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Milan unveiled, from the bottom up, in the essential Salone Preview

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Stepping up

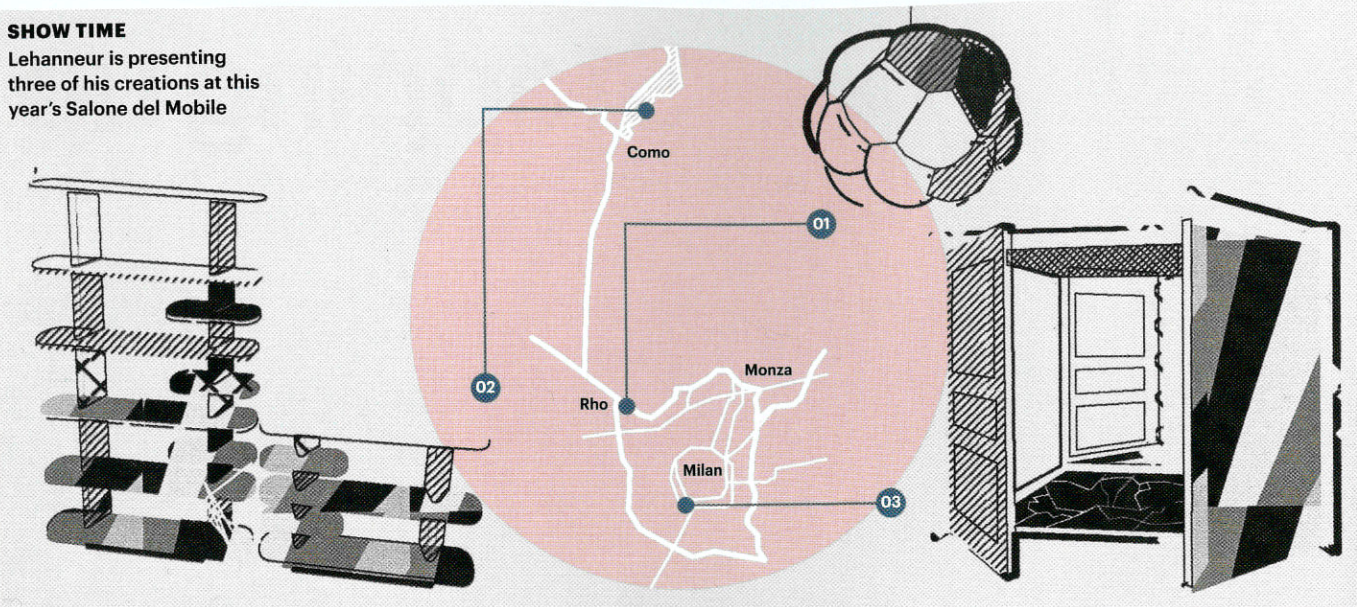
French designer Mathieu Lehanneur, a triple-hitter at this year's Salone, is intent on finding better ways to sleep, breathe and stop breathing



GREAT STRIDES
Mathieu Lehanneur in his Parisian studio, stepping on a block of marble part of his upcoming installation, *Bathing in Light*, with his 'Strates' desk (left) and 'Cloudy' lamp (right, on desk)

SHOW TIME

Lehanneur is presenting three of his creations at this year's Salone del Mobile



01. 'CLOUDY' LAMP

Pavillon 9, Stand Ho2-Got, Veneto area, Euroluce, www.cosmit.it/en/euroluce

02. 'STRATES' OFFICE SYSTEM

Belgian Residences, Comacina Island, Lake Como, www.objekten.com

03. LIQUID MARBLE

Bathing in Light, Art-Garden, Superstudio Più, via Tortona 27, thusspokethemarbile.com

Go to Wallpaper.com to see our pick of not-to-be-missed events at Salone *

The French designer Mathieu Lehanneur is bringing a triple bill to this year's Salone del Mobile: a glass lamp resembling a cluster of bubbles (for the Italian brand Fabbian), wooden shelves like a millefeuille (an addition to his office system for the Belgian company Objekten) and a block of seemingly liquified marble for a Turkish installation called *Bathing in Light*.

Despite the instant visual hit of the line-up, Lehanneur says that he prioritises function over form. 'I never start thinking about a project with a pencil and paper. I close my eyes and put myself in the mind of the person who will experience it. Once I have an idea of what will happen in his head and his heart, the form comes naturally.' Take that millefeuille office system, 'Strates'. Before drawing a single line, he contemplated: What does it mean to own a desk today, when we can sit on a couch with an iPad? And why would we store items in a drawer when most things fit onto a flash drive? So 'Strates' features sleek open shelves: 'The idea was to make the system geometric and structured so the mind stays uncluttered,' explains the designer.

Even as a child growing up in the Parisian suburbs, Lehanneur doesn't recall sketching much, but rather observing, and suspecting that one day it would pay off. His father was an equally introspective engineer, who is still trying to develop better racing wheels for bicycles at the age of nearly 80. Of his six kids, four applied to design school, though Mathieu, the youngest, was the only one to pursue the profession.

Over the course of his career Lehanneur has designed a chair or two, but that's not what excites him. 'As designers we can go much further than just furniture,' he says. 'Let's look at the world, what people need, how they live. Yes, they sit, but they do a lot of other things too. They breathe, they sleep, they pray, they love, they die.' He conceives objects to fulfill these human needs – removing pollution from the air, covering up unpleasant noises or reigniting romance.

As a student, he earned money working as a guinea pig for the pharmaceutical industry. Learning that half of all medicine is taken

incorrectly, he decided the industry needed designers to rethink the relationship between patients and drugs, and created a collection called 'Objets Thérapeutiques'. It included antibiotics to be peeled like an onion, a different layer every day, encouraging a patient to continue the treatment to its end. Though never produced, the project is now part of the permanent collection at MoMA. And Lehanneur's fascination with the medical industry continues. He is currently working with the company Becton Dickinson to develop accessories around vaccines.

At age 38, he has some 40 projects on the go. But barely seven years ago, when he was building his reputation and clients were scarce, he filled the time by dreaming up projects on his own. He had been wondering how to transform house plants into efficient air filters when he met David Edwards, a Harvard scientist who was opening Le Laboratoire, an experimental space for art and science in Paris. Together they developed 'Andrea', a contraption with a green plant inside that filters toxins ten times as quickly as a plant on its own. They sold 30,000 units; a smaller version comes out early next year.

Lehanneur has collaborated with a range of scientists who develop solutions for his unusual ideas. 'Mathieu is a researcher as much as a designer,' says Edwards. 'He is interested in going where others haven't gone.' This pioneering spirit appeals to museum curators such as Jennifer Fletcher, acting head of architecture and design at SFMOMA, where Lehanneur is giving a talk this spring. Citing his 'Once upon a Dream' capsule that induces sleep by regulating sound, light and temperature, she says: 'It is interesting

how he goes back to certain clichés – what do we need for a good night's sleep? – but in a new, highly technological way.'

'The Island' is another air-enhancing device hitting the market next winter for the French brand Airmineral. Looking like a flying saucer, it diffuses a mist of beneficial minerals in seawater via a process called micro-nebulisation. Of all the newfangled objects Lehanneur has invented, this is a rare one to make it past the prototype stage. The problem, he says, is not that he's ahead of his time, but that his ideas often go beyond the comfort level of marketing departments.

His interior architecture is as hard to categorise as his design. A few years ago he created an entire choir for the 11th-century Saint-Hilaire church in Melle, made of white marble layered like a rice paddy. This winter he unveiled its antithesis, a vast space for electronic music on the periphery of Paris called Electric. Massive concrete pillars covered in black resin resemble tree trunks from which electric cables grow and spread across the ceiling. 'I wanted it to be like if Alice in Wonderland had listened to rock 'n' roll,' he says.

On the opposite side of Paris, in the palliative care unit of the Diaconesses hospital, is another of Lehanneur's projects. Called *Demain est un Autre Jour* (Tomorrow is Another Day), a series of discs with an ever-changing image of the sky hang on the walls of all 15 rooms. A patient can select a city anywhere in the world, Météo France informs the hospital what the weather will be like in that location 24 hours later, and computers on site generate corresponding images that appear on each person's individual screen. Quiet and hypnotic, the object is both a virtual window to the future and a classic conversation starter.

Like many of Lehanneur's creations, this one incorporates very different skill sets, from information technology to a great understanding of humanity. Still, he maintains that he is a designer, no more and no less: 'A designer is the best person to bring together disparate things in a complicated context, and in a form that makes life more beautiful than it was before.' * www.mathieulehanneur.fr