



UP honours British philanthropist and interior design expert

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The University of Pretoria conferred an honorary doctorate in Architecture on the person who has had an enormous influence on the discipline of interior design since he entered the profession in the 1950s. Sir Terence Orby Conran (81) is a designer, a restaurateur, an entrepreneur, the author of numerous books on interior design, the founder of the Design Museum and a businessman. Most importantly of all, he is a philanthropist who made the discipline of interior design accessible worldwide.

Sir Terence Conran is the son of Christina Mabel (née Halstead) and the South African-born Gerard Rupert Conran (a businessman from East London). He was born in Kingston-upon-Thames on 4 October 1931. It could be said that his career started while he was still in school. Being in a school where academic study was combined with practical, physical activities, he started designing furniture at a young age. While teachers in the 1940s encouraged pupils to learn hard so that they would not “end up working in factories”, Sir Terence did not see anything wrong with the idea of being a factory worker, creating things.

The man who is said to have had the biggest impact on the contemporary British lifestyle enrolled at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in 1948, but was later advised by his tutors to leave the course to join the architect Dennis Lennon to design the interior of a princess flying boat for the 1951 Festival of Britain.

Sir Terence founded Conran and Company in Notting Hill, London in 1952. The practice specialised in furniture making, but also received

commissions for complete designs. After working in the basement of a restaurant washing dishes as a young man, he got the idea of opening a restaurant without any chefs. So, his first restaurant, The Soup Kitchen, was born in 1953, founded to supplement his furniture enterprise, selling only soup (made in a large cauldron) at cheap prices.

He did not give up on designing and in 1956, at the young age of 25, he opened his own furniture store in which he could sell his modern furniture at affordable prices, making a contemporary lifestyle available to the average person. He later opened the first Habitat shop in London, which grew to become a revolutionary furniture store across the UK and later worldwide. It sold affordable, modern furniture and both local and international household goods. In the 1980s, Sir Terence expanded the Habitat shop into a group of companies to include various chain stores.

In 1956, Sir Terence established The Conran Design Group. He was involved in, among others, redesigning

London's Michelin House, which he turned into a restaurant. In the 1990s, he played a major part in the regeneration of the Butler's Wharf area of London.

In 1982, he opened The Boilerhouse in the basement of the V&A Waterfront to showcase and celebrate design. This collection grew to such an extent that it moved out of the basement of this museum in 1988 into a new premises in Shad Thames to become the Design Museum that is still there today.

Sir Terence received his knighthood from Buckingham Palace in 1983. He is also a fellow of the Chartered Society of Designers and winner of the Minerva Medal (the society's highest award). He was awarded the Prince Phillip Designer of the Year Award by the British Design Council and is a *Commandeur de l'Ordre des Artes et Lettres*, France.

His other later successful business ventures include creating the Conran Octopus Publishing Company, having the Conran Shop spread around the world, establishing the Conran Restaurants group in the 1990s, and publishing around 30 books.

Sir Terence was the Design Indaba Keynote Speaker in South Africa in 2003.

Honorary doctorate

The University of Pretoria decided to bestow the degree PhD (honoris causa) upon Sir Terence Orby Conran in recognition of his significant and original contribution to the discipline of interior design. He is specifically honoured for his direct contributions to interior design, his design activism, his contributions to the literature and for his management and corporate contributions.

Sir Terence advocated the use of a multidisciplinary approach in design – a model that is still followed by the Department of Architecture at the University of Pretoria today. His holistic design approach, where location, environment, architecture, materials, interior design, light, space, product and graphics connect as if chosen by 'one pair of eyes', is a major and original contribution to interior design where the concept of design distribution plays such an important part in the design process.

Sir Terence was meant to receive his honorary doctorate at the April 2012 graduation ceremony, but due to ill health could not travel to accept his degree. He received his degree at a TuksAlumni function in London on 21 August 2012. 📍

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