



S+ARCK

PHILIPPE STARCK

If ever there was a design maverick who spawned dozens of quirky copycats, it's Philippe Starck. As Ayesha Khan finds out, this eccentric industrial and interior designer clearly marches to the beat of his own oversized Lucite drum.



Interviewed for *Oryx Premium* by Ayesha Khan



“When at school, primary school I guess, I would draw torture machines for my teachers, and I would give these drawings to them as a gift in order to gain my peace. I never fitted in society and school to me was just hermetic, it was a real suffering. The only way to escape was creating,” recalls the adorably quirky Philippe Starck as he sits in his Paris studio sporting his signature dishevelled hair and hoodie (the hoodie, of course is his own design, in collaboration with Ballantyne). Fortunately for the world, this enfant terrible channelled his angst into an unmistakable design aesthetic that has pervaded everything from automotive and lighting design to hotels and presidential palaces.

Although many think that Starck first entered the world design stage in 1988, when he began his decades-long collaboration with boutique-hotel godfather Ian Schrager, Starck was actually quite prolific years before that. It all started in earnest when Starck, who had held a prominent position at Pierre Cardin, opened his namesake product design company and began working on well-designed, mass-market pieces for the likes of Alessi, Kartell, and Vitra. He believed then, as he does now, that good design should be accessible to all, not just those who are able to pay a hefty price. “Design never interested me. It is a weak tool compared to others, such as politics or science, and it chose me more than I chose it. Design is useless in the sense that it does not save lives but it can still somehow improve life,” Starck explains. “My only motivation has always been the profit of the person who will use the things or places I create,” he adds.

Starck’s foray into interior design came when French president François Mitterrand commissioned him to refurbish the private apartments at the Élysée Palace. He then collaborated with Paris’s famed Costes brothers to create their Les Halles flagship, Café Costes. The next step in Starck’s interior design career came when he created hotel history with Ian Schrager. “With Ian we created what people now called ‘boutique hotels’ – I must admit I never understood this term – we always shared the same values that are not about trendy ideas or useless architecture. We just shared human values, the only values which deserve to last. We met, became friends, members of a family, that’s how I like to work,” he recalls of the famous collaboration. His new hotel partner is Los Angeles mogul Sam Nazarian, with whom he developed the SLS brand. There are now three SLS hotels in operation, and a New York outpost is soon to open.





Unlike his contemporaries who are always willing to cite their design influences, Stark's answer to the ubiquitous 'What inspires you as a designer?' is quite surprising – he deliberately places himself in a design vacuum. "I know nothing about the design industry at the moment – I don't go out to cocktails and dinners, and I don't have time to visit museums," he says. "With my wife and daughter I live far from the mainstream of thinking, mostly in remote places. I am the perfect example of the designer working alone with no information about my profession. I am convinced that to be able to create something interesting you need to work very early in the morning, completely alone, in front of your blank page," he adds, revelling in the controversial nature of his reply.

So has the isolationist's lifetime goal of democratising design been fulfilled? "When I started designing, a designer chair cost US\$1,000. I thought everybody needed a well-designed, quality chair – it didn't have to be elitism. Democratic Design was the idea to increase the quality of an object while decreasing its price and making it affordable. I had to fight with editors, vendors, and manufacturers, but I am proud to say I took two zeros off the price of a designer chair. This battle is won," he says with a proud smile. Be that as it may, he's certainly not content to rest on his laurels; he is working on several interesting new projects, such as PATH – Prefab Accessible Technological Homes, and a 3D printer that will allow customers to print their own furniture. His latest hotel venture, the South Beach, is soon to debut in Singapore. ☹



DEDICATED TO DESIGN



2013

Baccarat Harcourt Marie Louise

As part of a long-standing partnership with the storied French crystal house, Starck created a light fixture out of the iconic form of the Baccarat Harcourt glass.



2014

Parrot Zik Headphones

Proudly declaring that they are 'the world's most advanced', these wireless, touch headphones were inspired by the head and beak of a parrot.



2015

Kartell Only Me in the Light Mirror

This polycarbonate mirror features a built-in light, which offers its users the optimal lighting with which to see themselves.