LES AMIS DE
l'École de Paris

http://www.ecole.org

Séminaire Création

organised with support from the Ministry of Industry (DGCIS : agency for competition, industry and services) and the Ministry of Culture, and thanks to the sponsors of the École de Paris.
Algoé[2]
Alstom
ANRT
CEA
Chaire "management de l'innovation" de l'École polytechnique
Chaire "management multiculturel et performances de l'entreprise" (Renault-X-HEC)
Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Paris
CNES
Conseil Supérieur de l'Ordre des Experts Comptables
Crédit Agricole SA
Danone
Deloitte
École des mines de Paris
Erdyn
ESCP Europe
Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme
Fondation Crédit Coopératif
Fondation Roger Godino
France Télécom
FVA Management
Groupe ESSEC
HRA Pharma
HR VALLEY[2]
IBM
IDRH
IdVectoR[1]
La Poste
Lafarge
Mairie de Paris
Ministère de la Culture
Ministère de l'Industrie, direction générale de la compétitivité, de l'industrie et des services
OCP SA
Paris-Ile de France Capitale Economique
PSA Peugeot Citroën
Reims Management School
Renault
Saint-Gobain
Schneider Electric Industries
SNCF
Thales
Total
Ylios

[1] *For the "Tchenical ressources and innovation" seminar*
[2] *For the "Business life" seminar*

(liste at march 1, 2012)

DESIGNERS AND BRANDS

by

Patrick Jouin
Founder and co-manager, Patrick JouinID
and Jouin Manku Agencies

September 13th, 2011
Report by Sophie Jacolin
Translation by Rachel Marlin

Overview

When Patrick Jouin founded his agency in 1998, he had a number of objectives. He wanted to concentrate on industrial design in order to work on technical and complex objects ; he did not want to specialise ; he did not want to confine himself to a specific style ; and he wanted to take risks. His first professional experience was designing chairs. Today, he works on projects with hotels and well-known restaurants, street furniture and fittings for cars. Each project he undertakes is for a company with a well-known name or brand, and he integrates very well with these companies. Because he does not necessarily put his name on the projects he undertakes and does not have a style which is unique, his contribution to the brand is found elsewhere, in new designs, in a new voice, and in a new approach. His creations develop through an understanding of the brand and its 'codes', and through discussion and gut feelings. The result depends mainly on intuition, but also requires extremely arduous work at a group and personal level, as well as highly specialised technical research.

TALK : Patrick Jouin

After completing my industrial design studies at the École nationale supérieure de création industrielle (ENSCI), I started working at Thomson Multimédia alongside Philippe Starck who was their artistic director at the time. During my first year, my objective was to design radios, televisions and video recorders. When Philippe Starck left Thomson Multimédia, he offered me a job at his design agency which I accepted. While working for him, my speciality was designing chairs, mostly using the process of plastic injected moulding. This technique requires great skill while opening up huge possibilities. This experience working for Starck gave me a taste for designing furniture, but made me realise that I wanted to design objects for myself, using my name. With financial support from the VIA (Valorisation de l'innovation dans l'ameublement : an association for promoting contemporary furniture design) which every year helps about ten young designers to develop prototypes and to exhibit them, I was able to leave Starck and to set up my own agency in 1998. By chance, soon afterwards, I was approached by Renault who asked me to carry out a comprehensive study on their car, later called the Modus. Even though I was an industrial designer, I had never designed a car before. It was this very fact which attracted the Renault team who were curious to discover what a new pair of eyes could bring. At the same time, the chef, Alain Ducasse, asked me to design a plate. We got on very well. When he asked me to recommend a designer to design the shopsign for 'Be', the bread-cum-grocery shop he was launching, I automatically suggested myself even though I had never studied or worked on interior design. I plunged enthusiastically/head first into this new world, working closely with Alain Ducasse on this new brand, its graphic identity and the products.

From the beginning, the agency had two areas of interest : the design and creation of furniture, and interior design. Gradually these two concepts came together in the form of two agencies, 'Patrick Jouin ID' and 'Jouin Manku', which I manage with my associate Sanjit Manku, a Canadian architect. Today, the agency employs 25 people, one-third of whom are architects, one-third interior designers, and one-third designers. There is also an administrator and an accountant. I divide my time between design, interior design and managing the teams.

An object is always designed for someone

A designer, as opposed to an artist, does not create an object only for aesthetic or creative reasons. The important thing is to design an object which is 'fair' in any given context, for the client, the brand and the user. Of course, designers are artistic but this is only the starting point. Their creativity is necessarily limited. The aim is not to invent a new shape, but to design an object which works better and is more pleasant to use. Paradoxically, the invention should also be simultaneously conspicuous, comfortable and striking. It should be a 'normal invention'. I believe these are the rules of the design game rules and they are very exciting.

Creating an object for a brand

It was during the time that I was designing chairs that I fully appreciated the importance of a brand for an object. Initially, I drew chair after chair, without having a specific client in mind, and I presented my models to furniture manufacturers who were not very enthusiastic as they realised that the chairs had not been created specifically for them. It is clear that a chair designed for Kartell is not the same as a chair designed for Ligne Roset. The designer has to make the values, codes and brand characteristics his own. The same is true of car design. The difference between a Renault and a Citroën is subtle, but still huge. The designer must demonstrate that he is capable of communicating this difference.

A project always starts by meeting the client who represents a brand. Most of the time, I go to these meetings alone, without my team. These are times when the 'one-on-one' contact can be very important and valuable exchanges may take place. I intuitively find out the requirements

and wishes of the client which may otherwise be very unclear. We discuss various possibilities. Sometimes during these meetings I make drawings. This is a sign that the project interests me, and, more importantly, that I am enjoying talking with the other person. It is essential to feel this affinity. I find it impossible to carry out a project for someone whom I do not appreciate, or for a brand which I do not like. In fact sometimes, at the end of the first meeting, I realise that this project cannot go any further, and this feeling is probably mutual. If I disregard this first impression, the result is almost always catastrophic. I can identify with some brands and others who do not. Those who want us to work for them, do so for a reason.

An object - a use, or 'designer's empathy'

Similarly, one cannot design a hotel room without having slept in it, or a spatula for Nutella chocolate spread without having had a Nutella sandwich, or public toilets without having used them. Whatever the object or the space which one designs, everything begins with an observation, a role play, and one's feelings. It is what I call 'designer's empathy'.

When Ferrero (the owners of Nutella) commissioned us to design a spatula for spreading Nutella, the first thing we did was to organise a tea at the agency to talk about what the object should look like. Our discussions resulted in the design of a knife-spreader which has a wooden handle and a flexible, plastic palette knife which is not a hazard to children and makes it easy to spread Nutella. A small indentation in the handle makes it possible to attach it to the Nutella jar, and also place it on the table without dirtying the table. We perfected an advanced technique in the assembly of the wood with the plastic so that the object can stand up to numerous washes in the dishwasher. Generally speaking, this is our usual work method ; we hold relatively informal discussions resulting in a multitude of simple ideas – many of which are pure common sense – which later on may be at the heart of the project. The creative process is no more formal than this. Initially, about ten propositions may seem interesting. We make scaled models, carry out tests, and our choice is progressively narrowed down, after much 'to-ing and fro-ing'.

For our goldsmith client, Puiforcat, we used the same approach as the Nutella knife, but made it more up-market. During a meal, a dinner guest only looks at his fork for a few seconds. Most of the time, the fork is in his hand and he brings it to his mouth. The feeling which this cutlery gives is as important as its shape. We have designed cutlery in stainless steel by making use of the metal's mass and its fluidity of form, and the way its facets reflect the light. This is like drawing feelings. In a more concrete way, this forces us to solve a certain number of technical problems. There is constant tension between initial intentions, the design, the technical possibilities and the cost, until one finds the right balance which brings one back to the initial intentions.

Designing by observation

We use our bodies and our own experiences to breathe life into a project but this subjectivity has its limits. The user may feel differently. He must also project himself. This is why we often watch users in their natural surroundings and devise scenarios to understand how our project may be perceived : what sort of a person spends a night at a hotel, dines in a chic restaurant, and uses automatic public toilets ? This empathetic and psychological approach should be expressed in the object.

Observation has been fundamental in the remodeling project awarded to us by the city of Paris for JCDecaux's automatic public toilets. Our project which was to make the toilets accessible to the handicapped made us rethink the entire question. First of all, we considered how the old automatic public toilets were used, and we interviewed and filmed the users. Our first finding was that women were frightened to use them for fear of being attacked. Therefore, we did all we could to convey a sense of security, where the user's intimacy was preserved, and to remove any sensation of being enclosed or locked in. We achieved this in a

variety of ways : we made the interior space larger and added natural light by means of an oculus ; we made the door open more slowly (we noticed that if it opened too quickly, this caught the user by surprise and made him apprehensive) ; we positioned the entrance slightly to the side of centre, so that people coming out of the toilets were not directly in the line of vision of passers-by ; and lastly, we added a large red security button which was clearly visible in the toilets to reassure female users. Our model probably did not win over all potential female users, but the proportion of women using the toilets greatly increased.

Another of our undertakings was to renovate the rooms and restaurants for the hotel chain, Campanile, and once again we made a series of observations before we started on the task in hand. The initial constraint for this project was the price : our budget was 6,000 Euros per room and this had to include the painting, electricity, plumbing, the floors, and changing the furniture and the door. Because we knew that we had to renovate 15,000 rooms, we were able to manufacture some pieces of furniture (such as bed headboards and lamps) on a mass scale in order to cut the cost, while at the same time including high-quality objects. The project's guideline was simplicity, without any frills. For example, we noticed that customers do not use the wardrobes (necessary for a 2-star rating) or drawers in the Campanile hotels, so we took away the drawers and reduced the wardrobe to its simplest form, without a door. We made an important change by placing the wardrobe near the door so that the customer can store his luggage straightaway. We had noticed that customers, having pulled their suitcase across the lawn in front of the hotel, put it straight onto the white bed when entering their room, thereby inevitably dirtying the bedlinen. Cleaning costs were significant. As a result of savings made in the cost of the wardrobes, we were able to add colour to the beds with a dark tartan blanket (unusual in a 2-star hotel) where perverse customers can place their suitcase without making too much mess. Above all, and in almost our strongest design move, we put aside a substantial budget for the mattresses which were the standard of a 4-star hotel. It is all very well spending the night in the most beautiful hotel room in the world, but if the mattress is uncomfortable, no-one will get a good night's sleep. I prefer spending money on providing a good mattress rather than repainting the walls of a hotel room, even though some people try to convince me that as a designer I should not be interested in the bedding. As far as I am concerned, if I was not interested in the mattresses, it would be like forgetting that I design the whole environment, and my aim is to help to create positive feelings and experiences generated by my design. It is about so much more than just shapes.

In the Campanile restaurants, the main theme of our assignment was to cater for people who ate alone. I have been struck by men, often on business trips, who ate by themselves and were not really comfortable in a restaurant setting. We designed a bar in front of which single people can stand and start up conversations. Despite my initial reticence, we installed a single television screen behind the bar. The idea behind this is that clients can look at the same screen and then easily make conversation or have interaction with other clients also watching the television. Begin alone then becomes a totally different affair, and is not a cause for concern.

Knowing how to choose and to explain an object

These observations and research give rise to many ideas. Design, however, is also about knowing how to choose the best idea and the right project. Even if one thinks that one has ten good ideas, one idea always stands out from the rest, has more credibility, and brings together all the important qualities such as aesthetics, manufacture, cost and comfort. This is also the reason why, unlike other agencies, I never present several potential projects to a client and let him choose. I make a single proposition which may, of course, evolve depending on his comments. Presenting choices is my responsibility as a designer.

Another principle is that I never show the client pictures when I am presenting a project. I have noticed that when I start showing pictures, the client stops listening to me. Furthermore, it is difficult for him to see a picture 'out of the blue' and expect him to have an immediate

reaction. Some clients are timid, others are not sure of their aesthetic judgment. Personally, I sometimes need time to form an opinion about how the project can be represented. I always begin by explaining our intentions and outlining my approach. If during this discussion, I already feel that there are points of disagreement, or that I have omitted some parts, or that my approach is faulty, I admit this to the client. This allows me to defuse the situation. If my presentation goes badly, it is because I have misunderstood the request. Nonetheless, I still try to validate certain points at this stage ; for example, perhaps the client does not like the aesthetics, but there are some practicalities which he appreciates. This gives me a base from which to work, even if it means that I have to go back and redesign everything from scratch. As the project advances, one must find the appropriate means of communication to make the project understood, such as drawings, models, or computer-generated images : not everyone knows how to read a map, for example. Once we had to create the model for a restaurant using a life-size scale. Once the head waiter was able to see himself in situ in the model, he could immediately identify the advantages and disadvantages of the design such as where a side serving-table should be placed, and so on. We were then able to design the project intelligently.

Design : an exercise incorporating limitations

When one designs for someone other than oneself, one should incorporate external constraints determined by the clients such as price, 'codes' associated with the brand, and so on. There are also our own technical constraints relating to the practicalities of what we are being asked to design. More often than not, we push these constraints to the limit. This technical 'tour de force' is not an aim in itself, but has a very important part to play in the design.

In our project to renovate the Jules Verne restaurant on the second floor of the Eiffel Tower, the major inevitable limitation we encountered was weight. The Eiffel Tower is a fragile structure weighing 10,100 tonnes and no additional weight whatever can be allowed. From the outset of the study, we had to assess the weight of all the elements which we intended to add and to remove. Rubble, for example, had to be weighed precisely. It was an unbelievable limitation. We were able to design chairs in extremely light carbon, weighing only five kilos, by working with craftsmen and a company which makes prototypes for cars. I have already mentioned how teamwork and informal discussion were essential to our creation process. The technical people in the project (engineers, those in charge of the manufacturing process, craftsmen, and manufacturers) clearly have an important part to play in the process from the early stages. Like the designers, they help to advance the project and sometimes come up with the correct solution enabling the project to overcome an obstacle.

Pushing back the boundaries of the materials used

I designed pieces for Kartell (a manufacturer who has a great deal of knowledge in the plastics sector) which theoretically were impossible to make. The aim was to push back the boundaries regarding plastic as far as possible in order to present objects which were totally new and which no-one else had ever been able to make before. I created storage space cubes in plastic which was both transparent and opaque, and which could be fitted one on top of another. I played around with the diffraction qualities of the plastic as if it were crystal. Ordinarily this is impossible with injected plastic. To make the plastic transparent, I had to vary the thickness of the piece. However, once it comes out of the mould, the piece becomes twisted and inevitably loses its shape. I managed to spread this distortion uniformly over the object so that the entire shape was stable. This feat required extremely accurate and costly adjustments. In achieving this technique, we were six months or even one to two years ahead of our rivals, and in the end, they will probably imitate us if this piece is commercially successful.

For fifty years, the work of designers on plastic injected chairs has consisted of concealing the ribs situated under the seat which give the chair the necessary solidity. After two years of

research and working with Kartell, we managed to create a chair which does not have any ribs. This was possible because we created a mould which cost 500,000 Euros. It was a huge risk for the company, but as far as we know, no-one has, as yet, copied us.

Unlike industrial production, a technical 'tour de force' can also enable one to create unique luxury objects. Our latest creation of this sort is the large stone bar at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel which has just opened in Paris. To construct it, we went to Spain to extract a 100-tonne stone slab which was then transported to Carrare in Italy where it was machine-finished using a digitally-operated machine. This took six months. Apart from the cost of such an operation, there are numerous risks involved : the slab might break ; the stone elements are difficult to transport and reassemble ; and a delay in delivery could hold up the entire hotel building site because as the bar is so heavy the floors cannot be finished before it is put in place. Nothing else like this exists in the world. This piece is characteristic of the necessities of the luxury goods market, namely that one has to invent an experience which is completely unique, but is not vulgar. This is far from easy. The existence of this bar in this raw and noble material gives the area a timeless character which is important for the Mandarin brand which has just become established in Paris and is looking for credibility. The stone presents a link with nature which makes one think of the Mandarin's gardens. It has an authentic nature which is the message the hotel wants to present regarding the services it offers. We could have made the same object in resin, imitating the stone, but anyone who touched the bar would have realised it was fake. I hope that clients who come into the bar area will intuitively appreciate the beauty of this bar which is not ostentatious.

Accepting the constraints of time

A project should only appear in the market when it is mature. It is essential to take all the necessary time. An important designer-manufacturer like Alberto Alessi understood this. For example, when I presented him with a project about saucepans, which was a collaboration with Alain Ducasse and which I thought was nearly finished, he suggested that I come back in a year's time and in the meantime he sent someone to help me. He arranged for me to meet the person in charge of protocol for the Italian president who was a leading expert in gastronomy. We talked about how to cook risotto for half a day. This discussion added an incredible cultural dimension to the project. The finished object is all about the pleasure of turning a spoon in a saucepan. The spoon slots into the handle so that one does not get burned when one uses the spoon. Alberto Alessi realised that the project was sound, but that it lacked depth, and that it did not make any reference to the thousands of years of Italian gastronomic heritage.

Incorporating a cultural constraint

One creates an object not only for a brand and a user, but also for a country. One must know the cultural specificities of the object (how it is regarded for comfort, its traditional uses, and so on). If one does not make allowances for these then one may make huge mistakes. The differences are especially noticeable in architecture, either in terms of project management or manufacturing capacity. It may be possible to manufacture a component in Paris but not in Las Vegas. It is useless to force craftsmen to manufacture an object with which they are not familiar as this would be very costly and the result could be disappointing. One must take into account the materials and the techniques available locally. I cannot design the same restaurant in Hong Kong, Las Vegas or Paris. I love working with plaster, but the plastering profession only exists now in France, Italy and Spain, and perhaps Germany. Therefore, I cannot use plaster in my designs for the United States. At the Mandarin Oriental in Paris, we were lucky to be able to use the treasures of French savoir-faire which is unique. These include the work of cabinet makers, plasterers, upholsterers, painters, and so on. France has tremendous talents which can be exported and we should not let them become extinct.

DISCUSSION

My part in the group

Question : *To what extent does your personal creativity influence the creative output of the agency as a whole ?*

Patrick Jouin : I am always uncertain to what extent my creative input is reproduced on a group level within the agency. I play a major role in launching projects, but subsequently I do absolutely nothing by myself. I need a team to nurture the project and help it to progress. In interior design, one always says that one produces 80 % of a project's outcome using only 20 % of one's time. In the remaining 80 % of the time, one concentrates on technical aspects which are not visible even though they are important (such as determining the width of the wooden flooring planks). If the spirit of the project is strong enough, one of the agency's interior designers can solve these aspects on his own. I only intervene at the beginning and then at significant milestones, but not all the time. Occasionally I raise questions about a project which is in progress by suggesting a new idea, and I know that this irritates my team. It is up to me to ensure that this intervention is sufficiently important for the work being carried out by someone else to be disrupted.

Signing my name for a piece of work is delicate. Even when my name is given to an object (which is not always the case), I would be lying if I said that I was the only person behind its creation.

Furthermore, if I always append my signature, this would discourage those brands which want the project to appear to be theirs. I understand this very well. In some cases, this could also give rise to in-house reluctance from client teams with whom I have to work. This would be a problem as I need help from everyone in order to carry out the project successfully.

Having said this, it is easier for the brands to associate their perception of the agency with one person's personality – mine, in this case. This is why I do put my signature on a few projects. I am also a permanent member of the agency whereas the members of our team may come and go.

Int. : *Do you have a stable team or do you often have to replace your staff ? Do you tend to recruit young people or those with more experience ?*

P. J. : The agency has 25 employees. The majority have open-ended contracts whereas most design agencies work with independent designers. The very first person I recruited is still with us. I had five years' experience when I created the agency. I was not sufficiently sure of myself to recruit someone who was more experienced ! For the first time, I will soon be recruiting someone who has more experience than I have, and who is an architectural engineer. I need this person. When one gains more confidence in oneself, one starts recruiting people who have greater experience, and this is essential. Today my colleagues have talents which I do not.

Int. : *Has your agency reached its optimum size ? Could it still grow and preserve its current method of working ?*

P. J. : The agency has about thirty projects at any one time. It would be hard for us to take on any more unless I take myself off some projects, which is something I do not want to do. Our creativity is also the result of the time we devote to the preliminary work, and the choice of the best ideas. I am sure there are other agencies which work more quickly than we do and make several suggestions to clients which are less successful, and ask the clients to choose. As far as I am concerned, I do not know how to work like this. We are able to carry out a certain number of projects and manage a team of a certain size, and that is enough. Were we to take on any more than this, we would not be as creative or innovative as we are.

Int. : *Is there a strong sense of rivalry between designers, both within an agency and between agencies ?*

P. J. : In the market, the competition between designers is fierce at the beginning of their careers. This competition is based on their image and their ego which allows them to get themselves into a position from which to start. Gradually, even though each person makes his mark with his own personality and approach, the pressure eases : a sort of natural empathy exists between the clients and the agencies. If you do not get awarded a project, it is because your profile did not correspond to what the client was looking for. It is useless to keep trying.

Within our team, I do not play off designers or interior designers against each other : instead we have discussions. Sometimes, ideas come out of these discussions, and in the end everyone forgets whose ideas they were in the first place.

New fields of design

Int. : *There are more and more digital features and systems of artificial intelligence attached to objects these days, all of which add an additional dimension to the user's experience. Do you intend to invest in this sector which is not 'material' ?*

P. J. : This is a subject I am starting to work on in the car sector and in other areas. I am currently developing a game with Ubisoft whereby, by using cardiac sensors, the player can synchronise his heartbeat with his breathing and improve his health. This shows that there is virtually no barrier anymore between the virtual nature of a game, physical sensations and the reality of the object. I have to work on the design of this.

Today, designers concentrate more on factors other than shape, and investigate these elements in-depth. When I carry out interior design projects for a restaurant, for example, I 'design' experiences and moments. I imagine scenarios in which the guest (during the two or three hours he spends in the restaurant) gradually discovers a variety of feelings at different stages. Certain factors should not be obvious to him straightaway. This method of design has become almost a necessary step in order to enrich the objects or places which one designs.

When the designer becomes a translator

Int. : *There are start-ups and research laboratories which employ designers as 'innovation sensors'. Is this a new field for designers ?*

P. J. : I have noticed that this field has opened up to designers who are asked to work in new areas for which they are supposed to have the necessary qualifications. If this stimulates innovation, especially in small companies, I see no problem, and I am delighted. The designer can help companies to take risks which are reasonable and justified.

However, in other cases, in particular in large organisations which carry out complex projects, the designer has to play the role of an interface, a sort of translator between the various sectors of marketing, the technical department, the engineering department, the users, and so on. He manages to understand a little about the jobs that all these people do, and helps them to communicate. He becomes a sponge, a multilingual translator who gathers together knowledge, requirements, and requests from different parts of the company. He makes sure that the teamwork takes shape, and that the result is a coherent object to which everyone has contributed.

Some people even see the designer as an authority who can help to solve problems which he does not understand at all, such as urban politics, for example. Designers may be called upon for projects which do not require them to design objects or places, but services or methods of functioning. These are very exciting areas of interest even though personally I am still very attached to design, inventions and materials.

Presentation of the speaker :

Patrick Jouin : graduated from the ENSCI (École nationale supérieure de création industrielle) in 1992. He created the Patrick Jouin iD agency in 1998. Various collaborations with well-known brands led him to work on interior design projects (for example, for Alain Ducasse, Mix Las Vegas, Jules Verne, Mandarin Oriental Paris, Flagship Van Cleef & Arpels), projects associated with the art of entertaining (Alessi, Puiforcat, Ferrero, G.H. MUMM), furniture projects (Ligne Roset, Fermob, Cassina ou Kartell) and street furniture projects (JCDecaux). Technical innovation is at the core of the agency's work. Jouin's work was recognized by an exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in 2010, and also at the New York Museum of Art and Design in 2011.

Translation by Rachel Marlin (rjmarlin@gmail.com)