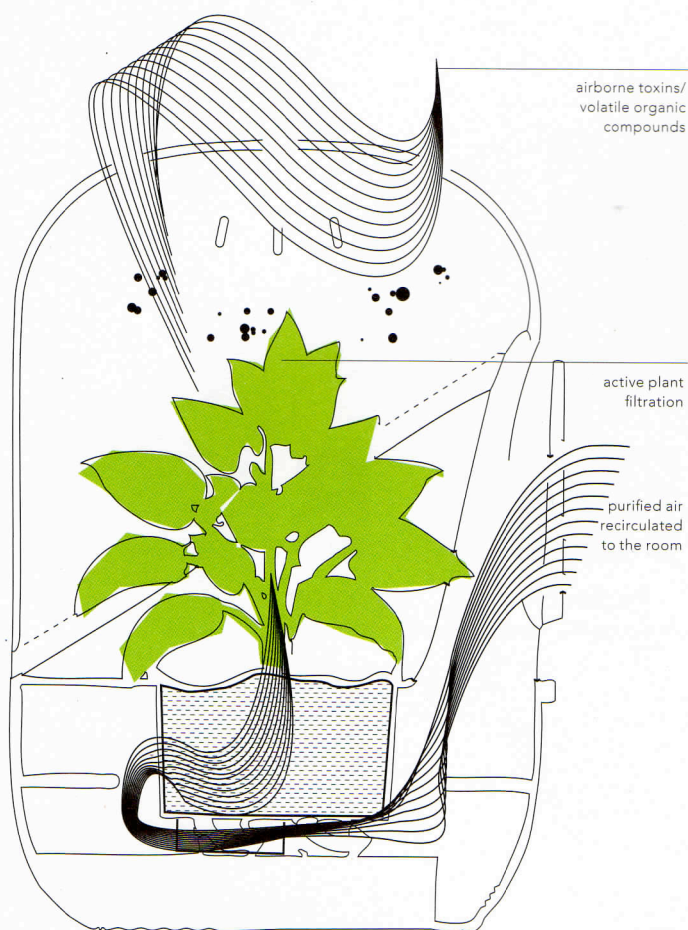


Wash Your Air



— Using the natural filtration skills of houseplants to improve indoor air quality, *Andrea* is nice to look at even when not doing anything at all.

Text NATASHA EDWARDS

When Le Laboratoire opened in Paris in 2007, it seemed a worthy idea: putting artists, designers and scientists together to encourage innovation. By far the most intriguing thing at its inaugural show was Bel-Air, a strange globule containing a houseplant. Developed by French designer Mathieu Lehanneur and Harvard professor David Edwards, Bel-Air was inspired by a 1980s Nasa research project on air pollution in space capsules – “only better”, recalls Lehanneur. He and Edwards incorporated a ventilator fan to pull air into the glass capsule, waft it through the leaves and down through the roots. The air receives additional

filtration from the water in the base of the capsule before arriving back in the room. Bel-Air won *Popular Science* magazine’s Invention of the Year award and was exhibited at MOMA, New York, in 2008. Now Bel-Air is on the market as Andrea. “It legitimates all the research we’ve done, in developing it from a luxury object to something on sale for the price of a coffee-maker,” says Lehanneur. So does it work? Indoor air is often five to ten times more polluted than the air outside, thanks to glues and solvents in carpets and furniture, which release formaldehydes and other toxic particles into the air. According to tests by Research Triangle Park Laboratories in North Carolina, just one passage through Andrea reduces formaldehyde levels in the air by 50 per cent and to near negligible after 90 minutes. Any houseplant will do but spider plants, aloe vera, madagascar dragon trees and peace lilies are particularly recommended. One Andrea unit can purify a 40m² room for roughly the same electricity as a low-energy lightbulb. £149. www.laboshop.fr ○