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Design: Impossibly Starck

Philippe Starck's latest creation—a plastic chair—earned its name on the first sketch: Mr. Impossible. The French designer said it simply couldn't be made. The challenge? The weld. Polycarbonate chairs are typically formed using a single mold, but Starck's translucent design required two: one for the legs, one for the seat. Fusing the parts using existing methods would mean an unsightly seam, so the engineers at Italian furniture maker Kartell had to forge a new technique. The key was a very big laser. Trained at specially formulated polycarbonate, it left a seam smooth enough to create the illusion Starck had imagined: a chair that appears to levitate. We reached across the ether to elicit the designer's thoughts. Like Starck's design, our conversation seemed to float on air. —ANDREW BLUM

What was the inspiration for Mr. Impossible? The speed of evolution of our civilization and the dematerialization that rules all our production. Take the computer: It was the size of a room, then a briefcase. Now it's a credit card. You cannot dematerialize a chair completely, because you must continue to sit on it. But you can make it invisible. That's why I made the Mr. Impossible with a double shell—it's basically made of air. **Recently, you have begun to look at the environmental impact of your designs. How does a plastic chair fit in?** The stupidity of

the ecological movement is that people kill trees for wood. It's ridiculous. The best ecological strategy is to make products of a very high creative quality, so you can keep them for three generations. I prefer to make a very good chair in the best polycarbonate than make any shit in wood that will be in the trash one year later. **Why not use recycled plastic?** It's a little joke of a material. You can do almost nothing with it. And I also refuse bioplastic, which comes from something that people can eat. Scientists agree that we have a real food problem, a famine approaching. It's



a crime against humanity to take something you can eat and make a chair—or use it as gas for your SUV. **How do you reconcile those principles with your position as creative director for Virgin Galactic?** Every project should fit the big image of evolution. You can consider Virgin Galactic as something only for rich people, but you can also analyze the incredible help that it will give us. The exploration of space is a vital part of our evolution. We don't have any future if we don't go into space. This world will explode in 4 billion years. We have time, but not so much.