exists outside gallery walls. There's street art to be seen throughout the city, original designs in stores and a burgeoning art community. A new wave of innovative product and fashion designers, architects and film directors are making names for themselves not only in Mexico but





The works of several young Mexican designers at the Design House

on the international scene. The Oscar-winning director, Alejandro González Iñárritu, responsible for films such as *21 Grams*, *Birdman* and *The Revenant*, was born there, as was the *Harry Potter* and *Gravity* director, Alfonso Cuarón.

Behind these new talents are some forward thinking art institutions. SOMA is an independent art school in Mexico City. Founded in 2009 by a group of artists, including video artist Yoshua Okón, it focuses on fostering dialogue and discourse rather than studio practice, and is a move away from the market-driven schools of the 90s. As its website states, the facilities are 'not designed for the production or promotion of work', rather as a 'space for reconsideration and reflection'. The institution offers three main programmes to students: a post-graduate two-year artist development programme, taught in Spanish; an international summer programme in English; and a series of free lectures and presentations open to the public.

Another significant addition is CENTRO, a university for creative studies offering a range of undergraduate programmes in interior architecture, industrial design, film and television, visual communication, digital media design, textile and fashion design, and marketing and advertising, as well as graduate programmes and continuing education courses. Founded in 2004, it was the first university in Mexico City specialising in creative studies and has just opened a new campus designed by renowned architect Enrique Norten, with a stunning outdoor staircase by the Dutch-born, Mexican-based artist Jan Hendrix.

Mexico's contemporary art scene reflects the wider changes in the country. There's a sense of energy to it and a need for expression. Though the institutions are at the heart of this change, more can be seen in small independent galleries, such as Lulu, Biquini Wax and House of Gaga, which exhibit a range of international artists alongside local artists.

Design Week Mexico was started in 2009 by a group of design professionals who wanted to establish a platform to promote creativity and design in the country. Held in October each year, the week has grown to include a guest country (most recently Italy) as well as a guest Mexican state (Chiapas in 2015). Emilio Cabrero, director of Design Week Mexico adds: "We organise and curate exhibitions and high-profile events dedicated to design with national and internationally renowned architects and designers. Sharing their views and experiences by creating a powerful network for those interested in learning and exploring the possibilities of how design culture can contribute to the future."

Some of the highlights of the 2015 Design Week include the Design Content initiative that saw 19 containers placed on the streets housing work by young Mexican designers; the Design House transformed by 12 design firms, and a temporary living structure in the gardens of the Tamayo Museum that was a collaboration between Mexican firm C Cubica Arquitectos and the Italian company Palomba & Serafini Associati.

The Design Week team aren't stopping there though, and according to Cabrero, one of its long term aims from the very start was to host the World Design Capital (WDC). Organised by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), the WDC is an initiative with an aim to promote design and creativity within a city. A new city is chosen every two years and since 2008 has included Torino, Seoul, Helsinki and Cape Town. This year it heads to Taipei. As well as highlighting the local talent across the world, past cities have seen both economic and social benefits. Back in October 2015, the ICSID announced that the next location was to be Mexico City, the first capital from the Americas, seeing off Brazil's Curitiba in the process.

The bid for Mexico City to host the WDC focused on the borough of Miguel Hidalgo. Situated in the northwest of the city, this is a popular area for tourists and includes Latin America's largest urban park. The aim is to introduce a new bike share programme and new health, communication and security initiatives to the area, as well as to rejuvenate some of the lower income areas of the city. "We believe that through important platforms, such as WDC, Mexico City becomes a window to the world giving us the opportunity to share the diversity of our vibrant



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PHOTO CREDIT: RENE ENRIQUEZ



The Soumaya Museum in Mexico City

creative community. Allowing a space for reflection and a new and responsible way of thinking, with no boundaries for innovative ideas, making way for a new optimism towards the future by bettering the human experience of the city," says Cabrero.

Exact plans for the 2018 schedule are still some way off, though the team promises a rich agenda of activities that will provoke thought and action, not only of the creative community but the general public alike. This, of course, is also a great chance to educate the public on the local art scene. "Throughout DWM's history we have sought to promote design and creativity as key change-makers in society. Through our programming we seek to establish a dialogue between community members by showcasing best-practices of design and their life-changing capacity," Cabrero adds.

David Pompa Alarcón grew up in Mexico and Austria, studying product design in London before opening his first store in Mexico City back in 2013. "I remember going to a lot of museums with my parents, not particular design

museums, but I would think of those impressions as the start for my interest in creativity," says Pompa.

Today his studio, davidpompa produces lighting and furniture pieces that use traditional Mexican materials with new techniques and ideas. "In my work I try to include moments and experiences I have lived. The eclectic mix between heritage and technology is a big part of our concept as it brings together elements that have not been combined in Mexico before. People start to understand that Mexico is a rich cultural country with many different facets that can be used in contemporary design," he says.

The studio took part in DWM and is set to play an active role in the plans for WDC in 2018. He adds: "The World Design Capital status will definitely push Mexican design even more and it will be a great opportunity for our brand to share our ideas with people from different cultures. Also, I can imagine a lot of collaborations between different disciplines working on projects to present the variety of Mexican design."



Left: Visión y Tradición exhibition Right: Design Week Mexico documentaries



PHOTO CREDIT: RENE ENRIQUEZ