



PHILIPPE STARCK

Interviewed by [Kyle Johnson](#)

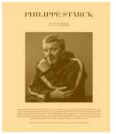
Portrait courtesy of [James Bort](#)



With a design vision that heralds the mantra “no one has to be genius, but everyone has to participate,” Philippe [Starck](#) is a man of many talents who sets out to improve the lives of as many people as possible. With a scope of work that spans across a wide range of industries from the design of grand architectural buildings to hotels, restaurants and even furniture, he melds his love of ideas with a determination to change the world through his great creations. Whether it’s everyday products like furniture and lemon squeezers or the grandeur of revolutionary mega-yachts, wind turbines or an electric car, it’s certain that [Starck](#) never stops short of pushing the limits. Forever changing the criteria of contemporary design.

“My juicer is not meant to squeeze lemons; it is meant to start conversations.” Philippe [Starck](#)





“I think materiality is vulgar. Only the project is elegant, only the dream is elegant”

To start, tell us a little bit about your childhood and your time at the École Camondo in Paris, explaining how you came to be a world renowned designer now at the forefront of modern design.

There are people who keep a wonderful memory of their childhood. This is not exactly the same to me. For me, childhood was a black hole, shadow, despair, great solitude. I did not understand the school. I did not understand the system, I did not understand - and I still do not - society, nothing I was told. And as soon as I could walk, I fled school. Since I never went to school, I lived all my youth totally isolated. No contact with anyone. The police regularly brought me back to school when they sometimes found me hiding in the wood. And then I stopped to flee outside: I stopped coming out of my room. For years I did not get out of my room. I was 16 or 17 years old, I had no furniture, I slept on the floor in a corner. One day I figured it could not go on like that because I was nonetheless a healthy boy - my wife maintains that I am completely crazy and she is not totally wrong, but the bases are healthy enough. I said to myself 'you have to get back to reality.'

I realized that there was only one thing I knew: creativity, mostly from my father who was an aircraft inventor, engineer and manufacturer. To exist I decided to create, sadly not airplanes, but just small useless gifts to try to help my society. But it was not for me a pleasure, it was simply a necessity of survival.

In 1983 you were commissioned to refurbish the private apartments for the French President, François Mitterrand, in the Élysée Palace in Paris. Explain how this helped shape your career.

This was a very interesting experience - and an honor - because François Mitterrand wanted it to be very simple, and it also established a precedent in the design world because this project symbolized the recognition of design by institutions.

Tell us about your time with Pierre Cardin as the Art Director of his furniture division.

At that time, Pierre Cardin was the modern man, the visionary. As soon as I managed to have a meeting with him - it took a year or so - I made a great and very elegant presentation. I had spent days and days testing it: it was very complex. I put my

“I don't consider myself as an artist”

presentation on the table, and he was stunned. He had never seen anything like that in his life. He told me 'you are hired' and I found myself, at 17 or 18 years old, at the art direction of the furniture for Pierre Cardin. But alas, very quickly, I realized that we were not at all on the same wavelength. He was an elitist capitalist, and I am a communist: I wanted to give people a million furniture at one euro and he wanted to make one piece of furniture at one million euro. We could not get along so I left.

But luckily I was able to develop my concept of democratic design that is to give quality pieces at accessible prices to the largest number of people, to lower the price while increasing the quality. With editors such as Kartell, I managed to take out two zeros off the price of a chair - the Louis Ghost family and the Generic collection are some of the best examples.

When you divide the price by 100, you have radically changed the concept.

Several years ago you frowned at the idea of going digital even calling it “sick” at one point. Despite this, you embraced the online culture and made your move to Facebook and Instagram anyhow. Explain how this online real estate has helped you set a new precedence with your audience or “sentimental tribe?” What new things have you learned? Do you have any regrets?

I have no sentimental relation with digital world because before everything it is just a tool. We use digital world because it is today part of the voice to communicate and when you want to speak, you want all the range of the notes of your voice to express your ideas. Then I try to communicate my vision to my sentimental and cultural tribe.

In 2016, you launched a new line of fragrances under your new perfume label, Starck Paris. Tell us about your inspiration for the project and then explain how “scent” has inspired your creativity since childhood.

When I was a boy, my mother had a perfume shop and I used to spend a lot of time there immersed in a world of fragrances, smells and loud classical music. This is where it all began. Odours, like music, have always been structural elements to my life, and my life - probably due to my mental sickness called creativity. Thus, it is only logical that my olfactive and musical memories unconsciously infiltrate all my creations. Music and smells are mental territories.

Starck Paris is not at all related to the world of design or architecture. It is related to my mental personal and emotional architecture. I have always had this idea of fighting materiality, which is a paradox because I have been producing materiality. Nevertheless, I think materiality is vulgar. Only the project is elegant, only the dream is elegant. By creating perfume, I could eventually reach this dream of immateriality. So, for all these reasons, this project is very dear to me. Probably one of the closest to what I am.

Peau de Soie is exploring the women's inner mystery. What we love in woman is their mystery. I wanted to create a mental space echoing the mystery of woman that may be her male part.

Peau de Pierre evokes the ambivalent masculinity. It is a very complex perfume. Some will love it and some will hate it, but it is my vision of men.

Peau d'Ailleurs was probably the most difficult for me, as I wanted to reflect where I live, in my soft bubble of creativity, which is not fun but fertile of surprises: Elsewhere.

It is interesting to see that the female perfume was made by a man, Dominique Ropion, that the male one was done by a woman, Daphné Bugey and that *Peau d'Ailleurs* was made by a UFO, Annick Ménardo.

Lastly, give us three words of wisdom that best illustrate you as an artist and shed some light on what we can expect to see from you in the future.

First, I don't consider myself as an artist, any more than a designer or an architect for that matter. I am a human, a mutant, belonging to the big story of evolution who only try to deserve to exist by serving my community, my friends and family the best I can - which is not much because I don't save live, only sometimes I make myself less useless. Today, what matters is not creating more matter but improving the one that already exists. The new modern parameters are dematerialization,