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Preface by  
Ross Lovegrove

Introduction by  
Paola Antonelli

A conversation with  
Hans Ulrich  
Obrist  
.....



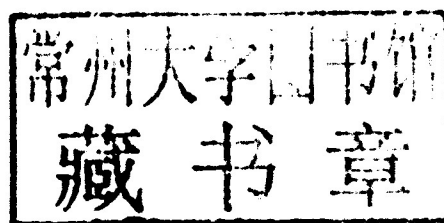
# MATHIEU LEHANNÉUR



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# MATHIEU LEHANNEUR

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# —B— RENAISSANCE MAN

*Preface by* Ross Lovegrove  
Designer

**T**he first thing I write, the first thing I contemplate in relation to Mathieu, is an experience I had many years ago in Florida.

The EPCOT Center housed in a geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller, blowing my mind as a large almost spherical assembly of pressed aluminum panels arranged in an intriguing matrix that read with a swirling degree of irregularity, like a silver pine cone based on a repeat formula between science, art, and technology. Everything was new... the experience, the sky, and even the visitors seemed to be from a science fiction movie... moving slowly, looking in every direction, an atmosphere of a brave new world prevailed, something that moved a young mind and made day-dreaming a beautiful reality.

Inside, things just got better, a veritable wonderland... a boat ride in a floating tin can propelled on a thin river that created silence and clean air, an effortless sensuality that left the mind free from pollution to contemplate plants grown in suspension, hydroponically... tomatoes all juicy and ripe, fed like a hospital patient in a fantastically hygienic, soil-free existence, super clean... just how I imagined the future. If I could print photos directly from my memory from a laser out of my eyes, nothing would be lost from the impact this experience still has on my memory and contemporary imagination.

The combined visions of artist, architect, biologist, agriculturalist, philosopher, and free style speculator, where the naïve charm of Disney makes technology seem accessible... context is everything but so too is instinct, and the ability to inspire a new philosophy set at the forefront of technological enquiry.

We miss the magic... design as something expected and art as something unexpected... the feeder system to break new ground and to speculate on things unseen, to make creative mistakes and to result in form from process and thought, irrespective of what it looks like.

The twenty-first century did not begin in 2000, it began ten years later, as enough time has passed to banish nostalgia from our sanity and see the world as set for reinvention, reinterpretation, and redesign on all levels, as the rules of engagement are different now than they were before.

We are fast approaching a third phase of evolution, tertiary evolution that will form a new movement or a new industrial approach, as we begin to see and design at an atomic level, the building blocks of life now open to recombination, heading towards a biological age of material invention and physical expression.

This is exciting because it will release us again from arbitrary taste and begin an era of fantastic logic and beauty convergence, but with rapid growth potential accelerated by the digital, and the unrestricted fluid exchange of knowledge and information.

The journey into the future will see evolution becoming subject to automation, accelerating a process that used to move like nature, at glacial speed, responding only to atmospheric change without artificially induced needs or desire.

Primary evolution in many ways was the drift mutation, migration and combination relating to natural selection. Secondary evolution relates to a process by which an intelligent species participates in its own evolution.



As awareness grows, an artificial world emerges of chemical plants, virtual currency, space travel, and the world wide web. It creates new industries and begins to manipulate DNA; exponential growth occurs as potentially billions of innovators emerge in response to need and change through a constant process of enquiry and forward thinking. This creates extraordinary diversity, and with that a change in the physical world around us, manifesting itself as cars, products, architecture, art, and so on.

Tertiary evolution will lead to radical changes in knowledge systems, as evolution itself becomes automated... it will create a world of wonder and awe, even if we really do not have any idea what man will create in a mere 1000 years or so, a spec of dust in evolutionary terms. It will place into question the separation of natural and artificial conditions as they blur into a cloud of recreation... the building blocks of life giving rise to plant forms, new textiles, new energy sources, even new body forms.

Primary evolution had evolved biological forms until the industrial revolution arose with heat and violence, weight and mass to facilitate a new status for machines, but now, as we evolve at a point of third-stage evolution we will begin to see the physical elements of our existence mutate into extraordinary objects that are more akin to nature, but new nature or Nat Art as I call it, funded by freeform abstract design, born out of analysis, experimentation, science, and speculation.

We will arrive at a point of creativity that becomes an avalanche of ideas, and new species will emerge within our present lifetime.

So the point we are at now is beyond design in the sense that the repetitive formulaic gestures of tasteful principles are no longer relevant to an age of expansion and innovation.

Design gripped by simplicity in an age of beautiful complexity, the young mind being primed for complexity, like the joys of navigating a rain forest with all one's senses on alert and constantly interacting... there is a need for a new aesthetic born out of a new process funded by the potential of the times we live in, and a humanistic scientific mind.

New sparkling ways to see the world that are vital and cross-pollinating...

There are few with the mindset and natural instinct to stimulate this new vision... without doubt the man you will read about, and share visions with in this book is no ordinary man, and absolutely no ordinary designer... defying categorization, way beyond comparison. He is a Renaissance man with a new language that is so uplifting of the senses, because his form is as a consequence of thought... a concept solidified... no nostalgia, no luxury, no status... finally someone out there at the edge of space, breathing fine, but joining the dots with such effortless naturalness, like he was born with a key to life made from a leaf.



Paris office, rue des Jeûneurs







# — C — THE QUEST FOR A NEW WORLD

*Introduction by Paola Antonelli*

Curator Design and Architecture, MoMA NY

One of Charles Eames's most famous intuitions was the centrality of the idea of connection in a designer's practice. Connections within a single object, of the object with its environment and with human beings, of the designer with the manufacturer and the experts in other fields that would make the object come to life. The celebration of connections was not only a recipe for a correct design methodology, but also a visualization of a new model of organic design for the modern era. In the postmodern and postindustrial era, when designers have managed to cut the umbilical cord that saw them tethered to the strictures of industrial production and have launched in a universe of concepts and scenarios, design has branched out to build connections into realms that were once removed, such as science, politics, and macroeconomics.

Mathieu Lehanneur is a champion of the intellectual agility of today's design, and a champion of the new paradigm of

organicism seen as the integration of the most ancient human rites and habits with the most advanced technologies. He represents what is most compelling about contemporary designers, a deep curiosity for other fields of studies mixed with an equally deep pragmatism and great technical and formal flair. *Objets Thérapeutiques*, the first series of objects that captured my attention, were designed in 2001 and represent a clear example. They are a collection of eleven objects that aimed at restoring the relationship between human beings and medications, especially prescriptions for chronic ailments. The premise was simple and touching: ever since little pharmacies in villages and city neighborhoods disappeared, supplanted by impersonal chain drugstores, the figure of the pharmacist, savant, narrator, and guide towards better health, has been lost as well. Lehanneur tried to recuperate this important dramatization in the packaging and delivery methods, transforming

an asthma inhaler, a calcium supplement, and a cold medicine into experiences facilitated by sympathetic object/companions—a lung-like inflating contraption, a bone-like stick that dissolves progressively in water, a cold-prepped hankie. The *Objets* were strong reminders of the humanity of patients, a humanity that needs to be addressed by pharmaceutical companies by making medicines more approachable, more understandable in their use, and easier to take.

The importance of a mental, spiritual, and sensual dimension in design, a concept as old as mankind that was momentarily lost with the persuasive propaganda of rationalism, is today once again an acknowledged datum. Helped by science and technology, mighty tools guided by even mightier human needs for expansion and connection, designers have learned to provide our environment with doors and windows into lateral dimensions. They



have learned to maximize our physical space by enabling our many metaphysical activities. One of the most captivating details in Lehanneur's work, however, is that he assigns this metadimension also to very mundane objects, such as home appliances.

Domestic appliances, a twentieth-century introduction to our way of life, have gone through an interesting series of crises of identity. Think of television sets, for instance. Massive pieces of ornate furniture at first, in the 1930s, with small round or octagonal screens lost in oceans of lacquered wood, they could not celebrate the technological independence of their knobs and cathodic tubes until the 1950s; once again, they were transformed into sculptural space-age icons in the 1960s, and then progressively dematerialized as screens became thinner and thinner. And as has happened with so many appliances today, they have become a large family of all sizes and weights, from massive and flat to minuscule, portable, personal. Why shouldn't heaters, air purifiers, and white noise machines go the same way and become personal pets that follow us around, climatizing the space just around us, saving energy, cleaning and enriching our lives?

This is what Lehanneur envisioned with his *Elements* series, a group of five elegant, if mysterious, objects for the home. People's bodies are continually adapting to the changing environment and Lehanneur proposes to reverse the process with domestic appliances that create microenvironments customized for each person in the household. Each *Element* works autonomously and is always alert, monitoring conditions—air quality, light, body temperature, background noise, and movement—and instantaneously acting to keep them in ideal balance. Lehanneur has worked with biologists, sleep specialists, and noise technicians to produce a collection of devices that allows the home to work in harmony with the individual, "like the epidermis, reactive and capable of sensitivity to and receptivity of our states."

Designers indeed have a lot of freedom today, but freedom, as we know from history, can be very unsettling and problematic. Especially for a group of practitioners that thrive on overcoming limitations and finding the most efficient, elegant, and memorable solutions by taking those limitations as opportunities. The most successful amongst them are those who are able to design, first and foremost,

their own research goals. When it comes to research, experimentation, and critical design, that is half of the design process, and Lehanneur has always shown great inspiration. While in his career he has often worked for clients, his speculative projects, especially those in collaboration with scientists, and in particular with David Edwards, the biologist who founded the art/science/design center Le Laboratoire in Paris, are the most telling. Designers and scientists are made for each other. The clarity, aesthetic and intellectual elegance, ability to communicate and convince, and ease to work in teams, as well as the focus on human limitations and aspirations that characterize designers' approach to the every subject are just what scientists need in order to give life to their experiments and their vision. Lehanneur's design process is rigorous and sensible, so much so that it could be taught in a design school as the zero degree of practice. Yet, the outcome is always surprising and so much bigger than the sum of its parts, that it touches the spirit and the imagination.

Lehanneur's objects, when used, open up, unfold, and generate invisible, yet powerful personal fields that others can enter only when invited, although they are not delimited by physical boundaries. I call this kind of effect the *existenzmaximum*. The word is inspired by the German rationalist idea of the *existenzminimum*, or the smallest possible dwelling unit in which everything was fit as if in a puzzle. In the 1920s, these architects, among them Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, were intent on delineating the characteristics and specifications of the kitchen, dwelling, apartment building, or neighborhood, in which human beings could live efficiently while occupying the minimum amount of space possible. The *existenzmaximum* is the opposite. It is the object that, while occupying the minimum space possible, enables a human being to expand his vital functions. *Existenzmaximum* can be found in nature, for instance in a sea shell, and then also in mirrors, in some armchairs, in car interiors, as well as in many customizable minimal units of our times, such as the interface of a computer, a Walkman, or a cell phone.

*Existenzmaximum* marries the attention to humanity of organic design with the economy of biomimicry, the invention of technology with its integration in life. Contemporary organic design mirrors not only the shapes, but also the structural solutions and efficient systems found in nature. While it is immediately recognizable

in the curvilinear forms made possible by the use of the computer in design and manufacturing and applied to all scales of production, it is at other times subtler, hidden in the function, performance, or lifecycle of the object. True contemporary organic design makes the self-conscious and often misleading term "green" superfluous.

By its most commonplace descriptions, design should solve problems, match form with function, produce artifacts, and make people secure and comfortable. Necessity and need are magical words for any responsible designer. Many designers lead a double life, working in the real world with tight constrictions imposed by clients, regulations, budgets, technology, while at the same time also inhabiting an ideal sphere where they can focus on visionary concepts for new behaviors, new objects, and new worlds, and where the only conditions to grapple with are human beings' physiological and psychological needs, and gravity—this latter not always. For many designers, the dream of a lifetime is to be able to marry these two parallel universes and make their vision a reality, and the sense of excess of things that surrounds us can naturally lead to a search for a field of action that is a real enrichment to the world, and not just a gratuitous addition of talent. Mathieu Lehanneur's work, so young and yet so accomplished, seems to ask the most important question: does the world really need another chair?

Mathieu Lehanneur took part in the exhibitions 'SAFE - Design Takes On Risk', and 'Design and the Elastic Mind' at MoMA NY. *Therapeutic Objects* are part of the permanent collection at MoMA NY.



# — 01 — ANDREA

2009  
for Le Laboratoire



Almost all manufactured objects diffuse, even several years after their production, into toxic compounds from their materials or from their covering. These gases, called organic volatile compounds (OVC), are the most harmful pollutants of our homes. Today they are classed by the World Health Organization as *definite carcinogens*.

If some plants have the ability to filter these gases, these same plants, alone and in pots, filter very little. Their ability to metabolize the chemical molecules is in fact situated in the roots and in the earth. The efficiency of the leaves is quite minimal in this field.

Analysis carried out by NASA in the 1970s, on the return of the first space flights, revealed the high level of OVC in the bodies of the astronauts: mainly composed of polymers, glass fibers, insulating materials, flame retardants; the American spaceship had progressively poisoned its occupants.

Their subsequent research showed the ability of plants to reduce the presence of OVC, and many years later resulted in the project *Andrea*.

*Andrea* is a filtration system of interior air by plants. A real living filter, it gets rid of the pollution in our professional and domestic interiors, through a ventilation system which forces the air to cross the earth and the plant roots at the right place and at the right speed.

*Andrea* is designed to be placed as close to the user as possible, on a desk or next to a sofa. The plant is in the heart of the system, encased there like a brain in a cranium.

In collaboration with David Edwards,  
Harvard University

Edition: Le Laboratoire

Best Invention Award, Popular Science, USA

Permanent collection at the Musée des  
Arts Decoratifs, Paris

Materials: ventilators, polycarbonate, plant  
Dimensions: diameter 32 cm, height 45 cm

1 3D representation showing the object's different components and the path of the air.

2 A 3D animated film co-directed with Gaëtan Robillard, created at the timing of the "Bel-Air" exhibition at Le Laboratoire, Paris in 2007.

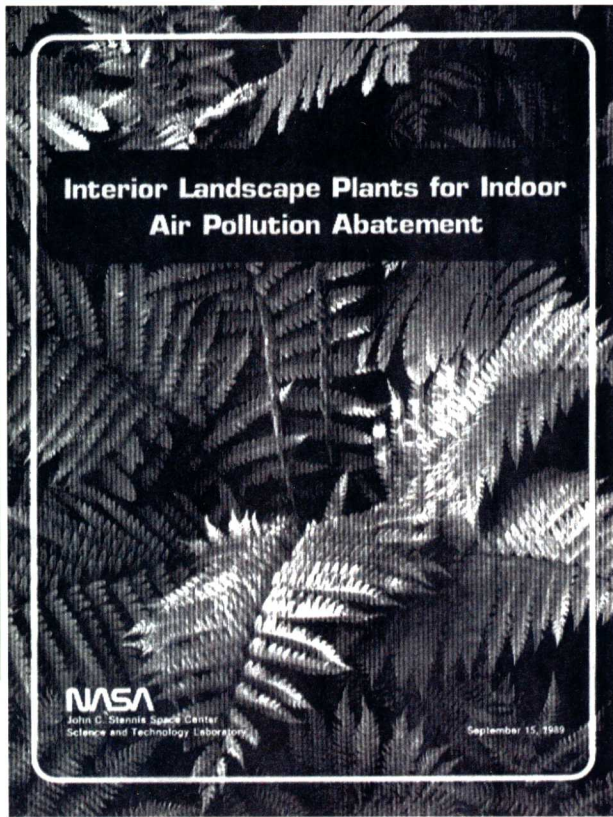
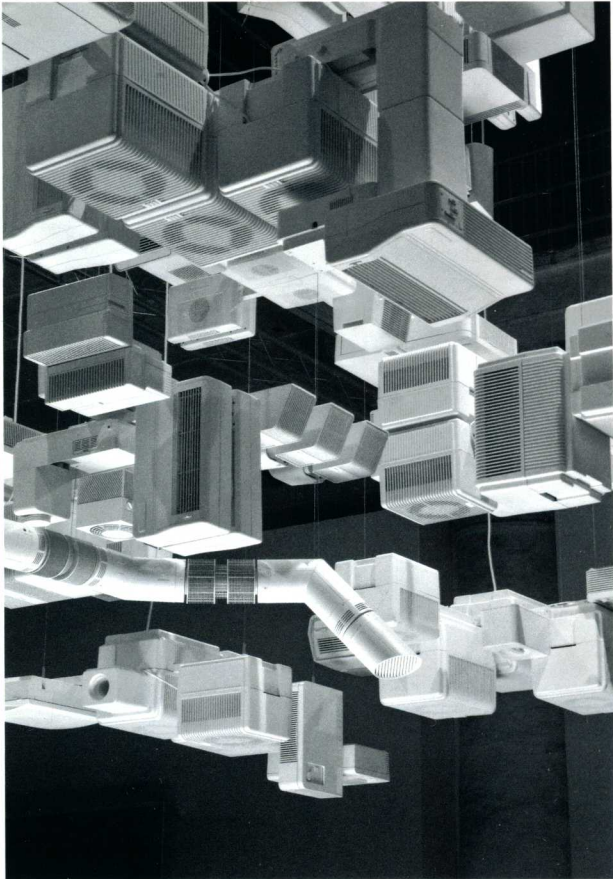
3 An te Liu, Cloud, 2008, air purifiers, ionizers, sterilizers, washers, humidifiers, ozone air cleaners; 136 units running continuously. Installation view, 11th Venice Biennale of Architecture.

4 Cover of one of the studies led by NASA about air remediation by plants. January 1989.



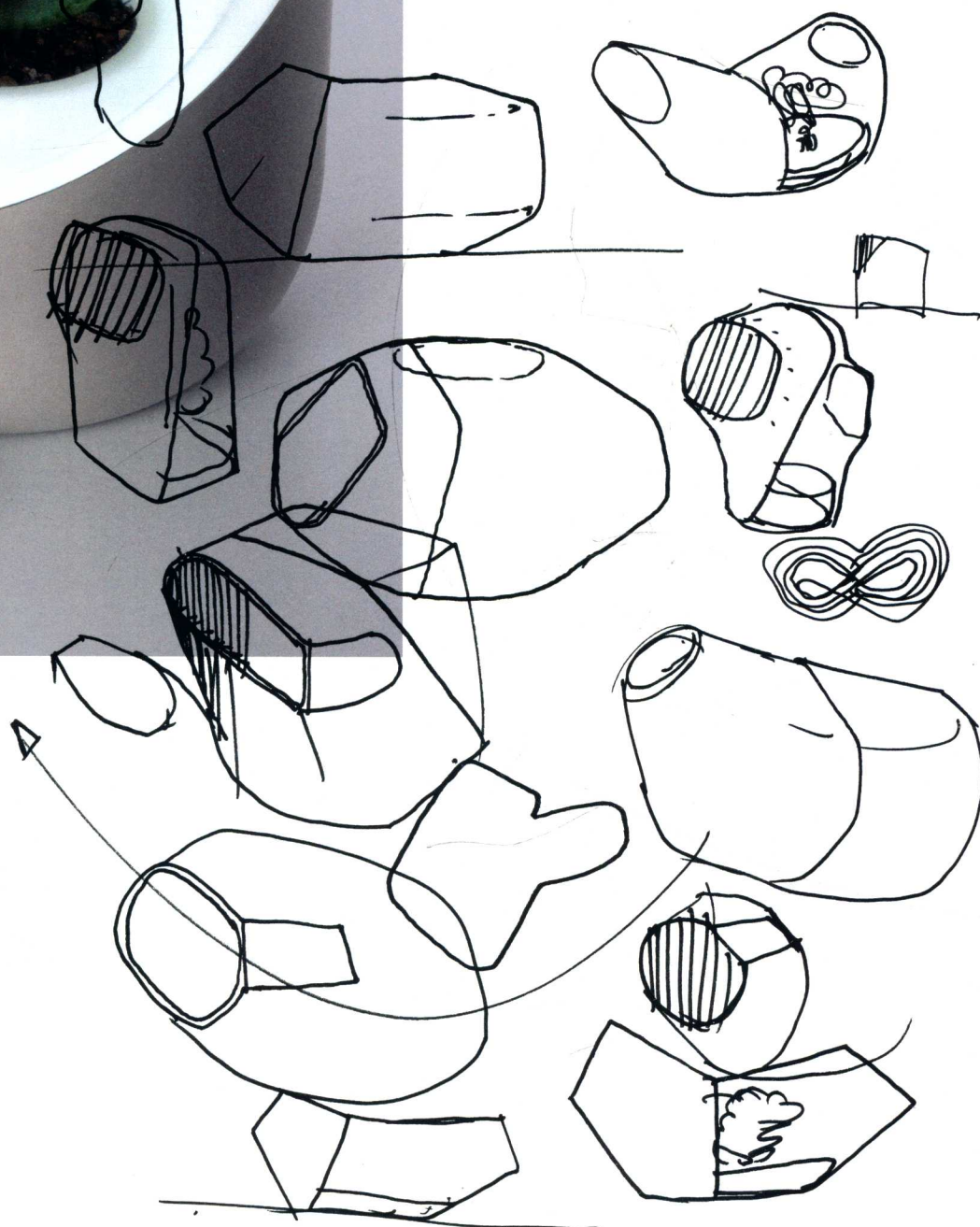


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1 The lower part of the plant is watered by capillary action. Access is through a draw situated at the rear of the device.

2 Study mock-up, blown glass, plant.



.....  
“Design is medicinal,  
sometimes chemically  
active, sometimes just  
a placebo. Like any  
medicine, it has side  
effects. Inside pollution  
is without a doubt one  
of the most harmful of  
them. *Andrea* could be  
considered like a sort of  
remedy for the side  
effects of design.”  
.....

