

BLUEPRINT



Gaetano Pesce

“the beauty of the future is imperfection” **Exclusive interview**



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SHOPS

Smooth operators

This month Babylon Design opens a shop on London's Fulham Road and launches a new collection of products by some of the leading names in design. Michelle Ogundehin reports

Babylon Design, the London lighting and accessory company, says "a shared spirit, style and sensibility" characterises its new collection of products, launched this month to mark the opening of the first Babylon shop on Fulham Road. Michael Anastassiades, Matthew Hilton, Simon Maidment, textile designer Rebecca Hoyes, architects Torsten Neeland and Claudio Silvestrin, and the Berlin-based duo Vogt + Weizenegger, have designed the pieces, which range from stone bowls (Silvestrin) to silvered-glass lamps and vases (Anastassiades).

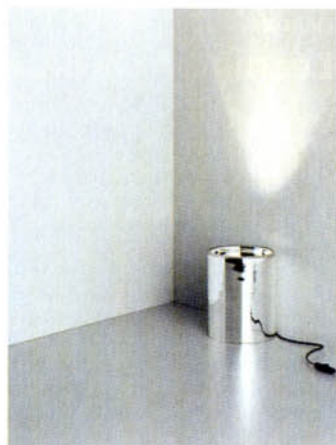
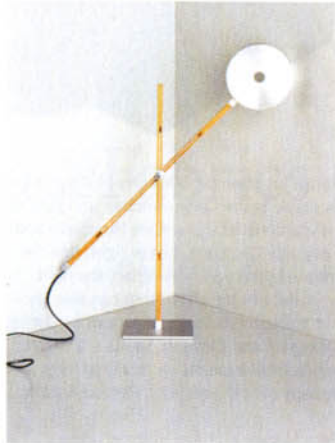
Even if you don't recognise the name Babylon Design, you'll probably know its products – Babylon directors Peter Wyly (design director) and Birgit Israel (creative director) have made simple, sculptural lights from various combinations of bone china, paper, plastic and concrete into something of a trademark. Or perhaps you've spotted the ceramic incense burner on sale in The Body Shop (Wyly cold-called the store offering to produce a better burner than the one currently on sale – "we see a gap in the market and have an idea to fill it," he says), or their white ceramic Oxo stacking light for Habitat.

With design seen as an area for profitable play, the pair "work with forms, then look for mediums." Their aim, they say, is to appeal to our subtler senses. "Even if we're using plastic, it's in a soft, sensual way." Combined with the desire to seek out creative talent which complements their own skills (they often

trawl degree shows), Babylon also produces and promotes work by other designers. It's the kind of attitude that's seen them grow, in just three years, from small concern to a team of five working with some respected names. They also have the business savvy to keep prices competitive (on the high street, the lamps start at £25, collection pieces range from £5 to lamps by Wyly for £300, while a porcelain chandelier is available to commission from recent graduate Jo Whiting for £5,000).

Wyly began in business selling his own vividly coloured oriental silk lampshades in the early '90s. They quickly became a fashionable accessory, selling over 50,000. Before the pair formed Babylon in 1997, Israel, a stylist, distributed the shades in her native Germany. A year long sojourn in an all-white Miami Art Deco hotel sparked the demise of the colour phase. Today, the new shop is a marker of how far they've come. A former wine merchants turned lofty New York-style space, it's intended to be "more like a living room than a shop. It'll be informal, easy going and stylish," stresses Israel. "I can't stand shops where you feel like you can't touch anything. Here you'll be free to explore". Not least the latest collection, which is, they claim, "a memorable group of designs beyond the boundaries of fashion, time and place".

Babylon: 301 Fulham Road, London SW10, from 22 September. Tel 0171 729 3321



Babylon's new products, which will be launched at their Fulham Road shop – opening late September – include (from top, left to right): lights in English bone china by Peter Wyly; lights with wood veneer shades by Vogt + Wizenegger; desk light in oak and aluminium by Birgit and Christoph Israel; Turned wood lights with micro cashmere fabric shades by Peter Wyly; Bone china breakfast set (with coffee jug) by Torsten Neeland; Italian stone bowl by Claudio Silvestrin; Silvered glass vases by Michael Anastassiades; Silvered glass light, also by Anastassiades; bone china candle holders by Matthew Hilton (as the candle burns expressions written in the china such as "light of my life" and "light hearted" are illuminated from within)



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