

# Air Bubbles and Japanese Swords

*Cédric Ragot delights the industry*



Naturally, if a company that once commissioned you to design something and then ended up foregoing its production subsequently comes back and asks you to work on something new, it is not insignificant. That happened to Cédric Ragot in the case of the packaging of a certain champagne. More recently, his new chair was launched in Milan. This mild-mannered designer, working away quietly on the outskirts of Paris, receives a fair share of project requests, not least of which are for scent bottles and knives. In fact, the range of works Ragot undertakes is rather wide, which suits him very well, as he likes the chance to continually reinvent his style. DAMN° gets the low-down from the designer himself.

ANNA SANSOM

It's mid-April, and Cédric Ragot has just returned from the Milan furniture fair where his O2 chair for French manufacturer Roche Bobois was unveiled. The prolonged frustration that he felt in waiting for it to come out, and the ultimate joy when it did, is something that many designers can empathise with. “What's very difficult for a designer to do is to carry an idea for two-and-a-half years and not give up, in order to try to bring it out in the best conditions”, Ragot says. “The chair was nearly abandoned several times for reasons of aesthetics, comfort, and technical feasibility. I started to become tired of the product towards the end. But the day it came out it regained all its value, in my eyes. I thought of how exhausted my wife was carrying our child, and the moment the baby arrived, it was the most beautiful baby in the world. I learnt to be persevering.”

Ragot had wanted to redesign the Medallion chair, a French archetype, in a contemporary way, and the O2 chair's fluid form, its rounded seat and back with overlapping arcs, was loosely inspired by cells or soap bubbles. Virtually transparent, the chair was

made using injection moulding, and is produced in seven colours, in addition to a limited edition of 1,000 in fluorescent pink. For Ragot, the scale of the operation leading to manufacture was a revelation. “It was the biggest mark of trust that I've ever had in my professional life”, he adds.

Organic ideas apply to several of the French designer's products. For Italian manufacturer Plust, Ragot made a modular system of armchairs and Y-unit benches, titled Jetlag, that can be composed in graphic arrangements for public spaces such as airports and shopping malls. “The idea was to create a minimum system with just two pieces – the bench and the armchair, in order to allow the maximum number of possible configurations”, he explains. “Initially, I wanted to call it Reef, because a whole life could be developed around it, with everyone sitting on it.”

It transpires that Ragot took the initiative and suggested the project to Plust. “Plust didn't ask me to do this, but to do something else”, he recounts. “Then, at the end of my presentation, I proposed this system be-



cause I thought it could be fun.” Jetlag finds an echo in the Coral candlestick (for Bitossi), similarly intended to look like a living organism. For the Italian brand, Ragot also designed a figurine called Lapo (from laipin and oiseau, the French words for rabbit and bird) that is meant to be “a peaceful spirit in the home”.

## THE BUBBLY AND THE SMOOTH

Having grown up in Brittany, Ragot studied at EN-SCI (a national college for industrial creation) in Paris. In 2002, he founded his studio – which today consists of a team of five – in Montreuil, to the east of the Paris periphery. Despite coming across as a softly spoken, discreet designer, he is a go-getter. His versatility has won him commissions from such luxury brands as Veuve Clicquot and Paco Rabanne, and from small companies like the lighting-manufacturer Artuce and the knife-maker Henri Mazelier.

Ragot was first commissioned to design the packaging for Veuve Clicquot Rosé in 2011, the result of which was a biodegradable prototype called Bubbly.

In order to make it insulating, articles of air were trapped inside each bubble in the papier maché, the accumulation alluding to the drink's effervescence. The pink prototype looked pretty cool. However, when Veuve Clicquot changed the colour to yellow for its Brut champagne bottle, it was less desirable. “They realised that it looked vaguely like sweet corn, and the concept no longer worked. So the piece never went into production”, Ragot says.

Two years later, the LVMH brand came knocking again. This time, Ragot and his team designed sleek, white packaging that included a handle, the minimal form recalling the multi-dimensional Klein bottle by the 19th/20th century German mathematician Felix Klein. Named Naturally Clicquot, it comprises of a 100 percent bio-based, isotherm material made from potato starch combined with paper. “All our research was about finding materials that could fulfil the function of keeping the bottle cold for two hours, between the moment of purchase and the consumption of the beverage”, explains Ragot. “So we looked at cork, wood, and cellulose paper that



CÉDRIC RAGOT

NATURALLY CLICQUOT  
for Veuve Clicquot

INVICTUS for Paco Rabanne (1)

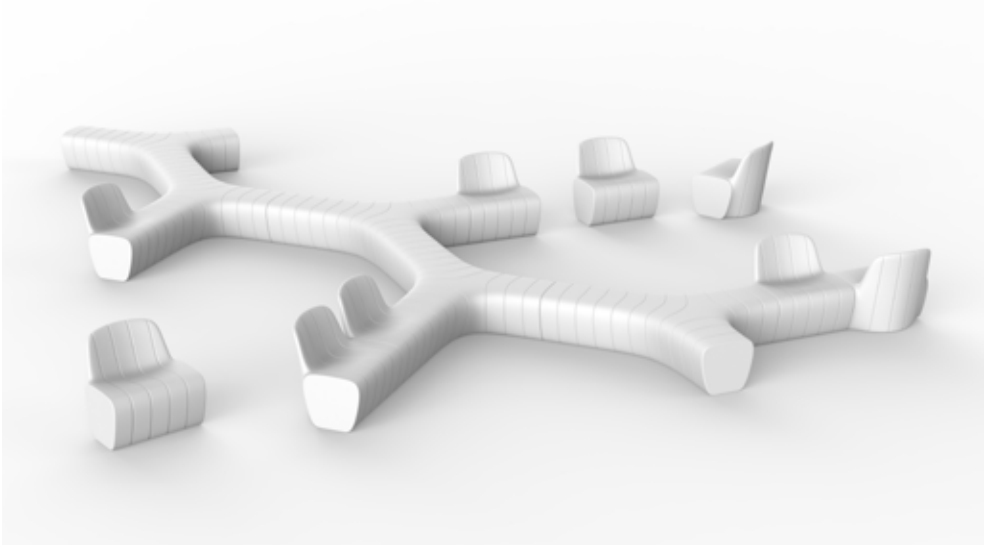
HAUSSMANN (2) + TSUBA (3)  
for Henri Mazelier

O2 (4) for Roche Bobois  
Polycarbonate chair, made using  
a gas-assisted injection moulding  
technique

BUBBLY (5), prototype packaging  
for Veuve Clicquot

CORAILLE Platinum for Bitossi (6)





1



2



3



4

JETLAG (1) for Plust

SVEL (2) for Roche Bobois

TANK (3) family for Artuce

LAPO (4) for Bitossi Ceramiche

would trap the air. At the same time, in-house at LVMH they found a way of transforming the paper to create this material.”

In-depth research was also necessary to produce the bottle for Paco Rabanne's Invictus fragrance, which was launched last year. Ragot first collaborated with the brand in 2011, when he made an 18-carat, limited edition of their 1 Million aftershave and Lady Million perfume, both locked into packaging resembling a safe. For Invictus, the brief called for a design reflecting the theme of victory. Ragot's winning proposal, which he spent two years developing, is based on a trophy cup adorned with horizontal, minimalist lines loosely inspired by 1920s architecture. “I didn't want to reference one sport in particular but was thinking of something generic, like the Olympic Games”, informs Ragot.

Ragot tries to achieve a different style in each project. For French lighting company Artuce, he designed

bulbous polypropylene lamps for indoor and outdoor use. “They're quite voluminous and industrial, but diffuse a very soft light, and the surface patterning gives a paper lantern effect”, he says, mentioning that he was thinking about US reservoir tanks when he imagined them. On the domestic level, Ragot has been creating upmarket collections of knives for Henri Mazelier, a coutelier operating in the Loubéron region of southern France since 2011. Think of cheese knives, steak knives, and pocketknives with a pared-down, elegant style. “I was asked to make a contemporary version of the traditional, regional knives, but then I began considering other ideas, such as Japanese and Corsican knives”, Ragot says. The Tsuba steak knife with Corian handles is based on the Japanese sword; the Katana knife comes in a sheath that protects the blade from getting damaged in a drawer; the Haussmann model features graphic lines on its bronze, copper, and manganese handles, inspired by the architectural cornices of Haussmannian buildings in Paris. “The products designed by Cédric Ragot always have a strong personality; he's a designer who's constantly seeking out new materials”, says Richard Mazelier, the fourth-generation cutler who named his knife-making company after his great-grandfather.

So how would Ragot define his design philosophy? “That's the most difficult question to answer”, he admits. “I try to have an approach that respects the manufacturing processes of the brands I work with, and to have balance and harmony between wanting to produce repeatable, industrial objects, and something that is meaningful and interesting in terms of its drawn design and materiality.” And what's next? “Perhaps I'd like to change scale and make larger objects that manipulate space, or make something like a vehicle”, he muses. Let's see where Ragot's transversality will lead him. <

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SITE DU GRAND-HORNU - RUE SAINTE-LOUISE - 7301 HORNU, BELGIUM  
+32 (0) 65 65 21 21 - [WWW.GRAND-HORNU-IMAGES.BE](http://WWW.GRAND-HORNU-IMAGES.BE)  
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