

INDIA TODAY

AUGUST 2015

Spice

DESIGN SPECIAL



RNI NO. DELENG / 2005 / 15332 *Not for sale. To be circulated free with India Today in Mumbai, Delhi & NCR, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Chandigarh. *Supplement to India Today issue dated August 3, 2015*.

THE STARCK WORLD

French by birth and universal in his work,
Philippe Starck on what inspires him

PHILIPPE STARCK, ARCHITECT AND DESIGNER

THE STARCK DIFFERENCE

WITH A GRAND TOTAL OF 744 PROJECTS TO DATE, PHILIPPE STARCK IS AS MUCH LEGEND AS INSTITUTION. HUMOUR, HARD WORK AND A LOVE OF ELEGANCE ARE JUST A SMALL PART OF THIS PHENOMENON.

PHILIPPE STARCK AND HIS WIFE JASMINE ABDELLATIF



Photographs by SAM TINSON



THE FUTURISTIC KONG BAR AND RESTAURANT, PARIS



JESSICA HINES
Travel & Film Writer

“Just to inform you: Philippe Starck is not inclined to speak strictly about design as design in itself is not of his interest.”

As emails go, this one, received a couple of days before the interview with French design legend Philippe Starck, wasn't the most promising. Starck, 66, is hands down the most successful, influential, and prolific designer the world has ever known. He has been at the forefront of design since he arrived on the Paris design scene in 1969 with a range of inflatable furniture. His design résumé reads like the index to a design encyclopedia. To date he has designed no less than (deep breath) 92 different interiors for hotels and clubs, restaurants and waiting rooms; 13 buildings, 35 new build apartment buildings with Yoo (a residential and hotel design company); 90 pieces of technology from televisions and radios to espresso machines; 1 set of luggage; 53 lights; 281 pieces of furniture; six

food brands; 12 clothing ranges; 19 vehicles; cars, boats, bikes; three bathroom ranges; one kitchen; 139 products under industrial design, which covers everything else, from door handles to kettles, even a mineral water bottle. This is a total of 744 projects to date, some of which, like the hotels, required multiples designs and collaborations.

Currently he has six new architecture projects as well as assorted industrial designs and a hydrogen car. And he has just declared war on underwear, calling it stupid and pointless. That's a lot of stuff.

In a fundamental way Starck has shaped how we relate to industrial design. You have probably sat on one or more of his chair designs or opened a door with one of his door handles. His playful relationship to living spaces, the mixing of future-proof modernism with eclectic collections of old things are now second nature to us.

THE PERSONA BEHIND THE PROCESS

He takes the interview in the middle of his work day and is dressed in a faded black T-shirt and jeans. He has an easy smile and twinkly eyes and is utterly without front or guile. By his side throughout the interview is a brown-haired, brown-eyed woman with the widest, warmest smile. This is Jasmine Abdellatif, Starck's wife. They sit with some part of their bodies touching each other through the interview, a constant silent monitoring flickers back and forth between them. This isn't claustrophobic, just moving.

None of this is what was expected so what is going on here? If we are not going to talk about design then perhaps we can figure out the man just a little bit.

“I am not intelligent and am clearly autistic,” he states. He grew up in a wealthy French family. His father, an aircraft engineer, taught him how to create, “not in a simple way, if you are designing a plane this means you need creative technology and a very rigorous approach. Creating daily was the norm.” His mother was, “a sort of foolish grande bourgeoisie” who instilled in him an understanding of the importance of elegance in relation to everything in life. He also credits his father with giving him one of his most famous attributes as a designer, his humour. Starck is the designer who has a metal apple holder fixed to the wall in each room; the phrase ‘An apple a day keeps the



▲ THE FAIRYTALE LIKE HOTEL METZ, PARIS DUE TO OPEN IN 2018

doctor away' is printed on the wall and the apples are replenished daily.

Joking for him is not just a way of thinking, it is a way of life. He says, "When you take seriously light things and serious things lightly it is a way to be. If nothing exists then it is fun to do it, to do it well. This means you can fly very freely, completely out of normal life and daily reality, you just fly in a dream, in the project. When you arrive at the end, the project is completed"

STARCK'S INSPIRATION

Humour, hard work and a love of elegance does not explain his phenomenal drive; it comes from something deeper.

"I had a strict Catholic upbringing which means that now I don't believe. But it did give

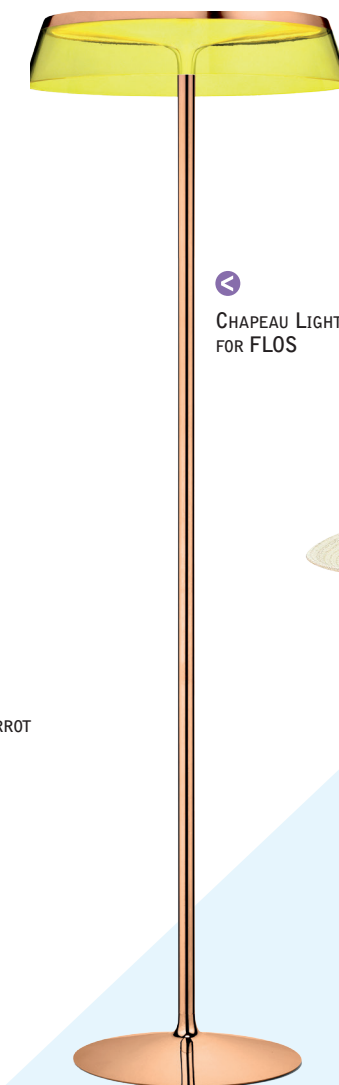
me an idea of a duty to others. I believe you have to serve. I feel this in my spine. When you are born, you sign a contract with your species, with your civilisation, your society, your friend, your neighbour and yourself. This contract is not a joke. You have to do it the best you possibly can. You have to engage the whole of your life to deserve the right to exist. Perhaps this is because of my religious upbringing or perhaps it is a natural response, but for me the desire to exist is the desire to serve, just serve. So this is what I do."

This is a remarkable thing to say. It is the sort of thing CEOs might say because they read that they should think this. But Starck isn't capable of such dissembling, it is a plain spoken fact. "Some people say, 'Ah Starck he makes so many things because he

▶ MADAM WORLD OF EMILIO PUCCI FOR KARTELL



▼ BRUT NATURE FOR ROEDERER 2006



◀ CHAPEAU LIGHT FOR FLOS



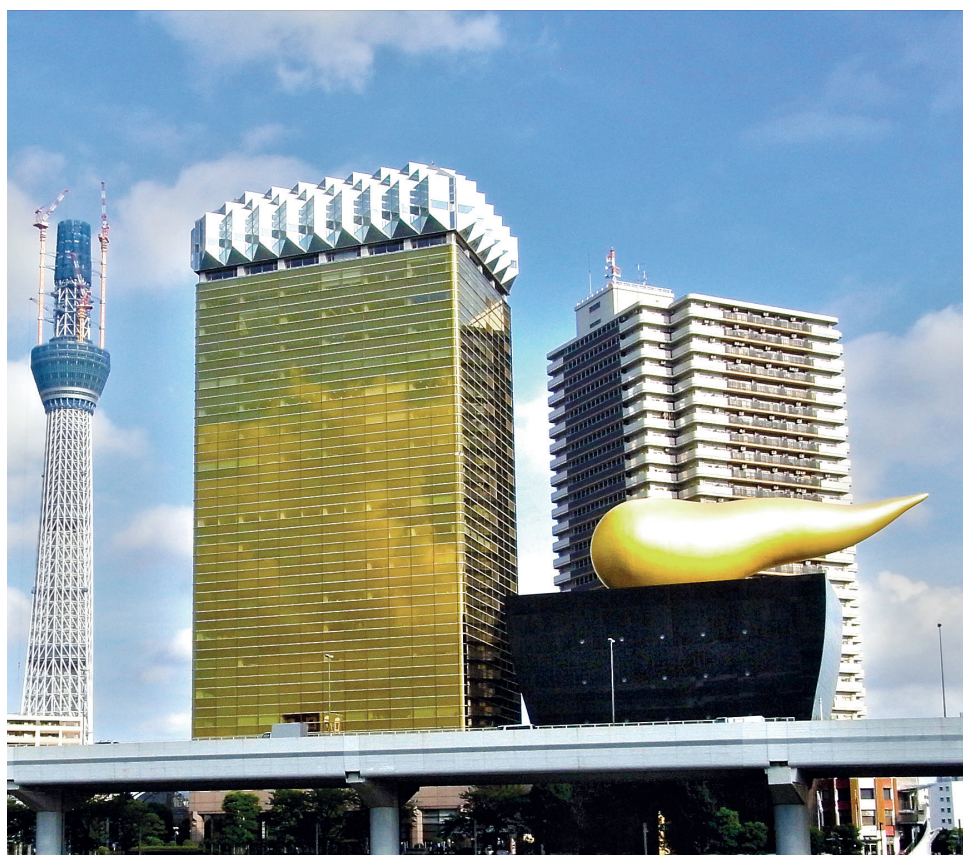
▶ F RAME FEGIO GIALLO FOR FLOS



◀ ZIK 2 FOR PARROT

STARCK'S DESIGN PORTFOLIO

STARCK'S BREADTH OF WORK SPANS EVERY POSSIBLE INCARNATION FROM A PHOTO BOOTH TO A LEMON SQUEEZER



THE GOLDEN FLAME ATOP THE ASAHI BEER HALL IN TOKYO



THE DELANO, MIAMI IS A ONE-STOP-SHOP FOR GLAMOUR, ART AND RELAXATION

STARCK'S MOST CELEBRATED PROJECTS

- **Asahi Beer Hall, Tokyo 1989** The golden flame on top of the building makes it one of the most famous buildings in Tokyo
- **Delano Hotel, Miami 1994** Opulence is given a minimalist makeover that grounds the hotel in its Art Deco past
- **Yoo Residences, Multiple cities 1999** A series of live work developments around the world that exemplify Starck's philosophy of simplicity, elegance and functionality
- **Alhondiga Cultural Centre Spain 2010** Dramatic redevelopment embracing the past and celebrating the future of Europe's new cultural kid.
- **Kong Bar and Restaurant, Paris 2003** Kong Futuristic pod landed on top of classical Paris rooftops.



I have no ego, no avidity, I have no cynicism, no ambition. My only ambition is to be a little less ashamed of my self. To be proud is impossible. I continue with the hope that tomorrow I shall be better.



THE ALHONDIGA CULTURE CENTRE, SPAIN, USES CLASSIC SPANISH TILING ON THE COLUMNS

has a huge ego,' but if there is someone in the world who has not ego it is me. I don't even know what it is. I have no ego, I have no avidity, I have no cynicism, no ambition. My only ambition is just to be a little less ashamed of myself. To be proud is impossible. But it is a very good driving force because I am never happy with myself, I continue with the hope that tomorrow I shall be better."

SERVE THE CAUSE; SAVOUR THE DESIGN

This is the heart of it. Philippe Starck has an overwhelming drive to serve and the only way to do that is to design things that he hopes, 'will make his friends' lives happy.' He can never be happy by what he makes because he doesn't like things and he doesn't know what happiness actually is. He says, "I don't want to be dramatic but I have the feeling that I've missed out on what life is. Since I was born I am alone, in a grey tube with no windows, no transparency and no end. The big paradox of this is that the only thing that has touched me is love. I am passionately in love with my wife, we are completely symbiotic. I am still alone in the tube, she is in me in it, half of me in the tube is her."

The empire that has grown around him is almost accidental, a bi-product rather than the goal. It exists because he has been driven to prove to himself each day that he deserves to exist not because he wants a huge empire.

Starck's daily life is for many the goal, the dream. He has his own plane so that each night he can fly to one of his five houses around Europe: an island near Venice, an oyster farm in South West France, a house on a sand dune in Portugal, another in a forest. For Starck this is not the goal; it is a means to an end. He has one thing to do in life, design. This allows him to do it better. He explains, "We live in different places depending on the level of concentration I need. Because, as you know, creativity is just the management of concentration. This is the centre of my job. So I know, if we go to a place with friends, there is low concentration, in one place we have no friends but we have neighbours so medium concentration, in another place we have no friends or neighbours so it has high levels of concentration."

So when he is there, how does he create? "For me whatever I make it is the same process. I have sort of X-ray eyes which give me an incredibly fast analysis of any type of structure. If you have this way of thinking you can make anything you want. Design a rocket for Virgin, a motorcycle, organic rice, a toothbrush; it is exactly the same way of working. First you analyse why this has to exist, why this doesn't have to exist, why we can change this. Afterwards I do it. People are astonished at my speed of creativity. It looks abnormal because it is immediate. But if you spend every second of your life looking at the things about you then it is normal."

When asked what makes him proud he answers that it isn't the things he makes, it is impossible for them to please him because the idea is always more elegant than the result. The idea is spirit, the result base materiality.

He is however "a little proud" that people have loved him, "and they don't look like masochists"; that his four children are special, despite him being "a very, very bad father, a ghost father". He concludes, "I am proud to be a servant. I am a servant and I have a broom and I try to clean the life of my friends. I am very happy with that."

In society today people are treated as objects, and objects are loved. Starck reminds us that objects are just things and it is people who should be loved. Their love for us is what has real value.