

BOAT

Boat Life

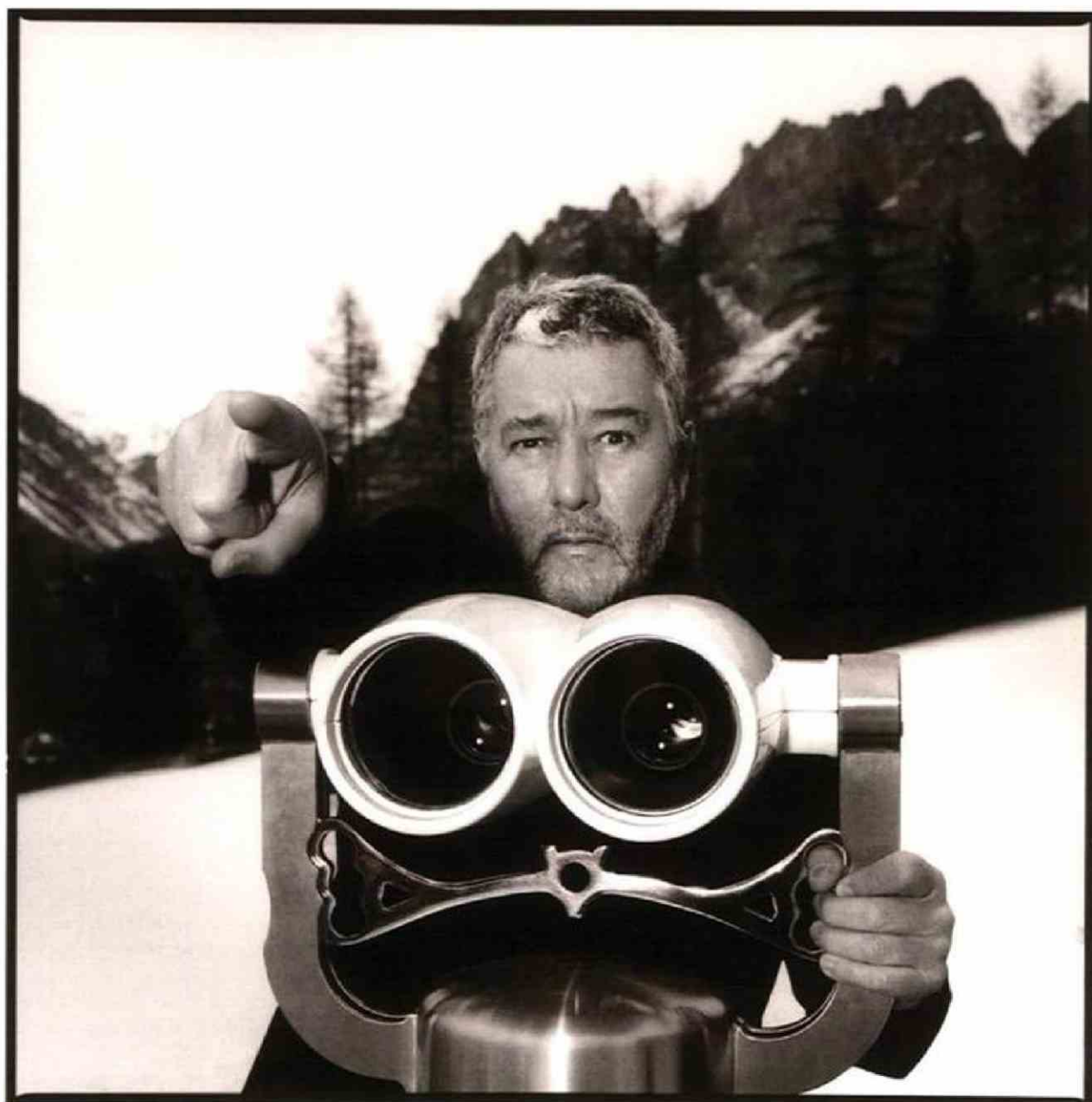
Celebrating exceptional style and design

Cool classics

Challenge the norm with our edit of the latest watches, cars and homewares



Fenc-e chair by
Philippe Starck,
from £3,985,
cassina.com



The Starck reality

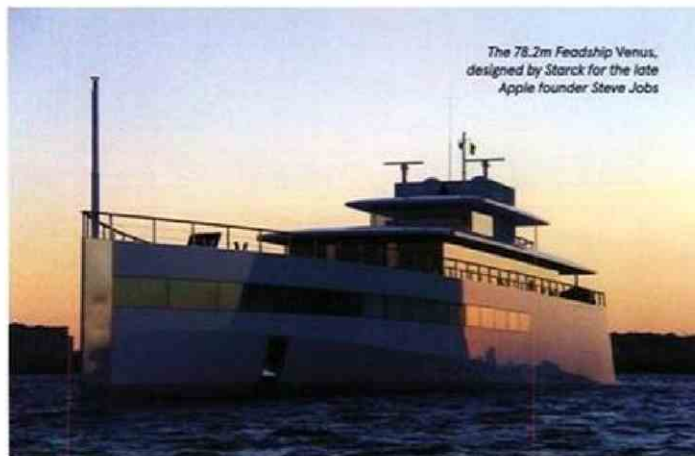
Philippe Starck's design philosophy is a simple, stripped-down pursuit of harmony and humanity. He tells *Stewart Campbell* what this means for the yachts, homewares and now space modules that he creates

Philippe Starck is in a good mood, which doesn't make a lot of sense. He hasn't eaten for a week and he's been stuck in a car for three hours, travelling from a joyless health retreat in the mountains above Munich to the site of our interview in Cortina, Italy. For a mind as famously restless as Starck's, long, boring car journeys are purgatory. He once tried to play cards to pass the time while waiting for a plane: "After three minutes my brain became hot and I experienced physical pain." Relaxation, he says, "does not exist". Give him work or give him death.

The closest thing he has to downtime is when he's at the helm of a boat. He likes to sail alone – and fittingly names all his boats *Moi*. "Because it's designed for moi, and used by moi only. Nobody can go on my boats," he says. He also used to fly planes in an attempt to unwind, but after two crashes he decided to hang up his goggles. "I cannot stop work and I always forgot things. One time it was an electric pump or something. Whenever I forgot something I would tie some tissue paper around the switch. Then one day I saw the dashboard was entirely covered in Kleenex. I said, 'OK, forget it.'"

Boats, fortunately, are a little less tricky to control and his latest is a small four-metre plywood sailing boat that he designed with a simple philosophy: "I tried to reach the minimum of the minimum of the minimum."

He has a word for this reductive approach to design: "dematerialisation". He can't abide the unnecessary. "I try to make all my boats look like a computer design, like it was at the beginning when there were no details and no 3D," he says. *Motor Yacht A* and *Sailing Yacht A* are exhibits A and B – despite being enormous vessels,



The 78.2m Feadship Venus, designed by Starck for the late Apple founder Steve Jobs



"You have to go on this boat to see what is meant by the term 'God is in the details'"

their profiles are largely uninterrupted by windows or detailing that snags the eye. The boat he designed for Steve Jobs, 78-metre *Venus*, meanwhile, was designed to be "invisible by transparency".

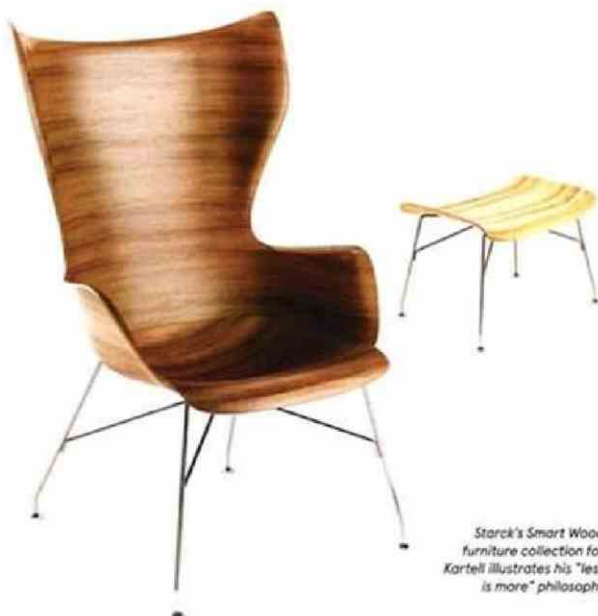
"I think it would be really, really difficult to make a boat like that now, mainly because [*Venus*] was created by two maniacs. Steve was the emperor of maniacs and I was the king of maniacs. Now he is dead, I am the

emperor," says Starck. The pair bonded quickly and spent almost six years designing the yacht. "We refined all the details millimetre by millimetre. You have to go on this boat to see what is meant by the term 'God is in the details'."

Today, Starck's portfolio runs from superyachts and champagne to glassware and chairs. But no matter the level of glamour, each project gets the same care and attention. "It's a sickness. I make everything at the same time with the same quality and the same rigour of concentration. There is no difference between designing a toothpick and a megayacht – and I take the same pleasure in each."

And now, there are also habitation modules for spacecraft. In 2024, Starck's vision will be blasted into orbit on board a new module that will attach to the International Space Station (ISS). Called *Axiom Segment*, the module will become the world's first commercial space station, allowing private individuals and organisations to spend time in space. When the ISS reaches decommissioning age, the segment will detach and become an independent space station. "My vision is to create a comfortable 'egg', where the walls are so soft and in harmony with the values of movements of the human body in zero gravity," he has said.

He talks a lot about harmony and humanity in his designs – and thinks the superyacht industry is lacking on both counts. "Nobody has



Starck's Smart Wood furniture collection for Kartell illustrates his "less is more" philosophy

"My vision is to create a comfortable 'egg' where the walls are so soft and in harmony with the values of movements of the human body in zero gravity"



Above: Starck's Xiaomi Mi Mix 1 smartphone. Left: his Xiaomi Segment space module.
Below left: FPBs are Starck's favourite type of boat



found the right balance between intelligence, elegance and humanity like it was on old yachts, which were warm, simpatico and full of harmony and history," he says. But worse is the churn of white boats: "Except a few things, everything is the same. If high fashion was like that, it would collapse in two minutes! I do not understand

how people can reproduce and reproduce and reproduce."

Our mindsets need to change, according to Starck, not just in terms of design but in terms of philosophy. He likes the modern trend for tougher-looking explorer yachts. They have a point, a purpose, some fundamental meaning, and are not simply an expression of wealth. His favourite boats are the ultimate distillation of this thinking: they're called FPBs (functional power boats) and are built by Dashew Offshore. "Every kilo of aluminium [on the FPBs] has a purpose. And it's not 10 centimetres more than what they need. That is the intelligence of the future. When a boat like that arrives in the harbour, it's not hated."

he was responding to a peculiar brief: "The owner asked for a galleon, a castle on the sea."

The client, therefore, remains king, but one whose decisions can be interrogated. "I always listen," says Starck. "I am super-open. If the client has a good idea, I am the first one to say, 'Oh yes, that is a good idea, we have to do it.'"

And if the owner makes a mistake? "I say clearly, 'No.' I say it's not good for him; it's not good for the future; it's not good for his karma. I explain why and people always agree. I never have any fights." He admits to working on another big boat project, but is bound by confidentiality. "It's bigger than a yacht; it might even create a new industry," he says, smiling.

His mood seems only to have improved in the time we've been together. Perhaps the thought of returning to that white-walled clinic isn't so bad after all. In fact, it seems to suit him. "I don't understand society. I don't feel well in the city. I have to be nowhere." That's true of his homes, too, which are dotted all over Europe – always "in the middle of nowhere". He spends most time, though, in a house hidden among sand dunes in Portugal, with a view of the sea. Being away from it all is the only way he can achieve the level of concentration required to design a smartphone one day and a new hotel the next. "I am a monk," he explains. A happy one. □