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Christophe Pillet

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Product Design Paris

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What have you been up to since you gave your talk in Luxembourg?
I have been constantly travelling. We have done many projects but our main activity since then has been doing hotels, hotels and more hotels. These include big and small projects around the world. We are also still designing furniture and residential spaces in North Africa.

You are present in America, Russia, Europe, how is the approach to hotel design different in all of these places?
It's more or less the same, but what's important is that people want a sense of curiosity. They don't want formatted designs. They expect me to do something very specific to their request, something very new. We have two groups of clients in hotels, big groups like Accor which are formatted — and they expect us to bring them out of this formatting with fresh and alternative ideas, the other group includes new and smaller groups, usually developers, though not necessarily smaller scaled hotels. They really want to be alternative, and have something that does not exist on the planet. We try to find new solutions, new ideas and a new way to harmonise the way we live with our environment. It's not just about matching the carpet and the wallpaper. It's really about finding new behavioural solutions.

What tips would you give to aspiring designers seeking a start in your particular field?
It's always difficult to give advice. I am not sure I am the right person to be doing that. I am not a teacher. Of course, I am mature, not to say I am old... but maybe the only advice I have is not to listen to other people. I think what we need in design are new, fresh, honest, individual ideas. Not one more thing in the endless sea of products. You will find a lot of people who will say, you should do this, and you should do that. Just trust yourself and just do things exactly the way you want.

What would you have liked to know when you first started working?
Well, I still feel that way now. That's what I like about this job. There are two elements, there is the project itself and then there is the completion phase and I am not very interested in the latter. Once it's done, it's done and it belongs to the market. The reason why I like the project phase is because you start from nothing and you build something and in the process you are constantly learning. All the projects I choose are because I don't know the field in which I am going to operate and they allow me to spend one or two years learning. For me it's not a job, it's a way of living. Learning for me is the core interest of being a designer.

Where do you look for magic? Is it within this learning and discovery process?
The magic lies in the fact that design for me is a matter of people, more than a matter of product. So, what I am looking for now is not just creating more things, but meeting more creative and ambitious people and having a vision together.



Maison Christoffle (Paris), 2017

Today more than ever, what does honest design mean to you?
It's one essential value. The world is more and more fake and artificial. You have an image of something and the reality is different. So, we need human honesty at the highest philosophical level.

Honesty and longevity are the two values that we should work on today. Honest design is a quest. It's not based on consumption or mediatisation. It meets the real needs of people, whether sensual or psychological. We don't have any obligation to be 100% honest, because design is also partly seduction; seduction is about playing with honesty. I don't think it's necessary to design more stuff, if this stuff is not for the honest needs and expectations of people to live a different life. All the rest is just blabla and we have enough blabla around us.

How important is it for you to inspire people? How would you like people to remember your work, and what sort of legacy do you want to leave?
This is too heavy for me. I don't think about legacy, that's not why I do this work. I was not supposed to be a designer. I started doing this randomly. I do it like a tourist. It's not my world, so I am visiting this curious world of design. I am working hard. What's important with people is not disappointing them, so I am not looking for posterity. Not disappointing people is already a heavy enough load to carry.

One of the ideas that generally defines design is the notion of improving life, let's extend that idea within the current depressing climate: If you were given the mission to save the world/planet, how would you go about doing it through your field?
You are talking about a mission and I don't feel like I have a mission. I am very happy to be a designer, but again I was not targeting this work. I never had any plans or goals. I am just a “promeneur”. What I try to do honestly is just describing or illustrating the environment of the people in relation to their expectation to live new models. This is what I am doing. I am not inventing a new world. I am not innovating into new behaviours.



The Bodrum Edition-Hotel (Turkey), 2018

A lot of times we listen to designers who want to change the world, but we can't change the world designing a new spoon. What we can do is to make people happy with a new kind of spoon in adequation to their expectation. I wouldn't want that mission otherwise and it is not through lack of ambition, it's just because if I wanted to change the world I would take up other means. Design doesn't change the world; it just fixes people's disappointments.

Good design is the intersection of good people and ambitious ideas.

What are the big trends you have observed in your particular field?
I have two systematic concerns with such questions. The first one is that I don't believe in trends. If you go to the Milano Design Fair to observe trends for example you will see everything and the opposite. I believe in aspirations, not stylistic trends. We just want longer lasting values. We don't want things that are good or right for just a couple of minutes or days. All our consumption of products, spaces was based on this modernistic idea of the new. The supremacy of the new. All old things need to be thrown away and we want new, new, new things. But this tendency

has gone so fast that newness doesn't give us any value. Now, we are looking for things that are lasting in 20 years time. We want to live a more ambitious moment in life.

In that case, how would you define timeless design?
It's a quest, a mission. There is no recipe for that. It's also virgin territory because we have all been programmed to do new things. There is no common model for it.

Honesty, humility and ambition in its vision are all necessary ingredients. It's about finding things that are more essential and substantial than the appearance of things, going into the depth of products. But I don't know, I am still searching. It's what makes you improve.

Failure is part of the game.

I am not afraid of failing; it's part of winning. If you don't fail, you don't win. So it's also positive. There are more chances to fail than to succeed, so that's part of your every day life.

On the importance or relevance of storytelling:
Of course, this is for me the definition of design today. The need for design is different today. We don't buy things out of necessity anymore (I am talking about rich western societies), we have everything and everything is working well, so we don't need to change. We buy because we have a desire for things. The desire is the intimate relation between an object and a person, and I really believe that the job I am doing is storytelling. I am doing exactly what a moviemaker or storyteller is doing. I am using objects to tell my story. I am not inventing a chair. The chair with four legs, a backrest and a seat has existed for hundreds of years. I am using a chair as a medium for telling my story. I am using my vocabulary, which is shapes, colours, objects to put on a chair and write my story. Without telling the story, the product does not exist.

What's the best way to challenge viewers' perceptions and is that always a good thing?
It's necessary. There is no need to do new things if there is no challenge. If you don't offer people a new point of view. It's the only motivation for doing things. Designing a new chair means that you put in front of people a challenge by presenting to them a new way of living from what they are used to. It's the only vector in doing something different.

Your work pays your bills, but how do you stay excited about your chosen path?
In the creative fields, we are all idealistic people and we never achieve our ideal target. The ideal

is ever elusive so you want to try again and again to get closer and closer to that ideal. It's ridiculous but it's a substantial human quality. People always want to try to go beyond the horizon.