

identity

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identity



Cover: Bouroullec Brothers.
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Variations on a theme, bathroom apps from Axor Bouroullec.



Freestyle compositions

Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, the reigning EIDA Designers of the Year, work tirelessly with an endless flow of creativity, inspiration and precision, as seen in their latest designs for Axor Hansgrohe. TEXT: CATHERINE BELBIN



Fresh, young and dynamic, Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec represent a new generation of industrial designers. They have grown up in the age of celebrity designers – a time when the world's leading manufacturers have realised the potential value that the signature of a well-known name can add to a product, especially if it wins an international design award such as the red dot or iF.

The Bouroullecs ascended into the limelight with designs for office systems, lamps, fragmented filaments of fibres that create almost invisible room dividers and their now classic *Clouds*, which is housed in some of the world's leading design museums. They have since received their share of accolades with their latest being the award EIDA (Elle Decoration International Design Awards) Designers of the Year 2010.

With an enviable track record, it is not surprising that Philippe Grohe commissioned them to create a designer line for his Axor range, following in the footsteps of Citterio, Starck, Massaud and Urquiola, among others, whose collaboration with the German company has propelled the Axor brand to the upper echelons.

The brothers' new concept encourages users to create a personalised bathroom from their collection of basins, tubs, shelves and taps. Allowing them to determine exactly where to place the taps – nothing is preconceived – consumers can create their own dream bathroom made from the finest materials and incorporating the latest water-saving technology developed by Axor engineers, which is exactly what is being demanded in the upscale market today.

"It is a very contemporary approach as consumers like to add their own images to screensavers and to select the apps that they need on their iPhones depending on how that are going to use that device. Today we can interact personally with technology," says Erwan, who takes on the role as spokesperson.

"The Bouroullec Axor collection that we have worked on for the past six years reflects this trend. You can mix and match the different elements to create a bathroom that is unique and custom-designed for you, depending on your height, habits, whether you want the tap levers on the left or right, on the wall



Clockwise from left: *Lighthouse* lamp; Erwan and Ronan Bouroullec; Axor Bouroullec collection 2010.



PHOTOGRAPHY: STUDIO BOURULLEC



PHOTOGRAPHY: TAHON AND BOURULLEC

Clockwise from above: *Baguette* table; *Slowchair* 2007; Kreo Exhibition.



PHOTOGRAPHY: TAHON AND BOURULLEC

or basin. The installer drills all the holes for taps in the sinks, bathtubs in situ, confirming Axor Hansgrohe's belief that the user is in total control as to where the fixtures are placed."

However, the brothers gained their reputation with products other than those for the bathroom. Designing a table is much different from designing a bathroom. Their new table, *Baguette* for Magis is, "meant for life with just enough shininess of the chrome, but at the same time, not interfering with the space. It is a really good table with attention to detail. This bathroom has more function involved so there is a meeting of many elements. Naturally there is a certain disorganisation that we need to organise, dimension that we can provoke. A table is much more condensed and this is reflected in the design for our new *Baguette* table for Magis. It is completely different to the Axor collection," Erwan says.

"We are designing a tableware collection for Alessi. To me it's an art to construct something that is totally different using the modern materials that we have available to us today and as much as possible we avoid circles and squares."

Their design philosophy is illustrated by the *Slow* chair, a product that makes you want to sit comfortably and not just perch on. "We always try to make our designs functional and inviting. Our designs are meant to be used and not just looked at. Our designs are not minimalist," Erwan says.

The relatively young duo – they are still in their 30s – have worked together since Erwan was at art school and Ronan got his first break with the Italian Capellini group, and have been riding the wave of success for almost a decade.

"We both have different skills and we thrive on each other's creative energies. Of course we could work independently, but together we are stronger," Erwan says.

"We are simple, hard working people, passionate about what we do and revel in having time to experiment with new materials, shapes and forms, and to generate new ideas as to how we can better organise work and living environments."

Today, manufacturers are lining up with project proposals for the cerebral pair yet, despite their success, they remain unpretentious and almost oblivious to the trappings of success. "We actually still have a core niche of companies that we have been working with over the years. We are comfortable with them and they with us. We share the same philosophies and we work well together, so we are hesitant about working with others," Erwan says.

"We love to maintain long relationship with eight main companies, as well as with a few smaller collections. Our strategy is based on our belief that the better you know the client, the better the product will be."

He goes on to explain that their success is not an accident. "The only thing that I know is that it's work, work and work: I am a workaholic. It's mental. It's tiring. From the moment I wake up my mind is already buzzing with creativity. I spend a lot of time observing, people, things, life and it is always nice to stop and look at the details especially if its done in a special or unusual way. My thoughts are not always focused. It's difficult to pinpoint the exact inspiration or reasoning as to why I did something when I did something," Erwan says.

"Yes we have a lot of pressure, but we self-generate this pressure [because] we are incredibly afraid of making a mistake. *Axor* was a major project that stretched over six years. It was challenging, completely new for us. Now we want to realise other projects that are realistic, but are as strong conceptually. We are so afraid of not being at the top, we have to keep pushing ourselves."

So what is next for the Bouroullec brothers? "My dream is to design a summer house for myself. I'd love to build in front of a lake, but my wife hates lakes, so we will compromise for a site on a riverside. I would never build on the coast as there are too many people and much of the French coastline has, architecturally speaking, been spoilt," Erwan says.

However, with the brothers' current frenetic pace, it may be a while before this dream is realised, but it is far more likely that the pair will succeed at their passionate quest to create a truly iconic piece of work, like an Eames chair or Saarinen's *Tulip* chair.

"It doesn't take time. I think it just happens. I think we tried to force it, but it is just something that will happen one day," Erwan concludes. 10