

VOICES

Is Mathieu Lehanneur the World's Most Versatile Designer?

The acclaimed French designer always has a new, and unexpected, project up his sleeve. Up next: the new Air France lounge at Charles de Gaulle

TEXT BY [GAY GASSMANN](#) · Posted June 26, 2018

The first thing that strikes you about [Mathieu Lehanneur](#) is his enthusiasm and interest—in everything. Where others might see boundaries and limitations, the 43-year-old French designer sees opportunities and collaborations. He has often said that science is his main inspiration; more often than not, he approaches design through the lens of technology. This is perhaps best exemplified by *Andrea*, a plant-based air purifier he developed in 2009 with Harvard University professor and inventor David Edwards. Two years in development, *Andrea* uses living plants to purify air indoors. “I wanted to find a way to live better,” says Lehanneur. The purifier, which won the Best Invention Award by *Popular Science* in 2008, is now in the permanent collection of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris.



Mathieu Lehanneur with a piece from his ceramic series, *50 Seas*. 

Photo: Courtesy of Mathieu Lehanneur



St. Hilaire church in Melle, France, renovated by Lehanneur.

Photo: Courtesy of Mathieu Lehanneur

Growing up, Lehanneur wanted to be an artist, which found him at the Beaux-Arts in Paris. But, he says, making art was a lonely process. “I decided that I needed a client, a question to think about, a problem to solve,” he says. “My ideas don’t just

appear. They are in response to something.” An early postgrad stint creating museum exhibition installations launched his career as a designer. Now, 15 years later, his practice includes creating furniture, lighting fixtures, and objects, many projects in collaboration with brands like Veuve Clicquot, Cartier, and *Nike*, as well as telephones for Huawei, where he has been the chief designer since 2015.

The work is often at once conceptual and highly poetic: In 2012, he created a work for terminally ill patients called “Tomorrow Is Another Day,” a round screen that projects the weather for the day yet to come. A less esoteric example of his work debuts this summer, when he reveals a redesign of the Air France Business Class Lounge at Charles de Gaulle Airport. Lehanneur says he was inspired by the French spirit when envisioning the 1,600-square-foot Air France lounge and in particular its box seating, which appears like that one might see at the French Open or the French Opera of Paris.



Dernier Domicile Connu, a living space concept.

Photo: Courtesy of Mathieu Lehanneur

When asked to describe his process, Lehanneur stands and starts to wave his hands in the air. This is meant to illustrate how he “draws with his hands, in space,” he says, “before I draw with a pencil on paper.” He maintains his primary aim is to create relationships between people and objects, “to create beauty with magic,” he says. When someone selects one of his designs, he considers that akin to saying, “I want to live with you.”