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## HERMÈS : HANDBAGS, SCARVES... AND HELICOPTERS !

by

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### Overview

What do a leather handbag, a silk scarf and a helicopter have in common ? The surprising answer is Hermès. However, how did Hermès come to sign an agreement with Eurocopter ? One only has to delve into the history of Hermès to discover why this project is not as incongruous as it might seem. Hermès has always been interested in transport, having manufactured saddles, harnesses and travelling trunks, and designed the interiors of cars in the 1930s. So why not a helicopter ? Nevertheless, the business relationship between an important industrial group and a family-run business is not that straightforward, especially because the project management was entrusted to a designer, who is not the kind of person with whom an aeronautical engineer normally deals. However, common ground was found between these seemingly disparate functions in an attempt to find an extremely functional object. Also, looking at the industrial process through a new pair of eyes – those of a designer – helped the project to move forward.

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# TALK : Corinne Poux-Bernard and Gabriele Pezzini

## Hermès: a tradition of innovation

**Corinne Poux-Bernard :** Hermès has every reason to promote a traditional image. The firm is now 170 years old and is run by the sixth generation of its founder, Thierry Hermès. This family-based continuity, which is comparatively rare in large companies, should not be seen as a commitment to continue to remain in the past. Through the generations, Hermès has been steered by forward-looking thinkers who have always broken new ground. It has managed to enlarge its 'family' beyond the close, inner circle to a close-knit group of innovators and professionals who have certain common values, and have drawn on the firm's history for new ideas. It is partly this capacity to reinvent itself which has enabled the company to survive for as long as it has. Hermès has always kept up-to-date and has embraced changes in the society in which it wants to participate. Why all the surprise about Hermès making helicopters ?

*Curiosity and open-mindedness : it's all in the genes*

Hermès can be described by several characteristics which explain its appetite for innovation. These include mobility, curiosity, a visionary nature, solidarity, emotion and being very fastidious.

Let me take each one in turn.

Mobility has been a recurring theme through successive generations and among entrepreneurs at Hermès. Geographical mobility is perhaps best demonstrated in the example of its founder, Thierry Hermès, who had to leave his hometown for Paris, where he learnt the skills for making saddles and harnesses. Intellectual mobility can be seen in the more modern-day example of applying one's knowledge to new areas, such as helicopters.

At the beginning of the twentieth century and especially after the First World War, the third generation of Hermès started diversifying the company's activities which, for 90 years, had been devoted to the manufacture of leather harnesses and saddles. New means of transport had been invented which stirred Hermès' curiosity, and prompted the company to explore areas other than the manufacture of saddles and harnesses, for example, the manufacture of car luggage.

A consequence of Hermès' curiosity is its visionary character. Any potential for innovation is explored with care and sympathy, without preconceived ideas, even if the idea comes from a sector which is seemingly very different from Hermès' original core activity. Émile Hermès demonstrated his visionary nature when, during a trip to Canada, he noticed zips on the hoods of convertible military cars. He recognised the extraordinary opportunity this might have for Hermès and bought the patent. Fitted with zips, bags could take on completely new shapes. Furthermore, Émile Hermès even thought about fitting zips on clothes, despite the fact that the firm had never ventured into clothing manufacture. A new field for future developments opened up. This visionary aspect is based on the ability of the company to notice elements in a changing world which might be suitable for the company to appropriate and then transform them into new products.

Hermès has always maintained very demanding standards for durability and recognition. Its silk scarves, perfumes, and bags – to list its most emblematic products – all demonstrate the same meticulous attention to quality, ranging from their creation and choice of materials to the expertise of the craftspeople and the sales team.

The firm's human and emotional dimension remains an essential component. At Hermès, there is solidarity between generations, individuals and different sectors of activity, and people occupy an important place. Similarly, the idea of emotion is present : Hermès does not

sell goods which are necessities, but thrives on the pleasure which the company gives its clients.

### **Design : always at the forefront**

At Hermès, innovation consists of seizing opportunities and making changes which may help to increase the geographical area where the brand is known, to establish its reputation, and to adapt certain similar products in a changing world. At present, Hermès has nine areas of activity : leather goods and saddle-making, silk, products for women (prêt-à-porter and accessories), products for men, products for the home (art of living and tableware), jewellery, watches, perfume, and a new product area entitled 'interior and design'. Hermès' Interior and Design, the latest addition to the firm, has found its proper place in the firm's history. The core business has always been the manufacture of objects which have a function, but which also are evocative of other things. This corresponds well to the definition of design. The harness, historically a product produced by Hermès, is an excellent example of a useful object. Hermès has always worked with decorators who have called on their know-how and high standards of fine workmanship both in their choice of materials and their execution. With the passage of time, another aspect has been added. What attitude would the firm take to an object which the company did not manufacture ? Apart from the craftsmanship, what other messages does a product convey ? How can one be sure that a product is functional, well-balanced and appropriate ? This last question opened the way for the Hermès helicopter project which was entrusted to the designer Gabriele Pezzini, who was subsequently appointed to the new position of director in charge of design at Hermès.

#### *The search for a 'fair' object*

**Gabriele Pezzini :** Design is a word used all the time, and is usually a purely decorative definition. However, designing is not just about drawing a beautiful object. It is looking at an object in all its dimensions (functional, aesthetic, and structural) in a new way, and involves the entire creative process (drawing, production, transportation, packaging, compilation of catalogues, and so on). The chair, for example, is a symbolic design object. It cannot be separated from its form, structure or functionality. The history of design is punctuated with creations of chairs. When I first started working with Hermès, I found it had this same approach, a combination of attention given to make an object 'fair', coupled with respect for the creator and the craftsman. Could this approach be applied to a helicopter ? This is the challenge which Pierre-Alexis Dumas, the general artistic director of Hermès, gave me. He already knew of my work (he had seen my design for a simple candle holder) and knew that I had a critical eye. Needless to say, his proposition made me lose a few nights' sleep...

**Corinne Poux-Bernard :** Before Hermès and Eurocopter came to an agreement, we had to understand what each side expected both from the project and from the other partner. As far as Hermès was concerned, a helicopter represented a means of expressing its culture which was based on function, harmony and stability. Eurocopter, on the other hand, wanted to gain a foothold in the VIP market and enjoy upmarket credibility by joining forces with a company already present in the luxury goods market. It already produced models intended for prestigious, upmarket clients, and outsourced the interior design and marketing to a third party.

**Gabriele Pezzini :** We had to make one condition very clear to Eurocopter from the start : Hermès had to be in charge of all aspects of design. There was no question of making the helicopter 'prettier' nor, as one might have imagined, decorating the interior in orange leather and a logo, the distinctive Hermès trademarks. We asked to be given 'carte blanche' for the entire aircraft design and a different concept. We had to learn about helicopters ; their technology, what happened during a flight, how its passengers moved around the aircraft, and so on. It became obvious very early on that the helicopter was a magnificent machine, but had not been designed for passengers.

## When engineers make pacts with craftsmen

**Corinne Poux-Bernard :** The collaboration between Hermès and Eurocopter was the meeting of a family-run, creative company where the decision is taken purely by the general artistic director, and a large industrial group where decisions come from a group of individuals. In order to make this collaboration possible, we called upon Gabriele Pezzini, who is both a fine ambassador for Hermès and also has a perfect understanding of the industrial world. We did not have a great deal of time to complete the project successfully because our aim was to present the first model at the 2007 National Business Aviation Association's convention in Atlanta. This is why the helicopter took just nine months to finish. This was made possible due to an extremely reactive project management team, the use of a hierarchy which was different to that which already existed, and a very exciting working atmosphere into which everyone put their heart and soul. The decision-makers at Eurocopter were a major driving force and did all they could to make sure the project was a success.

*Designer and engineers : a common goal*

**Gabriele Pezzini :** The most complex part of the project was the meeting of the two different worlds of craftsmen and industry, or even three worlds, if one counts the fact that the industrial group was split into Eurocopter France and Eurocopter Germany. These two companies did not have the same misgivings regarding innovation. It took some time before we managed to understand each other. Curiously enough, we found unusual common ground : the hand-crafted nature of our work. As surprising as it may seem, we discovered that a helicopter included parts which are hand-crafted. For example, the blades of a helicopter are made by hand, and design errors can only be detected by human observation. The first time we visited Eurocopter in Germany, we met engineers who were very open-minded, which incidentally helped dispel some of our preconceived ideas about them. Insofar as it was a question of producing a fair and functional object, we had the same vision, even though, coming from the design world, I expressed myself with words which the engineers had never heard before. One engineer admitted to me that the undercarriage which Hermès had designed was the one he had always hoped would exist. But what justification did I have for designing a new undercarriage ? Since this object was made up of aluminium tubes, my thinking was the same as that which I would have had for a chair. In his book 'Spoken into the void', the architect Adolf Loos wrote that a good engineer first of all uses his intuition, and checks his calculations later. If he is a good engineer, his intuition comes at the right time and place. At Eurocopter, I had intuition, and the engineers made the calculations. I used this method of working for numerous other products.

The design phase allowed Eurocopter to take a fresh look at what they had taken for granted with respect to the products and the industrial processes. We redesigned the entire assembly system of the interior panels which speeded up manufacture and made the helicopter safer. This earned us compliments from workers on the assembly line as this made their work easier. The design stage also helped to make us think more broadly and imagine other organisations and arrangements. For instance, whereas I had been told that the glass door model (which was made using the well-known technology, thermoforming) which I had submitted was not feasible, I discovered that a similar pane of glass had been used on another helicopter model. And yet it was the same engineer who had been in charge of both models, but the projects were too different for him to have made the link between them.

Out of 55 modifications put forward, 50 were accepted. The final product is very close to the original design which was approved by the Hermès artistic director and Eurocopter. Technical and safety constraints are clearly paramount for this kind of commodity. Our work on innovations emanated from these constraints. Our intervention helped to reinforce the safety of the helicopter, as the Eurocopter quality manager quickly realised. We had orders to use dark shades of colour in the cockpit to avoid reflection from the glass windows (and yet, the original VIP model was all in white...). This functional constraint paved the way for the choice of all the colours used throughout the aircraft.

## **The Hermès helicopter : seen from every angle**

When one travels by helicopter, one feels as if one is floating on air. One instinctively tries to find one's balance. In the original version of the helicopter on which we were working, the cockpit controls were placed asymmetrically, giving the impression that the cabin tilted to one side. Our attempt to regain balance paved the way for our interior design choices. We wanted to make the controls symmetrical by replacing a number of elements. This is especially important since safety also comes from the feeling that one is secure in a specific place.

Generally speaking, the original helicopter had virtually no coherency in terms of style. It was made up of a successive assembly of elements designed to reinforce safety with no consideration for any global aesthetic unity. This is why we redesigned even the slightest details (such as handles, security instructions, and so on). Hermès works as much on the outside of objects as on the inside. When one looks at the helicopter from the outside, one therefore ought to understand how the space is organised on the inside.

When one looks at the helicopter from the outside, one notices a distinctive – but not ostentatious – Hermès trademark, an orange ribbon which runs the length of the aircraft. This graphic design is not simply our signature. It is inspired by the string of wool which pilots sometime attach to the nose of the aircraft to determine whether the aircraft is rising or descending. We simply decided to 'wrap' this line around the helicopter. The part of the line which connects the tail to the body of the helicopter required a great deal of work as we installed a set of orange LED (light-emitting diodes) lights. From the outside, when it comes in to land, the aircraft can therefore be identified by the the 'cognoscenti' as the Hermès helicopter.

We found that the undercarriage of the original helicopter was not very functional. The VIP version was made up of a round tube which one slipped on when one placed one's foot on it, and the version intended as a rescue craft (hospitals, mountain rescue) had a flat and functional undercarriage which was not appropriate for the VIP clients. Our work consisted of increasing the functionality, the security and the aesthetics of the undercarriage. Our version is clearly safer and fits well with the shape of the aircraft. As we have already mentioned, this innovation delighted Eurocopter.

### *A space devoted to passengers*

Inside the helicopter, we created a panel which separates the cockpit from the passenger cabin. Eurocopter was not in favour of this because they thought it would cause vibrations. During its first flight, the aircraft felt so stable that this potential inconvenience was never mentioned again.

We thought that the space intended for passengers was a bit restricted. When a passenger climbed into the helicopter, he did not know where to put his coat or his briefcase. The space was largely taken up by a bar, able to serve about twenty people, whereas the cabin only had space for four passengers. Some aircraft had been equipped with six television screens even though the average length of a flight is only forty minutes. One might be forgiven for thinking that it is more interesting to look out of the windows at the view below than watch television. The passenger cabin we designed featured horizontal lines which we created to give a feeling of space and consequently comfort. We later discovered a helicopter dating from the 1950s which used the same concept. This choice was clearly correct from a functional point of view. The wide seats allowed passengers of all sizes to relax in comfort and stretch their legs. We reduced the size of the bar, incorporated a space for briefcases, and designed a foldaway arm-rest with a fire extinguisher underneath which was much more accessible than in the previous model. The arm-rest was equipped with a very functional pocket which solved the problem that in a helicopter it is difficult to move around and reach one's belongings easily. The idea is that once the traveller is seated, he has all he needs at arm's length.

To create an atmosphere of travel, there are maps and binoculars available in the cabin. The seats were partly covered in leather, but the cabin is primarily decorated in material which absorbs noise better. Material was never considered luxurious enough and therefore had never been used in a VIP helicopter. We used composite material which was varnished for some furnishings. This appeared to be quite a radical choice for anyone who has a stereotypical idea of luxury. We replaced the handle on the original model (which, we joked, was worthy of a bathroom door) with a very well designed handle which was extremely ergonomic and functional. When an object has been well designed, why redesign it ?

The original helicopter contained a variety of safety instruction panels which were rather ugly. We created safety panels in the form of labels made from Jacquard Fair Isle, which looked like clothes' labels. They are perhaps not as legible as printed labels, but are so much prettier that passengers take notice of them – whereas no-one cared to read the stickers which existed before. This is a good example of the functional nature which aesthetics can give.

In the end, when the prototype was presented at Atlanta, visitors told us that they felt 'at home' in the helicopter.

## DISCUSSION

### A luxury helicopter : an absurd idea ?

**Question :** *A helicopter is a military object in which one spends a small amount of time. It is also more difficult to wear ostentatiously than a luxury watch ! What makes people buy helicopters rather than standard aircraft ?*

**Gabriele Pezzini :** It is true that for the same price, there are other luxury products which one can wear more easily ! The classic VIP version of the helicopter was ostentatious and furnished in leather, but it was functional. We did not want to perpetuate any luxury clichés, and so we tried to create an object which was more comfortable, safer and more functional. We even recreated the equipment associated with a helicopter, and that is not at all ostentatious ! This helicopter is costly because we have devoted much thought, quality work and know-how in its creation.

**Corinne Poux-Bernard :** Why buy an object like a helicopter if one cannot flaunt it ? People have often asked us this. A category of clients – in particular at Hermès – buy objects, not to show them off but, for everyday use. Some people use helicopters on a daily basis to save time. Our objective is to make sure that the time they spend in the aircraft is quality time, due to an uncluttered style and calm atmosphere.

**Q. :** *What are your commercial aims ?*

**G. P. :** This project is a commercial partnership which aims to produce an object which will be replicated and then sold. This is a real commercial venture for the two partners. The aim is to sell ten helicopters per year. The helicopter costs 5.6 million Euros, in other words, 400,000 Euros more than a standard helicopter. Six have already been ordered, even though the future owners have not yet seen them fly. In order to judge whether the product is successful, we will have to wait to see the reactions of our clients when they use the helicopters.

## **Selling Hermès' soul ?**

**Q. :** *How have you showed respect for the Hermès tradition with a product like a helicopter ?*

**G. P. :** The Hermès spirit is about conceiving simple objects whose beauty comes from their suitability and functionality. This is as true for a bag as it is for a helicopter.

**Q. :** *What were Hermès' thoughts early on in the project ? You mentioned values, traditions and the spirit of the firm as if you needed to embark on some introspection before starting a new project. Why should one re-invent the past in order to prepare for the future ? Is it to reassure the teams and make them feel as if they belong to a project ? Is it to reassure clients or share-holders or to help the creators ?*

**C. P.-B. :** The main aim is to question the legitimacy of the projects. We have new ideas all the time, and we have to make choices. In making our decisions, we question the opportunities which we think have importance for the firm, and the criteria that we have to respect in order to remain loyal to the Hermès identity. The past is not an encumbrance. Hermès' long history has never prevented its managers from taking substantial risks. After the First World War, Émile Hermès decided, against his brother's advice, not to sell the family firm, but to develop its original core activity as a leather saddler and harness maker to adapt itself to the changing world. He bought the company from his brother and sister, and diversified the activities creating the success which is now globally recognised. This past history helps us to take risks and explore new areas. Our projects are not 'one-offs', but are part of the history and longevity of the firm. Of course, we cannot escape from the seasonal rhythm of fashion or trends. Nonetheless, the variety of our products and the range of our activities mean that some of them are part of a continuity (including products for the home, and our design and interior decoration projects), whereas the fashion world tends to follow the rhythm of seasonal collections. We make use of the two rhythms all the time, and this suits us.

Preparing the firm's future is also a promise which guarantees long-lasting employment for those who work for the company. This is very important at Hermès. We employ 2,000 leather saddle makers, which is a considerable number. We must ask ourselves how we should develop their know-how, what type of products we should develop, what we should do if there is a shortage of leather, and so on. In 1929, the firm nearly collapsed because it opened a shop in New York a few months before the Wall Street Crash. It managed to survive because its suppliers believed in the firm and gave Hermès credit for a further two years. In the light of recent events, this situation takes on great importance. Human involvement and respect are the foundations of the firm.

### **Passion and devotion as part of the project**

**Q. :** *Did Eurocopter approach you to create this helicopter ?*

**C. P.-B. :** The project, as is often the case at Hermès, grew out of a meeting. It is really important for a company which is growing to remain open to new meetings and ideas. Hermès had decided to relaunch its activity as a girdle maker, and this gave rise to numerous initial contacts, in particular with Eurocopter.

**Q. :** *How many people from Hermès worked on the project ? Was there one team devoted to this project ? Was this project an opportunity to make innovations in management terms ?*

**G. P. :** Our management method was passion. We were very enthusiastic about the project and we had to keep to very tight deadlines.

**C. P.-B. :** Eight people from Hermès were involved in the project : They included the head of Interior and Design, the project's development director (who is also a leather saddler), a method engineer, Gabriele, two craftsmen and myself. The Hermès team was small, but we worked on the some of the process in partnership with Eurocopter. This included the design of

the helicopter, the graphic identity, the range of colours, the communication techniques and language used, the design of the stand at the Atlanta salon, the brochure, and so on.

The area of responsibility of the designer remained long after the design had been accepted. Gabriele led the project, co-ordinated those taking part, and made sure that we kept to the schedule, and so on. In addition, we did not compartmentalise the functions. We were all dedicated to the progress of the project, and were able to advance rapidly because of our unusual relationship with Eurocopter beyond the customary decision channels. The project was supported directly by the vice president of the EC135 Eurocopter unit. He told us that this project was the greatest project of his career. I do not think that we could use these working methods on a regular, daily basis as it would be exhausting.

**Q. :** *Who is now in charge of helicopter production and quality control ?*

**C. P.-B. :** We work in parallel. Some elements are made at Hermès and installed directly in the helicopter, whereas others are installed on the spot from components sent by Hermès, having been checked by Hermès' and Eurocopter. We have defined a quality process in which all the stages have been validated with practical control details.

### **The results of an unusual project**

**Q. :** *Did this unusual project have any effect on Hermès' products or on its methods of management ?*

**C. P.-B. :** The project accelerated some of our strategic choices. The department which had been in charge of the project was called Hermès Gainier. This name did not adequately describe the wealth and variety of work carried out on this project. The department was therefore renamed Interior and Design, and this opened up new geographical areas. Since then, we have worked with Bugatti. Again, these are two worlds which are quite different. Bugatti has an image of luxury goods which is not exactly the same as Hermès'. However, a number of similarities can be drawn between Émile Hermès and Ettore Bugatti, notably a shared passion for horses and cars. Incidentally, Ettore Bugatti was a Hermès client, and had some amazing products made for him by Hermès. The two companies have been able to find common ground, and both are demanding in terms of their high standards. We also developed a commercial partnership with Smart. This experience also allowed us to go one step further and sign a joint venture with Wally, thereby creating a company in the yachting industry.

These projects are very ambitious because they open up new, unknown areas for Hermès to explore. The firm takes risks because it puts its brand image and identity at stake, leaves its 'home' territory, and entrusts the sale of its products to partners. This helps reassert our brand name and signature logo, and to decide it will be in the future. We should not understate the financial risks which Eurocopter has taken with this project : the model which we built was taken out of its production line, thereby reducing the predicted turnover of the group.

**Q. :** *What impact did the project have on Eurocopter ? For example, did this experience encourage it to apply new procedures ?*

**C. P.-B. :** The Eurocopter workers who took part in the project have undoubtedly changed the way in which they look at their activity. However, teams rotate regularly in industrial groups. Today, in the production phase, we have to deal with new teams which are more difficult to work with because they do not know the history of the project, and did not experience the euphoria when the helicopter was created. They are responsible for a difficult phase, the replication and having to conform to regulations, without having experienced the advantages of the initial phase.

**Q. :** *Have your innovations been copied in traditional helicopters ?*

**C. P.-B. :** It was agreed between us that our innovations would be exclusive to the Hermès helicopter. The contribution from Hermès in the Hermès helicopter is not only its trademark stamp, but all the technical innovations. The design of the undercarriage, for example, took



eight months ! We are starting to market the aircraft now which means we have to protect the design. The first drawing was presented in September 2007, and the first aircraft was delivered eighteen months later, in March 2009.

**G. P. :** I am sure that the technical improvements which we have made to this aircraft will be copied in the future in standard helicopters. This project will have helped to raise minimum quality standards. Such momentum always starts from the top before trickling down through the hierarchy.

### **Establishing a dialogue between industry and design**

**Q. :** *Monsieur Pezzini, how have changes in your career prepared you to be so familiar with the world of design and industry ?*

**G. P. :** I studied at a school taught by the important figures in Italian design. Ever since I was a student, I have taken part in research exhibitions. I have always been motivated by a desire to understand objects, and to analyse them in a political, social, cultural and historical context. Since I was curious about industry, I worked as an employee and then a consultant in the Allibert design team, a household equipment company in Grenoble. After some time, I felt frustrated with an industrial world which, in the end, was not very interested in product quality, and which sometimes even found some products 'too beautiful' for its clients. So I went back to research exhibitions. And this was how I came into contact with Hermès which had just created an innovation department. I began as a consultant for Hermès before I was given the helicopter project. When I was faced with this new project, I once again adopted the same analytical and critical view I would have had, had the new object been a chair.

**Q. :** *You talk about the search for symmetry or balance and you used the words 'shape' and 'feeling'. Did you have any communication problems with engineers from various areas ?*

**G. P. :** The Eurocopter engineers shared my ideas, even though they had never thought of them in the terms I used. They were obviously focussed on the safety of the aircraft. This was a technical area in which I could not intervene. Nevertheless, I was able to explain to them that their perception of safety was as important as their actual safety. I felt I had an input in this sensitive area. The vice president of the German unit told me that he understood what design was all about, thanks to this project. He had previously thought that it was all about making pretty objects, but he now realised that it was about making 'fair' objects.

**C. P.-B. :** It was possible to establish a dialogue because Gabriele intervened in an operational capacity, working on the design models and constructing the modules. The relationship therefore proceeded on an equal footing. If an engineer thought that a proposition was impossible, Gabriele would find a solution to make it possible. In fact, it was Gabriele who made the final decisions. We presented Eurocopter with a unique project which had already been validated by the artistic management at Hermès. It is often the case that design agencies offer their clients various projects. This was a new method of functioning for Eurocopter and they played agreed.

**Q. :** *The combination of a prescriptive engineer and a creative designer offers a competitive advantage to the helicopter not only in terms of style but also in terms of functionality and production process. Is it possible to generate comparable competitive advantages for more low-quality products ?*

**G. P. :** The primary function of design is to think about an object in a different way, and produce it industrially for the greatest number of clients. I worked on a radio set which was made in China and cost a dollar, but whose value one would have instinctively thought was sixty dollars. Similarly, the object which enabled me to enter into contact with Hermès – a candle-holder – was very simple. I can go from working on a candle-holder to designing a helicopter. What is important is the thinking I apply to an object, regardless of its scale or the target market. Business managers are not always aware of the role of design, which they

reduce to aesthetics or the effects of communication. We have to teach them to choose good designers and to establish communication with them effectively. They can learn a great deal from these designers.

Presentation of the speakers :

Corinne Poux-Bernard : she has been with the Hermès group for seventeen years. She worked for various departments in the firm, having been director of the Art of Living department and then director of Handbags and Baggage. Because of her fine eye for detail, interest in products, and the development of the company, she has been in charge of creation and management in the innovation department for the past three years.

Gabriele Pezzini : he describes himself as a designer and thinker. His training as an artist often brought his work within the confines of research and industrial production. He started off his career as a consultant, and subsequently developed new products and strategies with an eye for new materials and applied technologies. He devoted a number of years to design as well as the implementation of research exhibitions. This enabled him to research his analyses and theories about the perception and 'contamination' of objects in everyday life more extensively. He was visiting professor at the Politecnico di Milano, the École des Beaux-Arts in Saint-Étienne, and at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. He was recently appointed director of design at Hermès International.

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