

# A PROFESSIONAL DREAMER

## 1 Guest Philippe Starck

by Alessandra Coppa

Philippe Starck believes that design must be poetic and political, rebellious and benevolent, pragmatic and subversive – and above all “ecological”. A brilliant, cultured, self-taught designer, he is renowned for the versatility of his creative talents. Since the 1980s, Starck’s design work has attained iconic status.

Philippe Starck’s wide-ranging work combines unconventional poetic creativity with rigorous professionalism, playfulness with irony. Ever capable of surprising and being surprised, he believes that design is first and foremost a “service”, a “democratic” concept in which design serves to make high-quality objects available to the largest possible number of people at affordable prices.

From everyday objects such as furniture and the famous Juicy Salif citrus squeezer (Alessi, 1990) to futuristic mega yachts, hotels that stimulate the senses, low-impact individual wind turbines, and recently also ceramics, his work is a political and civic act which he accomplishes with love, poetry and humour.

At Cersaie 2012, Starck unveiled his first ceramic product, the Flexible Architecture collection created for Ceramica Sant’Agostino which reinvents the potential of the joints, transforming a surface covering material into a novel architectural system.



Thomas Blaugies ©



PHILIPPE STARCK'S WIDE-RANGING CREATIVE ACTIVITIES SPAN DESIGN AND FUNCTIONALITY, ECONOMY AND SYMBOLISM, AND HAVE NOW BRANCHED INTO THE CERAMIC SECTOR

How do you prefer to define yourself: as a Japanese architect, an American scenographer, a German industrial designer, a French art director, an Italian furniture designer, a simple guy who allows himself the luxury of working only for people he cares about, a dreamer, a humanist, a pop star, or a mad inventor? And how would you define design?

“I am a professional dreamer, an explorer who seeks to justify his existence by proposing different solutions for his cultural tribe”.

You clearly love to open doors, to ask questions, to amaze and be amazed. Which legend is the best metaphor for your work: Faust, Pandora's Box, or the Sorcerer's Apprentice?

“Faust. I have sold my life to the devil for this mental illness called creativity”.

You have often said that you want to create “right” objects, as Munari called them: good objects that can make other people – your “tribe of the heart” – feel comfortable; objects that express more than just a function; design “as a means of justice, honesty and validity”. What makes an object “right”?

“A good object is one that attains a good balance between different parameters, such as function, economy and symbolism. Some parameters are rational and others are immaterial. A good product, a right product offers benefits to the end user”.

You have often stressed that “this work, if done for purely aesthetic or cultural motives, is meaningless ... there must be a kind of political urgency about it”. What do you mean by this? Can you give me an example of an object you have designed that highlights how you have redefined production and the relationship between man and matter?

“I was never interested in design or architecture. It is design that chose me somehow. Creating is a mental illness and is the only thing I am capable of

Above: “rooms” featuring the Flexible Architecture wall covering by Ceramica Sant’Agostino and objects designed by Philippe Starck, including the Lou Read armchair, Driade 2011 and the Fauteuil Blanc chair, Privé collection, Cassina 2007  
Below: tap from the Axor Starck Organic collection, 2012



« Creating is a mental illness and is the only thing I am capable of doing. I use design as a political weapon. I have always used my creativity to spread ideas such as Democratic Design... now I am continuing with Democratic Ecology »



Left: personal, invisible wind turbines, Pranac, 2010 (designed in 2004)  
Below: Abbracciaio, Kartell, 2012

Above, from left to right: Zartan chair, Magis 2011, Gun Lamp table lamp, Flos, 2005 and the Louis Ghost chair designed for Kartell in 2002 on the occasion of its tenth anniversary

Below: a detail showing the unique texture of Flexible Architecture

doing. I use design as a political weapon. But it's a very weak tool for expressing ideas. A journalist can change the world with an article, a politician with a law or a singer with a song, but for me each creation is only a single letter of a word, so it takes a long time to express ideas. I have always used my creativity to spread ideas such as Democratic Design, which aims to increase quality for the maximum of people while reducing the price. It was a very new idea more than 30 years ago when design was dedicated only to an elite. I am continuing with Democratic Ecology, which aims to create ecological products that are easy to find and easy to use at affordable prices, such as a personal wind turbine and more recently the electric car. In a few months' time, the first house in the PATH (Prefab Accessible Technological Homes) project will be ready".

You have teamed up with the company Ceramica Sant'Agostino for your first ceramic product: Flexible Architecture, where ceramic is no longer a simple decorative covering but an integral part of the architecture, in a new architectural approach. Joints take on a new connotation; how did you turn a weakness into a strength?  
"The starting point was the amazing craftsmanship and capabilities of Sant'Agostino. Then, whether you're designing a toothbrush, a chair, a building, a mega yacht or a ceramic tile collection, it takes exactly the same energy, the same concentration and process of creation: it starts with a vision, then leads to an ethic which in turn generates projects. And each project must justify its existence. I only think of the effect that my creation will have on people. I never think of stone, concrete or plastic,

but always of humanity, utility, humour and poetry. Only human parameters. In this case I thought of offering some infinite options for creating one's own environment".

You have spoken about ceramic and its "ancient yet modern" quality: what expressive potential does it have that design has not yet tapped?  
"I believe the options are endless. For example, at Cersaie we presented the collection in other environments apart from the bathroom".

You have designed a series of elegant baths for Duravit inspired by the simplicity of the bowl form, and for Axor the Shower Collection with a squared motif. What will the bathroom of the future be like?  
"In the past the bathroom did not exist, then

it became a machine for washing. This was an improvement but it was not sufficient, it was functional but gave no pleasure. Now we don't need to choose, we can have everything. We can have greater efficiency and a 'salon d'eau', which becomes a room for living in. There are no longer any rules. Bathtub, sinks and so on become pieces of furniture like any other, they can be scattered around the room, mixed with any objects or materials that we desire. And they become coherent with the only style of tomorrow: freedom".

→ **biography**  
**Philippe Starck** (born 18 January 1949) is a designer and architect with a wide range of creative gifts. Through his unconventional objects whose purpose is to be good before being beautiful, he has been a part of our daily lives for more than thirty years. After being commissioned to work for President François Mitterrand, he began designing furniture for leading Italian and international firms. There are few areas of design he has not explored: from furniture to mail-order homes, from motorbikes to mega-yachts, and even artistic direction for space-travel projects, to name but a few. Philippe Starck believed in protecting the environment long before ecology became fashionable. Early on, he created the *Good Goods* catalogue of non-products for the non-consumers of tomorrow's moral market, and set up his own organic food company. More recently he developed the revolutionary concept of *democratic ecology* by creating affordable wind turbines for the home, followed by solar-powered boats and hydrogen cars.



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