



Clockwise from left: IC lights, Ball light, Beauty Mirror, and designer Michael Anastassiades.

Seeing the light

His work is poetic and reductive, but don't call Michael Anastassiades a minimalist.



Sometimes we encounter a new product and think: “surely it already exists?” The thought is an almost infallible gauge of good design, this sense of it being of such excellence that it should have already been invented.

I get this feeling almost every time I come across something designed by London-based Cypriot, Michael Anastassiades. Which is just as well, because at Milan’s Salone del Mobile, it seemed he was everywhere. At his own stand, but also at the glitzy showroom of Flos, the world’s most prestigious lighting brand. At the parties, the lunches and brunches, too, the name Anastassiades was on everyone’s lips – strange, really, since only months before most folk couldn’t pronounce the tongue-twisting moniker at all.

Anastassiades blipped onto my radar in 1997, the year he first collaborated with avant-garde fashion designer Hussein Chalayan. There was such potency to his stage set – two arced, bright white scrim curtains set inside an equally glaring white box – as magical as an installation by James Turrell. Having graduated from the Imperial College and the Royal College of Art with degrees in engineering and industrial design respectively, Anastassiades was erring to the side of the conceptual. A fine, carved wooden cup in which one could leave a vocal message and upturn; when re-turned, the recipient

would hear the message played back. Lights that came on when one paid attention to them, that sort of thing. He was concerned with investing inanimate objects with something akin to the Greek notion of *anima*.

With time, that conceptual earnestness has smoothed out into a seamless reductivism. Not “minimalism” though – Anastassiades can’t abide the term. “It has been worn so threadbare through misuse,” he says. What he’s interested in is essence.

His latest lighting designs are a case in point. The String light system for Flos is an ingenious solution to an enraging everyday

problem: someone moves into a new space and the plugs are not at all where one would have put them. A generous length of industrial flex and some cone or globe-shaped shades

fitted with LEDs, the String can be strung at whim, no matter the configuration of a room, creating a sleek, customised lighting rig.

For inspiration, Anastassiades cites the everyday. “Whenever I take the train, I sit by the window and watch the parallel strings connecting electricity pylons, flashing by. I love the way they divide the landscape and how spheres are occasionally beaded through the wires at random intervals. I also love how,

in Mediterranean cultures, strings of lights are stretched between posts to mark an outdoor space for an evening party in a village square.” That it looks like an installation at the Venice Biennale is an added bonus.

In a similar vein, the IC light – also developed for Flos – takes the precarious beauty of the performance juggler’s art as its visual cue. But its title hammers another agenda home: IC refers to the controversial Identity Code used by British immigration to record the country of origin of attempted immigrants, and therefore their likelihood of being rejected. Precariousness then, can touch ethics as well as aesthetics in Anastassiades’s world – and still look like a graceful wall, floor or table lamp.

The son of a Cypriot general, Anastassiades is nothing if not rigorous. For years he was an avid yogi, taking students on pilgrimages to gurus in Greece. More recently he has taken up a vigorous swimming regime. At 45 years of age he is a lean, mean, designing machine. The chief executive of Flos, Piero Gandini, sums it up well: “The contrast between the elegance and poetry of Michael’s products and the very strong, let’s say square, physical presence of the man himself is pretty unusual. And then, when you talk to him you see the incredibly poetic attitude and the very gentle attention he has about the world, and at the same time you realise how much discipline and rigour is in his product.” ■

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