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01

DENISON YACHTING DEMANDS THE FINEST
Days of Thunder NASCAR driver Greg Biffle swaps tarmac for ocean
Behind the Lens A picture speaks 1,000 words, but what makes it memorable?
To the Ends of the Earth When dropping anchor in St. Tropez isn't enough...





Words *Josh Sims*
Photograph *Marcel Wanders Studio*

→ Marcel Wanders studio's
One Minute Mickey created
in 2018 to honor the 90th
anniversary of Walt Disney's
iconic figure, Mickey Mouse

Dutch Courage

For design to possess inspired form, rather than style over function, it requires the vision of an artist, the nous of a businessman, the courage of an entrepreneur, and the audacious outlook of Marcel Wanders.



"Secretly, I'm an engineer," says Marcel Wanders, "because deep down all designers like to talk about screws and machines. But the fact is that the world out there really couldn't care less, because 99.9 percent of the people around me are not engineers. And it's only in the last 25 years or so that designers have started to understand that."

It's why Wanders, the Amsterdam-based product designer, doesn't really get the enduring trend for modernism – in all its stripped back, plain functionality – in furniture and interiors. For him, it says nothing. It's "outmoded" – even, like so much modern design, rather boring.

"For me, the whole principle of design is that it comes up with new things. It has ideas, a sense of fantasy," the 56-year-old Dutchman contends. "It's about designing something more than functional. You can buy a functional chair for \$12 and if you pay more than that you're not paying for function anymore. People aren't stupid. Obviously a \$600 chair isn't about function."

"Of course, in furniture there might not be much technical innovation – my ass is much the same size as my dad's, so there are physical limitations, for example. But the way my dad *felt* about just about everything has changed massively between his generation and those younger. The real change is cultural. That's why design should be about making things that are meaningful. People want things around them that they can love."

Certainly, Wanders' designs – as instantly recognizable as they are – are arresting, irreverent, twisted, exuberant and inventive: he's the man who modeled a vessel on a spectacularly explosive nasal emittance, and then called it the Snotty Vase; or who worked out a way of effectively suspending rope in aspic, making it hard and forming it into his Knotty Chair; or a way of covering inflated party balloons with carbon fiber to produce, appropriately, the world's lightest chair.

More recent furniture pieces have included the Ant chair, in which a wedge of comfy upholstery is suspended on seemingly too spindly legs; or the BFF modular sofa, which takes the capitone technique of deep buttoned upholstery and blows up the scale so that one fragment becomes a full module.



↑ Marcel Wanders studio's ultra-lightweight carbon fiber chair formed around party balloons

→ The Knotty Chair in gold, made by suspending rope in aspic

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Indeed, many of his designs refer back to established, historical forms and, as he puts it, often "look old to start with, because that makes for pieces people tend to stay connected to for longer – and that's proper durability, proper ecological thinking." Too much of contemporary design, he argues, and especially at the luxury end of the market, is obsessed with the shiny and unsullied – no cracks, no patina, no unique character allowed. The only newness he's really interested in is the original concept.

"I like nothing more than being challenged, of finding a fresh way of considering something, and what's so surprising is that innovation can be found in so many places and in ways that make you wonder why it hasn't been done before, why something has stayed pretty much the same for centuries without being reconsidered."

He cites, by way of example, a gargantuan 77 pound art book he produced, in which the paintings reproduced are on a 1:1 scale with the originals, "as they should be seen". Or the 'whispering' violin he's designed for a professional violinist friend of his who was becoming deaf through her years of playing; it sounds the same but produces fewer decibels, which composers are now even writing for.

Many of Wanders' designs form part of the permanent collections of New York's Museum of Modern Art, London's V&A and, naturally enough, Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum. Beginning his career at Droog, the Dutch design

collective that produced the Knotty Chair, he has since designed some 1,700 pieces for the diverse likes of Flos, Boffi, B&B Italia, Moroso, his design agency-cum retail venture Moooi and, most recently, for Baccarat. That points to one crucial quality of his work: for all of its frequent lightheartedness – and "it's not about being humorous," he stresses, "because humor in design has a short lifespan, in the way you can't tell the same joke over and over again." – it also sells.

"People say you should just focus on your talents, but that's stupid," he argues in counter to those who questioned why, back in 2014, he bothered to complete an MBA. "I make things, yes, but I also want people to have them. And that means business. That's the only way to get design to people. So, I figured the better I am at business, the better designer I'll be – to make things that make the client happy, me happy, and hopefully the world happy, too."