



SURFACE

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DESIGN

Philippe Starck

DESIGNER

INTERVIEW BY SPENCER BAILEY

For about three decades, Starck has been an omnipresent figure in the design world, creating everything from 7-Eleven staplers and pencils to Baccarat chandeliers. The French designer's steady rise has coincided with the growth of an Italian brand for which he has designed dozens of products: Kartell. Here, Starck and Kartell president and CEO Claudio Luti describe their ongoing collaboration—and deep affection for one another.

Philippe, why did you begin working with Kartell?

Philippe Starck: Early on in my career, plastic was considered cheap, and for me, it was very sad, especially when I saw the beautiful work made by Kartell. It was clear to me the only way to make democratic design was injection-molded plastic, and the only company in the world that had a religion around that process was Kartell. They have the right know-how, engineering, and culture. This has given Claudio the possibility to take risks. That's why Kartell is now the factory of modern, affordable miracles.

How would you describe your working relationship with Claudio?

Starck: We're an old couple with very passionate relations. We have big joys, we have big dramas, and that's life. We have created many beautiful children. [Laughs]

Claudio, why did you start working with Philippe?

Claudio Luti: Philippe was so easy to understand. We spoke the same design language. For more than 25 years, we've been on the same plan.

Starck: The only thing we're missing in our relationship is sex—but we still have time.

Luti: [Laughs] We have a lot of passion.

How do you see Kartell evolving?

Starck: Kartell is No. 1. We're always obliged to make it better than every other company. Claudio knows we have to reinvent the brand every year. This year, he launched the Kartell in Tavola line of tableware. Tomorrow, who knows, maybe we'll do sex toys!

Philippe, what separates Kartell from some of the other Italian brands you work with?

Starck: When you think about the Italian design industry, it's not about the companies, it's about the people. Each is different. There's a bad one—we shall not speak about it. But there are good ones with big visions; some others, they love to make small prototypes, but don't care about business and are completely stuck in their dreams. As designers, we have to adapt ourselves to the personalities behind the companies when we design. When we design something, we design it for somebody.

Luti: You cannot design just for the sake of it. You have to analyze what a company needs, and that's a job Philippe and I do together. If I have some new idea or some new material, I put it on the table, and Philippe puts all of his creativity on the table. After that, we arrive at some success.

Starck: We're our own clients. People say, "Oh, I shall create something for this type of target consumer." That's a mistake. The designer has to design for himself, because the people who will buy it will be like him. Now the market is so big that you don't have to try to please everybody. You can try deeply to please yourself—and make millions of pieces just like that.

What separates Kartell's buyer and market from the rest?

Starck: The Kartell user is somebody who loves modernity; who lives in the now and the future, not in the past; and who has a certain idea of quality. They're somebody who invents what can be the look of today or tomorrow. There are very few companies that create the looks of tomorrow. Kartell is one of them.

Luti: To stay in the market for a long time, for 10 or 20 years or more, that's the only way we can operate. I feel that this strategy is correct, and we just have to follow it.

So your approach to Kartell is the idea of longevity above all else?

Luti: Yes, to have an industrial product, you have to think about longevity. If you don't do that, it's not an industrial product.

Starck: Fifteen years ago, when you spoke about longevity and heritage, it was like, "Oh my god, you speak like my grandfather!" Today, the avant-garde is longevity and heritage. Our grandchildren could use these incredible miracles Kartell is making.

Philippe Starck's new Uncle Jim arm-chair for Kartell.



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