



## Ayse Birsel

Ayse Birsel was born in a land of contrasts--Izmir, Turkey, a town more than 2,000 years old. And although ancient customs and traditions are part of her heritage, she's always looked to the future.

Herman Miller Designs  
Resolve system  
RED Rocket

Office/Studio  
Olive 1:1 Inc.  
New York, New York

### Awards

NeoCon Overall Best of Competition Award and Most Innovative Award for Resolve system, 1999  
Industrial Design Excellence Award, 1996, for Zoë Washlet  
*I.D. magazine* award, 1996, for Zoë Washlet  
The Chicago Museum Good Design Award, 1995, for Zoë Washlet  
V.I.A. (French Furniture Industry Syndicate) Award, 1994, for furniture  
*I.D. magazine* award, 1990, for the Water Room

Growing up, Birsel first thought she might want to become an architect. But when a friend pointed out that an object as simple as a teacup is a design challenge, she switched directions. "I fell in love with the human scale of industrial design," she recalls. "It's both real and intimate." Indeed, mocking up design ideas full size has become central to her design process.

Birsel came to the U.S. in 1986 after winning a Fulbright scholarship to earn her master's degree in design at Pratt Institute in New York. From mentors such as Rowena Reed and Bruce Hannah, she learned to combine the principles of three-dimensional design with the "no-nonsense approach of distilling problems to their essence." Her satisfaction comes in finding new and novel design solutions. Consequently, her work is often a combination of simple functionality and striking inventiveness.

Her enthusiasm also embraces the unusual. After designing a combination bidet and toilet for a large Japanese manufacturer in 1995, she asked, "Who gets to design a toilet seat? It was the chance of a lifetime!"

Birsel especially enjoys working with organizations that truly embrace change. When faced with the challenge of creating a new system of office furniture for Herman Miller, Birsel's point of departure was the evolution of work. "Today, we can work anywhere we want," she observes, "from our homes, back yards, while we travel. If we can work anywhere, why do we go to the office? I believe we go to the office to belong to a community, to share, to learn, and to socialize." The result, the Resolve system, where lightweight structures and flowing fabric screens define personal space, is a departure from traditional enclosures and partitions.

Innovation is often the result of Birsel's work. "I count on my intuition, coupled with as clear an understanding of the problem as possible, in order to arrive at new solutions. Innovation is often then the happy result of my work rather than its prime driver. I also try to focus on the big picture, the overall concept and strategy," she says. "Appropriate details then follow naturally."

The big picture, whether of furniture or a fountain, continues to delight and define the work of Ayse Birsel.