

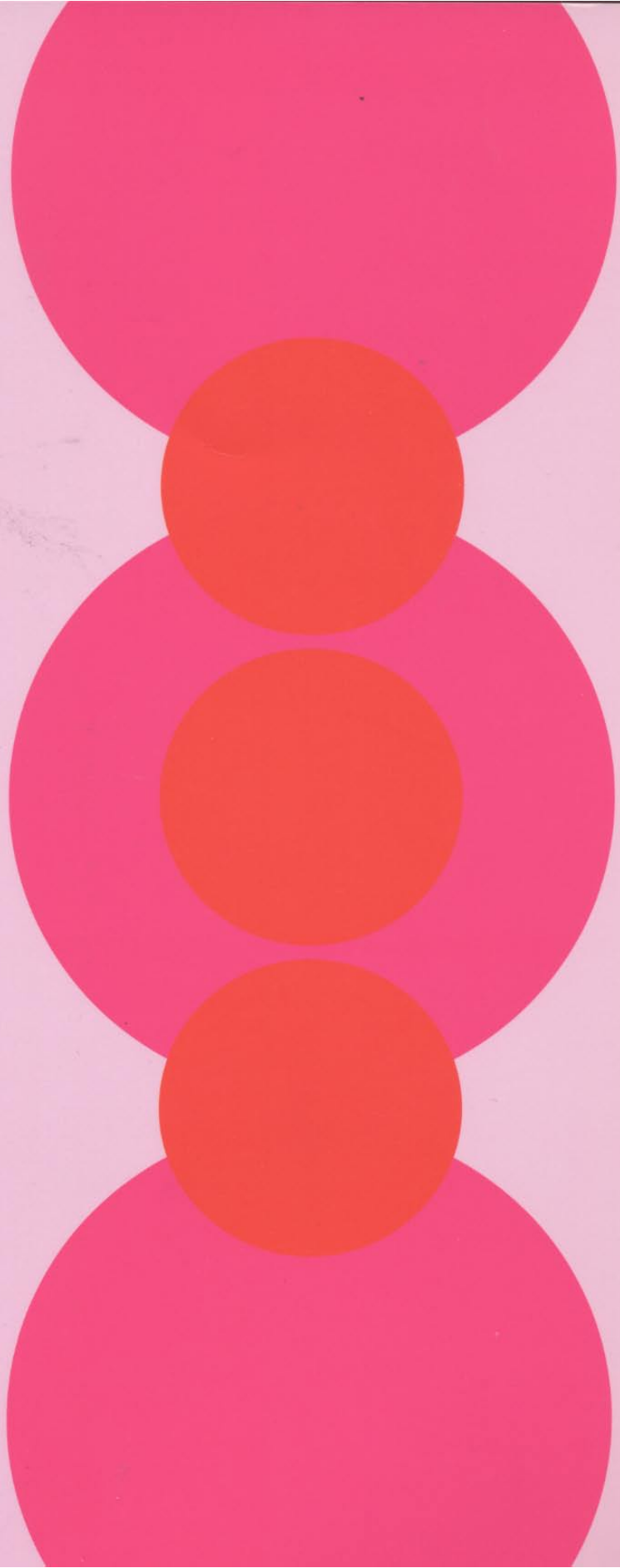


EUR 20/SEK 189/NOK 171/DKK 156/GBP 15/USD 28

Forum AID Award

2007

Best Nordic architecture,
interior design
and product design





Winner
North Tile
Denmark

Jury's motivation

"North Tile is a textile with architectonic qualities, a curtain of building stones of a type that has never previously been seen. Apart from the splendid acoustic properties of the panels and the infinite possibilities they provide to expose the client's range of textiles, the design helps to profile a company that until now has had some identity problems. Scandinavia has acquired a new Lego. Chapeau!"

Design

Studio Bouroullec through Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec with Perrine Vigneron

Consultants

Molgard (technical calculations)

Client

Kvadrat through Anders Byriel (managing director) with Ove Frandsen (branded space manager) and Anne-Mette Kjeldsen (product coordinator)

Measurements

W 284 L 645 D 17 mm
14 North Tiles build approximately 1 sq m

Weight

main tile approx. 250 gr

Colours

all

Textile qualities

4 (Divina, Divina melange, Steelcut and tempo), the PE-foam is flame-retardant

Price on contract market

between 400 and 600 Euro per sq m (depending on quantity and fabric quality)

Duration of manufacture

20 months

Completed

October 2006

FORUM AID
1.07/COMPETITION SUPPLEMENT
TEXT MAX FRASER

Bouroullec

DESIGN



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Observed as a solitary object, the padded, precision-cut "North Tile" designed by Erwan and Ronan Bouroullec makes little sense. First impressions suggest it could be a detachable cushion accessory for an outdoor chair or perhaps a fancy back support for car drivers. But what about those inexplicable flaps and slot holes? Of course, it is only when you witness the impact of the tiles in their correct application can you acknowledge the attributes that have projected this product to the winning position of the Forum AID design category. Indeed, those unfathomable flaps lock effortlessly into the corresponding slots of an adjoining tile and, when linked together en masse, create a flexible montage of colourful, padded textile "tiles". Their purpose is to provide curtain-like partitions within spaces without the need to build permanent walls. The visual impact is striking, the cumulative effect being compared to fish scales, plumage, or digital pixels.

This innovative design didn't come about by mistake. It is the result of a commission that the infamous French brothers earned from Danish fabric brand Kvadrat in 2005. They were approached to give shape to the interior of their new showroom on Södermalm, Stockholm, which opened in February 2006. The space is located within an old spinning mill, weaving mill, and printers, dating back to 1917. The impressively high ceilings and windows lend a certain grandeur to a space that was to house the somewhat anonymous textile collections of Kvadrat.

Project limitations from the client were loose. "There was no real brief except that Kvadrat wanted a showroom where the presentation of their fabrics was part of the room itself," states Erwan Bouroullec. From their Paris-based studio, the brothers set about exploring how best to express the Kvadrat range.

Their approach to a project like this takes a different tack to that of a more traditional "interior architect". Indeed, this duo take on architectural commissions as product designers, identifying walls and doors more as furniture – designed to be movable and flexible. "Many interiors enforce a notion of permanence. We wanted to create an interior that could be dissembled quickly and without trace." The avoidance of too many permanent fixings would enable this and hanging



seemed like the logical design solution for the brothers. "Installing proper walls requires a lot of building work that is costly and inflexible."

They had never worked with fabric for partitions before although had explored the idea of modular dividers with the "Algae" project for Vitra, where nature-mimicking plastic segments are randomly clipped together to form an organic ceiling drop and see-through room divider. Prior to that, elements of the modular "Clouds" shelving partitions that they developed out of polystyrene for Cappellini would later help inform their design for Kvadrat. "Without the experience of these previous projects, it is questionable whether we would have come up with the idea of the hanging tiles," admits Erwan.

That said, there is plenty of logic to the development of the tiles specifically for this Stockholm interior. The subsequent advancement into a sellable product comes as a bonus. "The building used to be full of machines and therefore has very strong ceiling and floors," states Erwan, despite the fact that the weight of an assembled wall of their tiles isn't significant. Additionally, the installation of exquisite whitened Douglas fir floorboards made from wide 6-7 metre-long planks from Germany provided them with the impetus to leave the floor untouched.

"This is such a beautiful floor that we didn't want to mess with it," admits Erwan. "It took nature years and years for the wood to grow and mature. It seemed sacrilege to place any fixings or marks on the wood – what gives us the right to damage such a pure material? That partly determined the idea of hanging partitions."

With that decided, they set about thinking how they could use an industrial process within a space. "Interior projects can be extremely expensive when it comes to specifying bespoke materials and dimensions. We wanted to create a design solution that doesn't demand skilful carpenters and painters for the final result to be successful. Thanks to the system with tiles and detached door modules, the interior can be delivered as a finished product.

It does not need to be polished up afterwards." Instead, they used the budget to invest in the tooling for the tiles rather than spending it on high material and labour costs. It took four people only four days to install the four-metre-high walls of the showroom. "They are designed to be so easy to install that even a five-year-old could work it out!" jokes Erwan. The padded textile forms have a sound-absorbing effect, enhancing the acoustic calm and warmth of the room. The tiles hang like curtains on steel wires fixed into the ceiling. A total of 3,900 tiles have been used in the showroom, in ten different colour shades and three different textile qualities from the Kvadrat collections. The brothers produced a "recipe book" for the tile composition prior to installation. There is the option to take apart and put the tiles back together, giving the product a high level of variability.

The tiles are manufactured by laminating the fabric onto a foam plastic core. The entire block is heated and then pressed into the tool under high pressure to form the relief effect. The tiles are then cut as the tool parts disengage. This process was inspired by the technology used in their "Facett" armchair for Ligne Roset from 2005. The system consists of four products: a main tile, a top/bottom tile, a side tile, and a corner tile. Fourteen North Tiles are required to construct one square metre.

Arched forms and slanting ceilings can be built with the tiles. They were used to construct an indoor pavilion at Musée d'Art Moderne in Luxembourg in 2006. Used horizontally, the tiles lose their self-supporting qualities. The Bouroullecs devised a support system using metal cables that were then woven between the tiles. North Tiles have been specified for a project at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 2007 and have recently been accepted into the Museum of Modern Art's design collection.

Interest has been so great that Kvadrat are now producing North Tiles as part of their collection. The idea is that both architects and private individuals should be able to purchase and construct tile walls. So versatile, they can serve as room dividers and acoustic improvers, chiefly in lounges, lobbies and offices, but also fairs and exhibitions. "With the tiles, we see a possibility of returning textiles to the public sector."