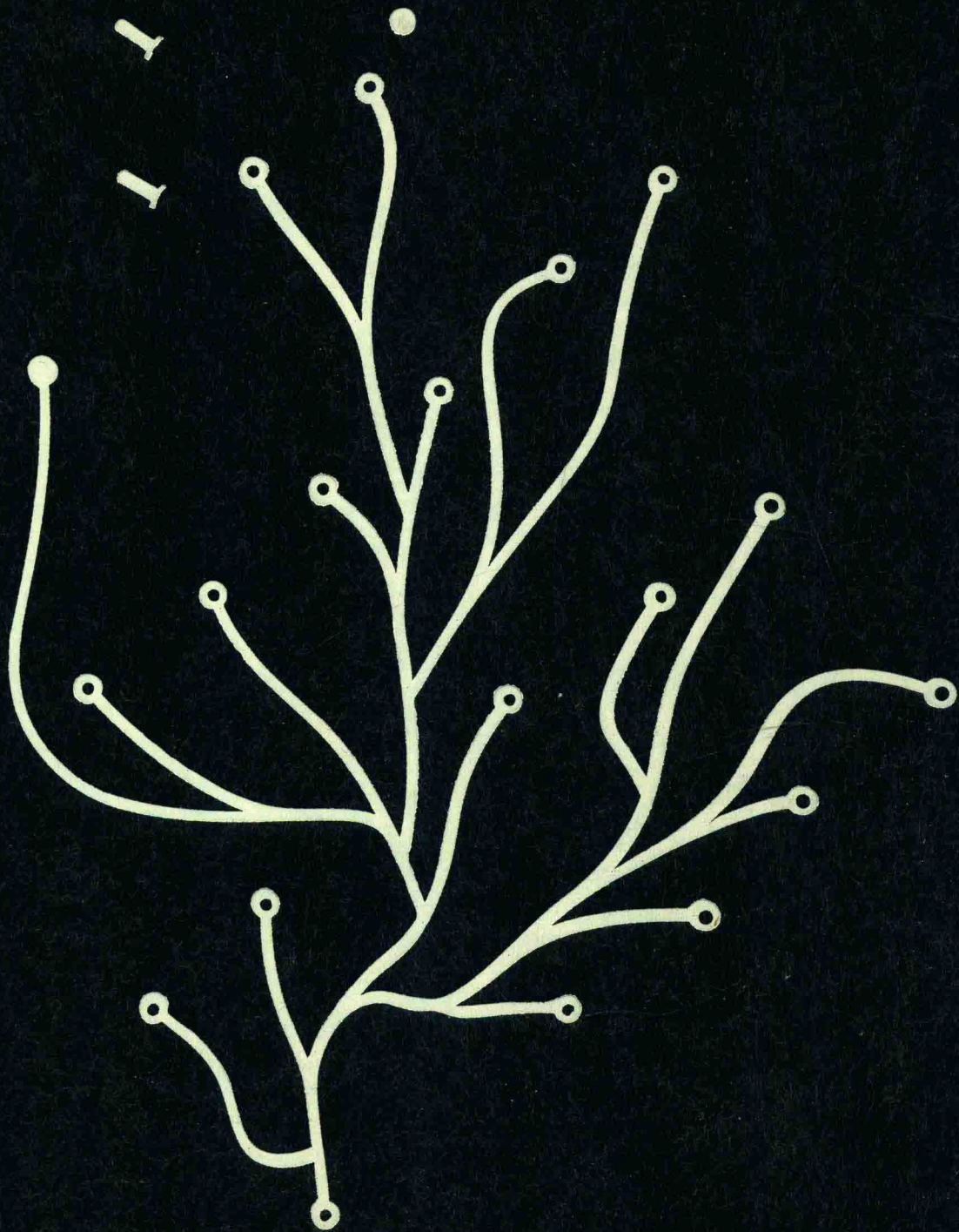


Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec

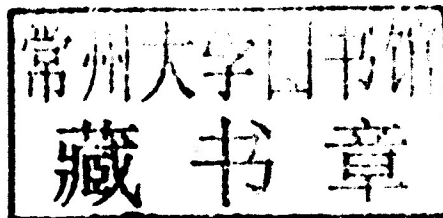


Works

PHAIDON

Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec

Works



Phaidon Press Limited
Regent's Wharf
All Saints Street
London N1 9PA

Phaidon Press Inc.
180 Varick Street
New York, NY 10014

www.phaidon.com

First published 2012
Reprinted 2013
© 2012 Phaidon Press Limited

ISBN 978 0 7148 6247 7

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval
system or transmitted, in any form or by any
means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording or otherwise, without the express
written permission of Phaidon Press Limited.

Commissioning Editor: Emilia Terragni
Project Editor: Joe Pickard
Production Controller: Alenka Oblak

Designed by Sonya Dyakova
Printed in China

The publisher would like to thank Ronan and
Erwan Bouroullec and their studio,
especially Felipe Ribon, along with Anniina
Koivu and all the contributors, including Anders
Byriel, Rolf Fehlbaum, Didier Krzentowski,
Eugenio Perazza and Alice Rawsthorn.

Many thanks to Belux, Cappellini, Dominique
Feintrenie, eric & marie, Established & Sons,
Flos, Marc Damage, Miro Zagnoli, Morgane Le
Gall, Ola Rindal, Paul Tahon, Tetsuya Ito and
Vitra for providing the images.

Thanks are also due to Michel Giesbrecht,
Claire Lafabre and Lucy Newell for their
valuable help.

Photographic credits:

All images © Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec and
Studio with Paul Tahon unless otherwise stated:

© Cappellini: 197, 261; © Dominique Feintrenie: 55;
© eric & marie: 9; © Established & Sons, photo by
Peter Guenzel: 183; © Flos: 192; © Marc Damage: 94;
© Morgane Le Gall: 14, 45, 46-47, 66-67, 157, 167,
174, 175, 177, 207, 262; © Ola Rindal: 292; © Tetsuya
Ito: 210-211, 212, 214, 216; © Vitra, photos by Miro
Zagnoli: 68-69, 70-71, 72-73, 75

Catalogue section:

All images © Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec and
Studio with Paul Tahon unless otherwise stated:

© Belux: 297 (Lantern, 2004); © Cappellini: 295
(Spring Chair, 2000; Brick, 2001; Glide, 2001; Fruit
Bowl, 2001; Console with Mirror, 2001; Corian
Console, 2001), 296 (Corian Wardrobe, 2001; Zip
Carpet, 2001; Butterfly, 2002; Samurāi, 2002; Cloud,
2003), 298 (Basket, 2005); © Dominique Feintrenie:
294 (Disintegrated Kitchen, 1998; Hole Shelf, 1999);
© eric & marie: 297 (Algues, 2004); © Established
& Sons, photo by Peter Guenzel: 300 (Lighthouse,
2010), 301 (Folio Shelf, 2011); © Marc Damage: 296
(Audiolab, 2002); © Morgane Le Gall: 294 (Sans
titre, 1997; Vases Combinatoires, 1998; Coffe Cup
no. 4, 1998; Torique Collection, 1999; Smak, 1999;
Piece of Carpet, 1999; Un et Demi, 1999), 295 (Lit
Clos, 2000; Aïo, 2000; A-Poc Boutique, 2000; Brick,
2000; Cabane, 2001; Vase, 2001; Honda Vase, 2001),
296 (Parasol Lumineux, 2001), 299 (Geta Table,
2008; Pebbles, 2008); © Vitra 296 (Joyn, 2002), 299
(Softshell, 2008), 301 (Alcove Work, 2010; Bistrot
Table, 2010)

Don't kill the butterfly — 5

Module — 6

On puzzle makers and puzzle lovers

System — 42

Manual not included

Alcoves — 78

The circus has left town

Drawings & Models — 122

The Cloud

An ongoing love affair — 148

Outline — 154

The narration of form

Manufacture — 208

Neither one nor the other

Chairs — 242

A chair is like a pop song

Who is the hedgehog? — 292

Catalogue of works — 294

Index — 302

Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec

Works



*To Josephine and Mette,
and everyone who has supported us
for the last forty years*

Don't kill the butterfly — 5

Module — 6

On puzzle makers and puzzle lovers

System — 42

Manual not included

Alcoves — 78

The circus has left town

Drawings & Models — 122

The Cloud

An ongoing love affair — 148

Outline — 154

The narration of form

Manufacture — 208

Neither one nor the other

Chairs — 242

A chair is like a pop song

Who is the hedgehog? — 292

Catalogue of works — 294

Index — 302

Text by Anniina Koivu

Don't kill the butterfly

A lepidopterist takes great pleasure in the hunting, catching and – most of all – collecting of butterflies. The rarest, most precious individuals are gently handled, put to sleep with anaesthetic and inspected closely under the magnifying glass, before being archived, labelled, sometimes baptized with a new name and finally pinned to the wall.

A pathologist dissects a creature in the name of medical truth. Once the lifeless body has given up its secrets, it is handed over to a taxidermist, who in turn preps the embalmed specimen for its new role: a trophy to be admired, or an archetype for public observation in a museum of history or natural science.

The designs of Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec bring to mind the lightness and delicacy of butterflies. Powerful and expressive, yet magically detached from the received ideas of functional everyday objects, their designs manage to embody a kind of freedom in a way that makes them hard to pin down. Even if, butterfly net in hand, we could capture the essence of their work, take it home in a glass jar and mount it on the wall, we wouldn't want to. While we certainly hope to present the Bouroullec brothers' work in a concrete, durable manner, the authors of this book are not lepidopterists. Nor are we pathologists or students of the art of taxidermy. Our desire to communicate is not an attempt to state the truth by pinning design to the wall. This book is neither a complete archive nor a manifest; it is not meant as a manual for aspiring designers, nor as a hunter's trophy.

In the following pages, we are not the hunters but the observers of design, and will strive to find a path – one that meanders along comfortably, somewhere between the realms of fact and fiction. It is a snapshot in the continuously changing and evolving career of two of the most talked about designers of our day: Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec.

On puzzle makers and puzzle lovers

In *Life: A User's Manual*, the French novelist Georges Perec describes how the world can be divided into puzzle makers and puzzle lovers. In his description, the art of the jigsaw puzzle is all about the whole, the end product, the picture pieced together after hours of effort. He defines a puzzle as 'a pattern, that is to say a form, a structure: the element's existence does not precede the existence of the whole, it comes neither before nor after it, for the parts do not determine the pattern, but the pattern determines the parts: knowledge of the pattern and of its laws, of the set and its structure, could not possibly be derived from discrete knowledge of the elements that compose it'.

Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec are also puzzle makers, but unlike Perec they say they take an 'approach from the millimetre'. The brothers design patterns based on repetitions of a single element, and their actual design work lies in the creation of this one module, whether it is a piece of geometrically folded fabric, hot wire polystyrene or injection-moulded plastic. The resulting three-dimensional mobile structures can be used as anything from curtains to room dividers, from carpets to shelves. What the brothers create are not so much final products as open systems of flexible geometry.

As a rule, the Bouroullecs don't specify the outcome of the assembly. In fact, one of their design accomplishments is to free the puzzle of its predefinition, effectually erasing the image from the cover of the box. Because each person who comes in contact with the pieces puts them together differently, a copy of an existing pattern is hard, if not impossible, to achieve: too complex and manifold are the bespoke interconnections of the individual parts.

Perec, however, understands the single elements of a classical jigsaw puzzle as mere parts of a predefined, larger and far more important whole. In rare cases, as with *Rocs* (Vitra, 2006), the Bouroullec brothers follow this idea: *Rocs* are large, boulder-like room dividers that have to be assembled from individual fabric-covered cardboard segments following a complex plan. If not put together properly, the pieces remain scattered, useless fragments.

Perec, though, is not only concerned with puzzle makers. A puzzle lover himself, he warns others about the dangers of trusting in the integrity of the isolated pieces. He says, 'You can look at a piece of a puzzle for three whole days, you can believe that you know all there is to know about its colouring and shape, and be no further on than when you started. The only thing that counts is the ability to link this piece to other pieces.' In Perec's view, the pieces are solely a means to an end, and count for nothing in and of themselves. He continues, 'The pieces are readable, take on a sense, only when assembled; in isolation, a puzzle piece means nothing – just an impossible question, an opaque challenge.'

Puzzle lovers will have a very different kind of encounter with the puzzles created by the Bouroullec brothers. Yes, when puzzle lovers first hold one of the Bouroullecs' little modules in their hands, they will, at first, be puzzled (the prerequisite for pleasure). But after a few moments, the unconventional units of, say, *Algues* (Vitra, 2004) will begin to make sense in and of themselves, as well as in relation to one another. After all, the *Algues* unit was made as one injection-moulded plastic stick with five branches and nineteen points of connection, based on the rational use of materials and the logics of industrial production. And note: contrary to popular belief, the name of the *Algues* was conceived of after the units were made. The name was not the starting point, but the (obvious) result, after the brothers – the puzzle makers – looked with delight into the maze of green, intertwining strings they had created.

Because, in the case of the Bouroullecs' puzzles, the single parts are identical, the puzzler is not obliged to follow a set of rules. In contrast to the classical puzzler, he is free to link the pieces as he wishes. He may create an infinite number of patterns, over and over again. In his hands a *North Tile* (Kvadrat, 2006) or an element of *Twigs* (Vitra, 2004) might blend into the rhythmic surface of a ceiling, while multicoloured strips of carpet can be zipped together in various combinations to form the larger *Zip Carpet* (Cappellini, 2001 then Vitra, 2004). A *Cloud* module (Kvadrat, 2009) fits together with its neighbours to create a unique, three-dimensional cumulus, that, hung from the ceiling, hovers tantalizingly overhead. Made from thermo-compressed foam and fabric, these geometrical segments can be intuitively clipped together to create an object, which, like that most ephemeral of natural phenomena, the cloud, seems to shift and change shape depending on where you see it from. This project was a follow-up to one of the brothers' very first designs, *Nuages* (non-edited project, 2002), in which they achieved a similar effect with a different set of modules made from polystyrene. This earlier piece consisted of hollow white bricks that were a cross between a soap bubble and a knuckle ring. Stacked up into a temporary installation of room dividers, they created the romantic sensation of walking in a landscape of clouds.

Perec writes, 'Despite appearances, puzzling is not a solitary game: every piece the puzzler picks up, and picks up again, and studies and strokes, every combination he tries, and tries a second time, every blunder and every insight, each hope and each discouragement have all been designed, calculated, decided by the other.' But as reimagined by the brothers, the puzzle makers are not just the puppeteers. Rather, they are the ones who hand the strings over to the puzzle lover, who can then begin inventing his very own puzzles.

