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PHILIPPE STARCK

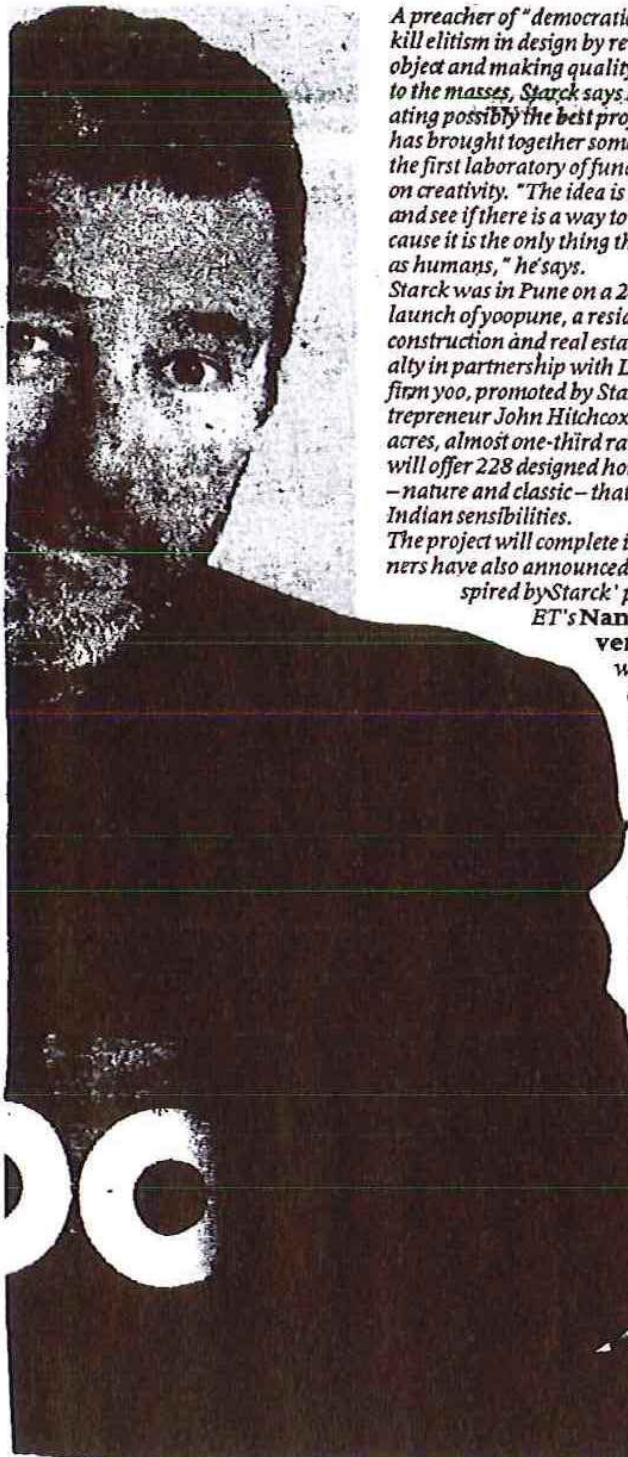
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Starck Reality

Iconic French Designer In Conversation With ET

PHILIPPE Starck is a superstar in a world where design increasingly decides the saleability of anything from mobile handsets to 5-star suites to social networks. Perhaps the most famous living designer, the 61-year-old bearded Parisian expects Indian creativity to play a big role in the new civilization. "I expect something completely new from India," he told ET at the site of yoopune, his first project in the country, this weekend. The designer, who started his climb to stardom by redoing popular Paris night-clubs and decorating then French president Francois Mitterrand's private apartments in the Elysee Palace, has designed hotels, airbuses, yachts, cars, bicycles, streetlamps, toothbrushes, juicers, furniture, shoes, external hard drive, underwear... you name it. As a child, he spent hours under the drawing boards of his father, an aircraft designer.

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A preacher of "democratic design" that tries to kill elitism in design by reworking everyday object and making quality products affordable to the masses, Starck says he is currently creating possibly the best project of his life—he has brought together some scientists to create the first laboratory of fundamental research on creativity. "The idea is to boost creativity and see if there is a way to teach creativity, because it is the only thing that differentiates us as humans," he says.

Starck was in Pune on a 24-hour visit for the launch of yoopune, a residential project by construction and real estate firm Panchshil Realty in partnership with London-based design firm yoo, promoted by Starck and property entrepreneur John Hitchcox. Spread over 17 acres, almost one-third rainforest, yoopune will offer 228 designed homes under two styles—nature and classic—that Starck feels best suit Indian sensibilities.

The project will complete in 2014. The partners have also announced their second 'yoo inspired by Starck' project in Gurgaon.

ET's Nandini Raghavendra caught up with the star designer, dressed in bright green and yellow pants, for a 30-minute interview. Excerpts:

Design is increasingly becoming a crucial differentiator for products and services. Do you think big global corporates have given design its due in their businesses?
I fail to un-

derstand why big businesses have been so slow to understand the importance of design in their work. Only very stupid people today do not recognize that design is one of the most important parameters.

Take the case of cars. Today they all have the same engine, the same platform, just the body changes and body is pure design. So if you prefer a BMW or a Peugeot it is because of the shape, since everything else is the same. Design is the only differentiator, that's very clear. Take the fantastic example of the American car business—these people have understood nothing till they went bankrupt. It was the same thing with the big players of the music industry who did not see the coming of the Internet. And all of this was known to us more than ten years ago, so it's even more astonishing and makes it very difficult to respect big companies because they are so blind. I feel sad because I love big companies. They have incredible know-how; incredible power of investment, of distribution, they are smart people, but blind.

What I foresee is Indian creativity rising in the new architecture of civilization and I expect something completely new from India. It would be sad, if you are the new kings and you repeat our mistakes.

Can you please explain 'the new architecture of civilization'?

The world has changed. The frontiers are now political, no longer human. Earlier, you would see India, Japan, Italy...but today, every country is made of the addition of many cultural tribes, so there is exactly the same tribe in India, in Japan and everywhere else. To try and please everybody is stupid and can never work. You please yourself, your family, your friends, and your tribes, which are now everywhere. In fact, there are enough of these tribes, which is why I do not have to adapt a building or a property to a country. Of course, we have to respect some professional facts like if it's a cold or a warm country, people are taller or smaller, which is all normal. But I just speak to my tribe. Here, I speak to the Indian part of my tribe; tomorrow I am in California and I shall speak to the Californian part of my tribe.

Before, people thought you have to make a unique product for your target consumer, which is absolutely ridiculous, which is how all the big companies have failed. One only has to be honest to oneself, because what you know best is yourself, why try and imagine what the others will love?

What is your design philosophy? Where is it rooted?

I am a very good professional. My father was an inventor and aeronautic engineer and he taught me that if I want to fly a plane I have to invent it, but if I do not want it to crash, then I have to be rigorous, which is

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why I am very inventive but very rigorous as well. I know I can make anything, but the product is not my end. I care about the effect that product will have on the people using it; if it's space (that I create) then (I care about) who will be living in it.

It's always people before product and when you do that everything falls into place. I am not making a revolution. I invent different things because while the others are so driven and focused on product, marketing and business, I am always thinking about people and how I can help them. I make things to share. This creates a vision, which in turn creates an ethic. The ethic creates a concept and the concept creates a project or product. It's always from the highest to the lowest, but never the contrary. Even if it's a chair. I use design as a political weapon, in a subversive and inventive way. What we need are more creators than artists. I am currently creating what's possibly the best project of my life—the first laboratory of fundamental research on pure creativity. I have brought some scientists to try and understand why do we have ideas and why are we creative. The idea is to boost creativity and see if there is a way to teach creativity, because it is the only thing that differentiates us as humans.

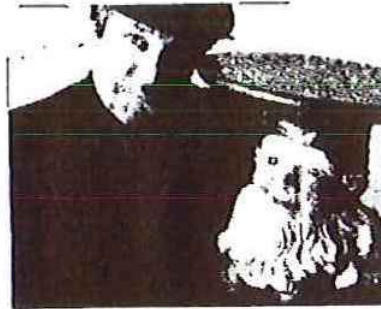
How do you look at the global economic crisis? How has it changed lifestyles?

This is not a crisis. This is part of normal change that comes in civilizations, the movement in civilizations. There was the Roman and the Egyptian civilizations, which were born and died. It is our turn now. It is like the friction caused when big glaciers move and scratches the rock. Today we suffer because the glaciers move from one place of the world to another. What we have to see it as is a fantastic opportunity to reinvent ourselves. We have lost our values. All of us are victims of the wild capitalism of Ms Thatcher, Mr Reagan and Mr Bush. We have to fix all of that and reinvent ourselves. I have never worked for revolution, but a permanent control of evolution. And I hope the young sees this as the opportunity that it is.

Yoopune is your, and yoo's, first project in India. How would you define 'yoo inspired by Starck' residential project?

It's a process to help you know yourself better. To live as communities, the smart tribe who will build our future. The long tables, the outdoor living spaces, it is for people to come together. After food, the second most important thing that people spend on is their house. It's difficult today to make a revolution here and you cannot afford to make a mistake with your house; it must be something you want to come home to. So, yoo is about respect, tenderness and vision and, of course, you. For which honesty is the best investment. Don't follow the mainstream.

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