bulthaup culture

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Welcome to bulthaup culture

A work crafted by hand

Visiting a market on a trip to Japan, I noticed a hand-forged knife. The blade was made from high-quality Kobe steel, while the handle was made from the finest wood. You could literally feel the craftsman's passion.

Anyone considering the question of what sets an outstanding product apart will at some stage come across the rule of thumb that says that the final twenty percent of quality that separates outstanding from good requires around eighty percent of the overall effort. You can only achieve this twenty percent by developing a passion for perfecting every detail until there is nothing left to improve.

In this issue we take a look at the people who use their skill and passion to give a product an aura that radiates appeal.

Meet Shinichiro Ogata from Tokyo, who combines traditional craftsmanship and modern taste in such a way that something as old as the art of paper folding and wrapping is given a whole new future. Learn how the bakers at Dean & DeLuca in New York are rekindling a passion for bread with ever new types in a city that was for so long content with sliced white bread. Get to know Simon Woolley, who founded a mineral water business and developed a bottle that does not stand out like a sore thumb on a dinner table because it has an aura: the distinctive signature of its creator.

A perfect kitchen in a perfect space with perfect people wouldn't be interesting. It's the mood that makes the difference. This mood ensues from subtle imperfections. Something that isn't perfect has an intimate and singular beauty.

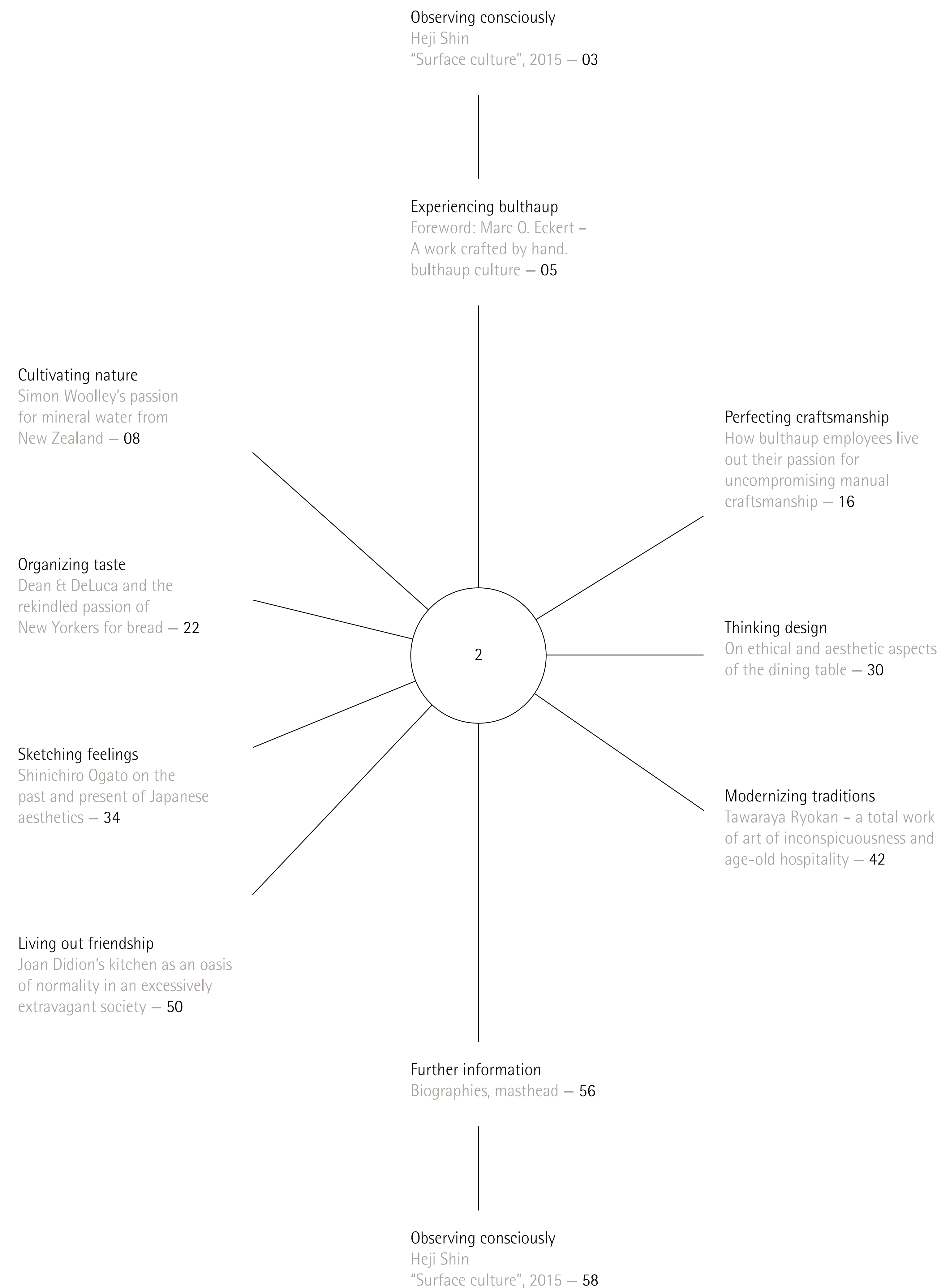
bulthaup culture starts where the machine stops. People can create what even the most sophisticated technology cannot: aura and depth.

Please join us in experiencing bulthaup culture.

Marc O. Eckert
CEO, bulthaup

> “Every day I go in search of perfection – sometimes here, sometimes there – and this never-ending quest is the source of creative energy.”

Shinichiro Ogata, Designer
You can learn more about Shinichiro Ogata and his dedication to detail beginning on page 34.



Conspicuously unobtrusive

New Zealand's largely intact natural environment is the perfect terroir for mineral water, says Simon Woolley. A visit to a passionate purist

Left page:
Together with friends, Simon Woolley founded the first business in New Zealand to produce mineral water.

Following pages:
The source is situated on the plateau of an extinct volcano. – The conspicuously unobtrusive bottle can be traced back to a beer bottle from the 1960s; the lettering was designed by Antipodes co-founder Len Cheeseman. It was intended to look good on a well-laid dinner table and yet not grab attention away from the food.

In the beginning it was just an idea. New Zealander Simon Woolley wanted to produce a premium mineral water that was not merely of the highest quality but which was also unique and true to its origins. There are hardly any better conditions to access such a precious resource than the untrammeled and modest lifestyle in New Zealand. Woolley, co-founder of the small but noble Antipodes Water Company, is a kind of star witness for this.

"I was once in a bar in Putney, London," explains Woolley with an enthusiastic glint in his eye when relating the story of how Antipodes started. "I was telling one of the locals that I came from New Zealand when he looked at me and said, 'Oh, you're from the Antipodes.' The word sounded almost disparaging the way he said it. But I laughed and found it great. I immediately saw the positive side and thought that the idea of New Zealand as the antipode of industrialized Europe describes exactly why our country is so unadulterated. One conversation led to another and when we were getting our water company off the ground one of my partners said, 'Why don't we call it Antipodes?'"

Woolley pours us a glass of his beloved water from the distinctive Antipodes glass bottle and recounts how the start of the company continued, "The Antipodes name suggests where the water comes from. The more we thought about it, the clearer it became that our water doesn't just come from the other end of the world – it was supposed to represent the exact opposite of water that comes in mass-produced plastic bottles. The Antipodes name sums up neatly what our water is all about."

If you travel from Auckland on New Zealand's North Island in a south-easterly direction, you will notice how quickly the landscape changes – you are soon out of the overcrowded city streets and on a rural road wending its way through lush green farmland and volcanic hills that stretch out to clouds. Just half an hour after you leave the city, the fresh country air blows away the grime of modern city life and reminds you just how beautiful seclusion can be. New Zealand – or Aotearoa, "the land of the long white cloud", as it is referred to in Maori – is said to be the last landmass on which humans settled. The Polynesians are thought to have arrived between 1250 and 1300, while the first Europeans only settled there officially in the 19th century following many hostile encounters with the Maori people that were living there. New Zealand has remained relatively untouched by the Industrial Revolution and large-scale industry and is therefore the perfect place for producing water. The population density in the area of Whakatane, where Antipodes water flows, is just one person per square kilometer.

The hospitality industry played a major role in Simon Woolley's career from early on. In his last few years at school he earned money washing dishes in local restaurants and then as a draftsman, before losing his job. It was a stroke of fate that brought Woolley back to the kitchen. He took a job as a waiter and later became a restaurant and bar manager before buying a bar, creating places where people could enjoy food and wine that were not served anywhere else. His love of culinary basics inspired him to offer a premium water as an alternative to the wine that is normally served with food.

"The cuisine here [in New Zealand] uses only a few ingredients which are cooked very well, cleanly and with a focus on flavor. The mineral waters imported from Europe did not suit this purity. The same is true of wine. The wines that grow here are completely different to those from Europe – again much more straightforward and with fewer complex fla-

"When we founded Antipodes thirteen years ago we wanted to do everything right from the word go."

Simon Woolley, Whakatane

vors. I think there was a real need for a table water that reflects this pure taste. Water is of course something very personal. I think there is the right water to match every occasion, exactly as with wine. I have a great respect for restaurants that offer several types of high-quality water."

Woolley and his co-founders decided to locate their business on the edge of Whakatane. Traveling inland from the pristine beaches of the Bay of Plenty, you stop at the rail tracks to look both ways before crossing. You then take the long dust track to the left, pass staring cows and horses you disturbed in their early morning meditation and finally reach the home of Antipodes. However, the entrepreneurs only found this site after what seemed to be an endless search during which they tested a whole range of water sources for taste and quality. Ten sources were shortlisted – from a total of thirty – before Woolley decided to enlist help from outside in order to reduce the number even further. He laughs as he says how very useful it was to seek the advice of wine experts. He therefore contacted his close friends, brothers Michael and Paul Brajkovich, owners of Kumeu River Wines in West Auckland, availing himself of their trained palates for the subsequent selection process.

"I was very near to choosing a source on South Island that was extremely clean and pure but virtually without taste. But Michael and Paul had very clearly made known that the water needed substance and something unique about it in order to stand out. They finally pointed me in the direction of this aquifer in Whakatane. I'll be eternally grateful for their help."

Thirteen years later and we are in the bottling plant of Antipodes, surrounded by lush green countryside, undulating hills and the plateau of an extinct volcano – where the spring flows. Simon Woolley and I walk the 200 meters from the plant to the place where the water forces its way to the surface. It has already covered a distance of 327 meters underground up through a system of artesian pipes, being forced through the pipes, and ultimately bottled, by natural pressure. Woolley produces two glasses, which he holds under the faucet directly at the source. We fill them with water that according to radiocarbon dating is between 50 and 300 years old. What an impressive notion. The aquifer flowing 327 meters below us carries exactly the same wonderful, almost antique water that we will drink later with our food and which we also now hold in our glasses. Drinking water directly from the spring is a humbling experience. It reminds you of just how simple human needs are and how far removed they are from the over-complicated, materially focused world in which we live.

We walk back to the bottling plant where the Antipodes workers greet us cordially. The plant is a convenient size and Simon Woolley knows all the staff by their first names, although he claims to have retired from daily operations. His passion and love for Antipodes seem to be too great for him to ever leave completely. While walking from the beginning to the end of the bottling line, Woolley does not interrupt our conversation even when he stops to remove bottles with blemishes or other slight imperfections. This devotion to detail can be seen throughout the company. It's something you cannot produce artificially or market. It has simply been a fixed element of the company since the beginning.

Antipodes places great importance on impacting the environment as little as possible. Woolley himself finds that there is no excuse for a lack of environmental awareness in the business world. "When we founded Antipodes thirteen years ago we wanted to do everything right from the word go. Setting up everything as you want to have it is the best

The bottling plant is surrounded by green fields. The water shoots to the surface under artesian pressure, filling the glass that Simon Woolley holds into the stream. Woolley's idea of "modern New Zealand thinking" encompasses solar power, care for the surrounding wetlands and the recycled glass that is used to produce the bottle.

way. Even if the debate was still under way as to whether climate change was actually happening, we thought it important to take care of the planet. And this moral concept should be reflected in our business."

Antipodes was the first bottling business for water in glass bottles to go completely CO_2-neutral. Every initial step was thought through completely from beginning to end, from the construction of the bottling plant to a shipping process that was intended to have the smallest possible impact on the environment. Solar energy was provided right from the start, and a project was initiated to restore the natural wetlands around the plant. This was also intended to comply with the "zero CO_2" requirements of the New Zealand government – as part of this program businesses undertake to achieve complete carbon neutrality and also to work towards cutting their CO_2 emissions per unit on an annual basis.

"Business always involves continuous improvement, and when we no longer find any more scope for this we turn everything upside down and consider radical change. Our business ethos reflects the New Zealand of today. Our entire business philosophy is based on clear, straightforward and extreme transparency. This underlying thought permeates all our actions, from our completely CO_2-neutral operations to the design of our bottle."

The noticeably unpretentious bottle containing this precious water quite obviously typifies everything that Woolley is talking about. Its design goes back to a very typical New Zealand beer bottle of the 1960s that used to be known as a beer flagon. It was possible to exchange the empty bottle for a full one in a bar. The Antipodes bottle, a trimmed-down version of the local historical legend, is made from 100% recycled glass and features the minimalist and yet timeless, custom typography of Antipodes co-founder Len Cheeseman.

The aim was to have the Antipodes bottle manufactured in its home country of New Zealand using recycled glass. However, the entrepreneurs would have had to order at least a million bottles in order to get this type of production up and running. This volume was not within their possibilities at the beginning and so they looked abroad and came across a German medicine bottle that almost perfectly matched their ideal notion for the design. Exporting this bottle would have been very costly, meaning that they would have lost money on each article sold. As Woolley explains, however, it was essential for them to test the market first before being able to order a million specially produced bottles in New Zealand. The entrepreneurs calculated that they could afford the losses for the first three containers of German medicine bottles. At the end of the day, it was 27 containers before their own New Zealand bottle went into production.

This passionate commitment to a bottle had good reason, as Woolley explains, "We wanted a bottle that really reflects modern New Zealand thinking – simple, clear, straightforward, committed and expressive, with quality always being the basic requirement." Woolley finds it interesting that the Antipodes bottle was such a topic of conversation in its early years. At home in New Zealand it was simply reminiscent of the traditional beer bottle that so many New Zealanders were familiar with.

In Woolley's words, the final product had to be a bottle reflecting the unique water and the philosophy behind it but should still be almost invisible on the restaurant table in order not to steal the show from the food and wine. The bottle was interesting enough to differentiate from the usual water bottles around at the time, but it wasn't intended to be any sort of special attention-getter on a well-laid dining table.

We leave the busy bottling plant and, having taken just ten paces, are standing in the green fields of Antipodes. Woolley explains that the founders didn't realize just how lucky they were at the beginning with this water. They were very naive in the way they approached the subject of water and how to make a business based on it. However, this almost helped them in creating a niche in the very difficult market for mineral water dominated by mass production.

"I really didn't know just what a unique resource we had found with Antipodes. Sure, it tasted fantastic and was high-quality, New Zealand water, but what wasn't clear to me was how special it was from a global point of view. It was only over time and with increasing experience that the specific properties of the water became clear. Our challenge now is to protect this resource and to make the best possible use of it while securing its survival over time. For example, we only bottle water in the plant to order. We take only as much as we need in order to ensure that nothing is wasted and the source is not overexploited."

Later that afternoon, Woolley shows me photographs of his home in New Zealand, where he spends half the year – a modest trailer that he maintains himself. It stands at the beach, ten minutes from the plant, back over the rail tracks and past the meditating cows and horses. In the middle of the conversation, quite out of the blue, Woolley comes up with a whole raft of new ideas. Within the space of five minutes he proposes twenty new possible uses for his water, ranging from spa applications and curative treatments – in addition to the sufficient intake of fluid – the list just grows from minute to minute. His voice unmistakably betrays his enthusiasm in the face of myriad possibilities, "I like thinking about what might become of the business in 100 years, not just in one year," he exclaims. "That poet expressed it best." His pause for reflection is accompanied by an almost comically intense facial expression. "W. H. Auden, I mean. He said, 'Thousands have lived without love, not one without water.'" We both can't help laughing at this ostensibly dramatic, but very true, statement. It is obvious that Simon Woolley has only very partially retired from daily business. After having the privilege to experience the beauty of New Zealand with my own eyes, it is clear to me that the Antipodes idea of the purest water in the world from the purest country in the world is not just some marketing concept thought up by a team of advertising consultants but the plain truth behind the story of Antipodes.

Text: *Tim Boreham*
Photos: *Mary Gaudin*

The human scale

The bulthaup factory is a place where devoted craftsmen can live out their passion for uncompromising manual workmanship

Left page:
Eyes and hands come into their own where machines reach their limits. Benedikt Heimerl's gaze together with his fingers gage the surface and edges. "It has to feel right," he says.

It sometimes happens late at night – on other days, immediately after work. Whenever Benedikt Heimerl hears a melody in his head, he sits down at the old Royal piano that used to dominate his parents' living room, but now stands in his room. He begins to improvise on it, trying out different things and honing it to perfection. He strings chords, motifs and rhythms together until he has fashioned spontaneous inspiration into a melodious composition.

This type of impromptu piano improvisation is both relaxation and exertion for Heimerl. "Whenever I discover something new and interesting, I'll play around with it until I've got it down pat."

You can guess how skillfully the 22-year-old hobby pianist uses his hands by watching him closely at work. The trained cabinet maker is responsible, among other things, for the finish on laminate surfaces at bulthaup's factory in Aich, Lower Bavaria – a task that demands extremely good manual skills and dexterity.

Heimerl first uses a special tool to deburr the small protrusions that are virtually invisible to the human eye and which result when the edges are attached. In a second step, he uses fine abrasive paper and flowing movements of the arm to produce a slight chamfer on the edges. When the front, side and covering panels finally leave Heimerl's hands, they really do seem to be cast from the same mold. For his work he wears gloves where the fingertips have been removed.

Why wear gloves anyway? Why do you protect your hands, but not their most sensitive points – your fingertips? As with a pianist, a craftsman's hands are his most important asset. He takes very special care of them. I wear gloves in order to protect my hands. Only the most sensitive points of my fingertips recognize any possible unevenness in the surface. It's easier to detect a flaw with them than with the naked eye. When I run my fingertips over the material, it's simply got to feel right. Just think how often you feel an impulse to caress and feel something even though you have observed it very closely. You want to experience both the visual and tactile sensation. I simply cut off the fingertips of my work gloves so that I can use the tactile sensation of my fingertips without hindrance.

While some of your colleagues swear by wooden sanding blocks, you use softer cork blocks to work the edges. Why? Cork is lighter than wood, and I prefer working with it.

Every one of my colleagues has their own method and their own special tricks. Every kitchen that leaves the factory ultimately receives its own individual signature from the employee.

At the bulthaup factory, the very same employee produces all of the fronts, side panels and worktops for an entire kitchen. This is because each craftsman creates their own angle when beveling edges. The angle on the corner therefore differs very slightly from craftsman to craftsman. That's craftsmanship and expert eyes notice it. The way surfaces are treated also varies slightly. Laminate must be processed very precisely.

In addition, wood is treated depending on the direction of the grain. Every wooden edge is individual and leaves its own fingerprint.

What is important for the edges? We connect laminate and wooden surfaces with a softly rounded edge. Aluminum surfaces and worktops each have chamfers, i.e. bevels. Edge and panel colors are absolutely identical and the connections at the front and rear of the edges appear seamless. The adhesive joint is kept as thin as possible – just enough to hold sufficiently but no longer visible. This requires the radius at the edges to be formed exactly.

How are the laminate surfaces joined to the base plate? For this purpose, paper in the corresponding color is pressed together with the base plate and then soaked in melamine resin.

What percentage of your work do you perform with your hands and eyes? My work always involves the interaction of eyes and

hands. However, the fine-tuning is done by hand.

Everything that Benedikt Heimerl does is governed by bulthaup's quality standards. Employees are themselves responsible for quality inspections; the colors and sheen of laminate and wood must also match exactly between the individual elements. Visual inspection is performed under standard lighting conditions as this is the only way to view genuine colors with no shadows to disrupt work. Uncompromising precision is required in order to imbue a product with the allure that bulthaup wishes to exude. Magic and meticulousness are twin sisters. This attitude is of course not something you can put on when clocking on and take off when clocking off like a pair of overalls.

Are you as meticulous as this at home? Or when invited round to friends or in a restaurant or a store – does your eye catch something that others perhaps overlook? I cannot do otherwise. Musicians can't simply switch off their finely trained sense of hearing when they leave the concert hall.

Do you consider yourself to be a perfectionist? Yes, I think so.

How do you decide whether something is finished? It has to be perfect and meet my expectations, bulthaup's quality criteria and of course the demands of the customers.

What is the difference between excellence and beauty? Excellence is about striving to achieve perfection. Perfect means that there is nothing better, when you've achieved the ultimate. In contrast, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Everyone perceives beauty differently. Some people only recognize beauty through the refraction of naturalness or blemish. Just think for example of the way the Japanese express beauty. Beauty is not the maximum but the optimum – and that is something different for every one of us.

Craftsmen used to sign their works in places out of sight. Is that something that you also do? Yes, we sign each wooden front as it were with a number so that the original pattern of the veneer can be put together.

All that is very ambitious, time-consuming and sometimes laborious. But as Henry Royce, co-founder of the legendary luxury car company, once said, "Small things make perfection, but perfection is no small thing." In other words, 'You need to invest a great deal of effort if you wish to create something good.'

However, for bulthaup CEO Marc O. Eckert it is clear that this craftsman ambition ultimately makes the essential difference. "These are people who provide a special depth of material thanks to their particular affinity for the material. And that is something that our customers feel with all five senses."

If you take this idea to its logical conclusion, then a sideboard, a table, a worktop or a kitchen unit are, at the end of the day, nothing more than extraordinarily aesthetic sound boards between their makers and their users. A connecting element between people on the same wavelength who never meet but who have such a lot in common. On the one side, there are manual craftsmen like Benedikt Heimerl, who create outstanding furniture day in, day out with their dexterity, their love of detail and their visual judgment. And on the other side, there are the customers and users of these objects, who seek authenticity and value quality. The kitchen forms the membrane over which both sides communicate with each other – silently, soundlessly but with a certain satisfaction over many years.

Text: ***Daniel Wartusch***
Photos: ***Heji Shin***

Previous pages:
One employee in the team always processes all the surfaces of an individual kitchen. This ensures that they match. To some degree it is a personal matter how the angles at the edges meet, and this constitutes a signature. Trained eyes recognize this.

Right page:
Fine-tuning is always done by hand. Fingers detect more than eyes. — The finished edge is as if formed by a single mold.

Bread for the capital of the world

How Dean & DeLuca, the world-famous deli, became the focus for New Yorkers' new-found passion for bread

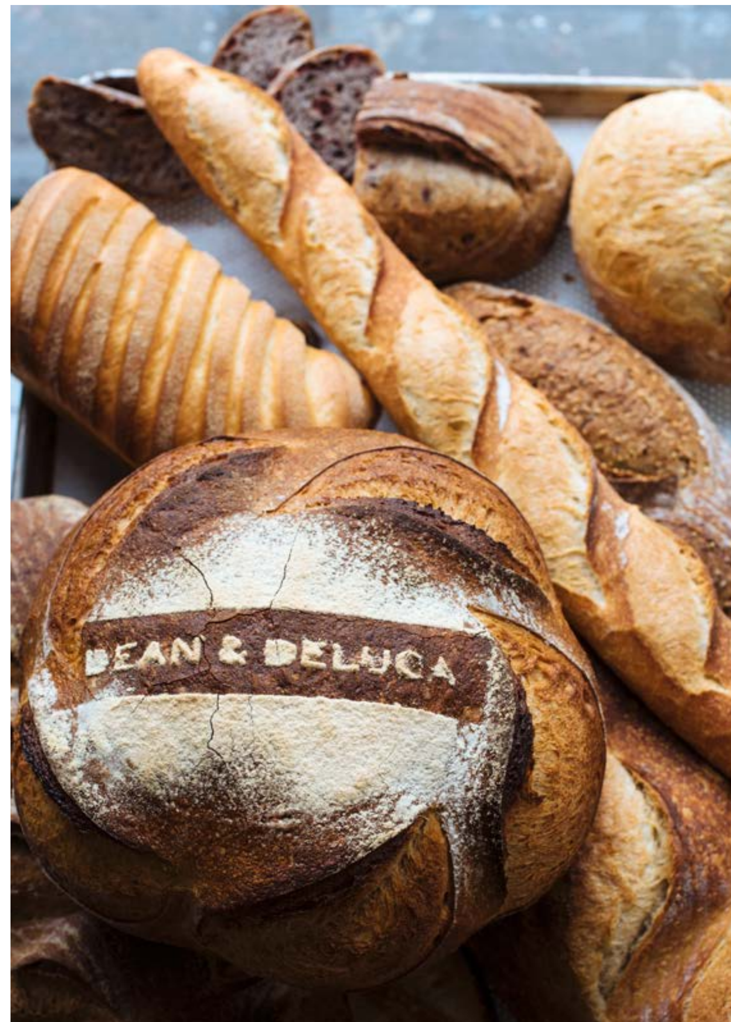
Left page:
Stéphane Amar, head baker at Dean & DeLuca, first studied art in Marseilles before switching to culinary arts. He came to New York to see his favorite pictures – and became a baker.

You can always see exactly where the boss currently is. When he's sitting in his office, you can find the marks of his size 44 shoes with their striking profile in a clear white outline on the black doormat. A couple of visitors later – the chef de cuisine from Singapore and the assistant with the invoices – and the floury profile has disintegrated into a thin veil of dust.

Flour dust at every turn is a key part of the trade of Stéphane Amar, head baker at Dean & DeLuca, the New York grocery store which has been the linchpin of the gourmet scene on the corner of Broadway and Prince Street in the fashionable SoHo neighborhood since 1988. The selection of bread there is immense. It includes their own varieties like crusty sour-dough bread with D&DL logo in flour, perfectly spiced fougasse with olives, almonds and rosemary, an autumnal crown with dried blackcurrants, whole wheat ciabatta with basil and red onions, pain de mie – which is perfect with pâté – and chestnut bread. In addition, there are also bagels, Polish bialys, and a range of ethnic pastries that emigrants from all over the world have brought with them since the 19th century resulting in the best creations from the New York artisan baking scene. These include Amy's Bread, repeatedly nominated for awards since its establishment in 1992, Sullivan's Street Bakery in Hell's Kitchen, Orwasher's on the Upper East Side, Zachary Golpers, or Bien Cuit and the SCRATCHbread Bakery, both in Brooklyn.

The man who currently determines the assortment and who leads Dean & DeLuca's own guild of bakers – one of whom is exclusively devoted to croissants – is himself an immigrant. At the age of 30, Stéphane Amar journeyed from Marseilles to New York for the sake of his art after saving up for the journey for a year. He wanted to see his favorite painting in the original. The scion of Sephardic Jews from North Africa – "No two generations of my family have ever lived on the same continent" – was born in Marseilles, where he first studied painting before transferring to the École Culinaire after a couple of years. Painting and cooking, he says, have one underlying principle in common: love for the thing in itself.

Once in New York, however, Amar got to know the rules of the game, hearth-hopping



Left page:
Sunday morning in the bakery in the gallery district of Chelsea: Stéphane Amar and six colleagues are baking for New York customers, most of whom are still asleep at this time. What is new are the seasonal breads with berries and nuts. All-time favorites include baguettes and the company's own sour dough bread with its logo.

Following double page:
Stéphane Amar sprinkles flour before the dough is kneaded. For him, bread is something simple. It has a cultural, symbolic quality. It is broken with others to indicate closeness. Seen in this light, a movement of the hand almost becomes a form of blessing.

in 15 different restaurants and at one stage earning a living planting trees on Manhattan's exclusive roof decks. Californian star chef Thomas Keller recruited Amar to his New York restaurant Per Se to oversee the bread rolls, small precious objects finely harmonized with each course: sour dough with chocolate and cherries, pumpkin morsels and pastries with sun-ripened tomatoes.

Eventually Amar wanted to do more than small-scale baking. Bread, he said, must actually be simple, down-to-earth, and that no longer suited him in the high-gloss world of haute cuisine. He switched to Amy's Bread, before continuing to learn at Bien Cuit in Brooklyn, which was this year nominated for the prestigious James Beard Award, the "restaurant-industry Oscars". "My life is like Lego – one brick on top of another." The subject never let him go again. Bread, says Stéphane Amar, is like the Indians' pipe of peace. It creates community. You break it with others in the name of fraternity.

Four years ago, the former Per Se baker, Louis Volle, summoned him to Dean & DeLuca. Now happy to have left behind the baker's obligatory night shift (which is now covered by one of the members of his team), Amar can now drink his espresso – an absolute must to start the day – at 6 am at home, from a cup that was hand-thrown in France. "When you hold it in your hands, you have the feeling of drinking something that comes straight from the earth. As if you were in direct contact with the planet." All the while, he imagines the shapes of the breads that he intends baking that day. These details are important for someone who only hesitantly settled permanently in Manhattan – and all because of love.

Amar also feels solidly grounded when he cycles from First Avenue almost all the way to the Hudson River in the far west of Manhattan, where the Dean & DeLuca commissary – the kitchen and the just 25 square meter bakery – occupies the sixth floor of one of the few remaining warehouse buildings surrounded by fashion houses at the northern end of Chelsea. "You see the city from a different perspective from a bike," Amar. says. Cycling is not much more dangerous in Manhattan than elsewhere. "You just mustn't forget that you're not a car."

On Sundays, Amar bakes with his 13-year-old daughter, Lou, in order to pass on to her his down-to-earth attitude. Amar surfs the Internet, searching for those recipes that he cannot realize in the large-scale production environment, for example flat breads from Norway, the Emirates or Mongolia, "as far away as possible from my own universe."

His world of bread is constantly expanding. Andrew Coe, who comes from Brooklyn and who investigates New Yorkers' bread habits for the website Serious Eats and who probably heads the only editorial desk for bread anywhere in the world, wrote when Amar joined Dean & DeLuca, "If you wish to explore the New York bread landscape, the bread counter at Dean & DeLuca's main store is probably a pretty good starting point. You'll find a great selection of sophisticated and down-to-earth, of sensational and traditional."

That was exactly the mix that Giorgio DeLuca, a former teacher, and his friend and partner Joel Dean were seeking to achieve in 1977. He wanted to kindle the love of New Yorkers for delis that go beyond the Jewish horizon marked out by challah, lox and latkes. He relates how he spent years in pursuit of organic olive oil – "Something that is completely

Left page:
At Dean & DeLuca in SoHo, customers can find the company's own bread alongside their favorite breads from the new artisan bakeries of New York. Fougasse with olives, whole wheat ciabatta, pain de mie, chestnut bread, and of course, brioche and bagels.

Right:
Since 1988 the top address for all those curious to discover good food – Dean & DeLuca on the corner of Prince Street and Broadway. The company is now expanding into Asia, and the head baker is baking for customers who did not grow up with the smell of croissants.

common today was damn difficult to find back then. We were the first to offer balsamic vinegar and dried mushrooms," explains the 80-year-old, who now, on a daily basis, can be found at the counter of his restaurant "Giorgione" in Tribeca.

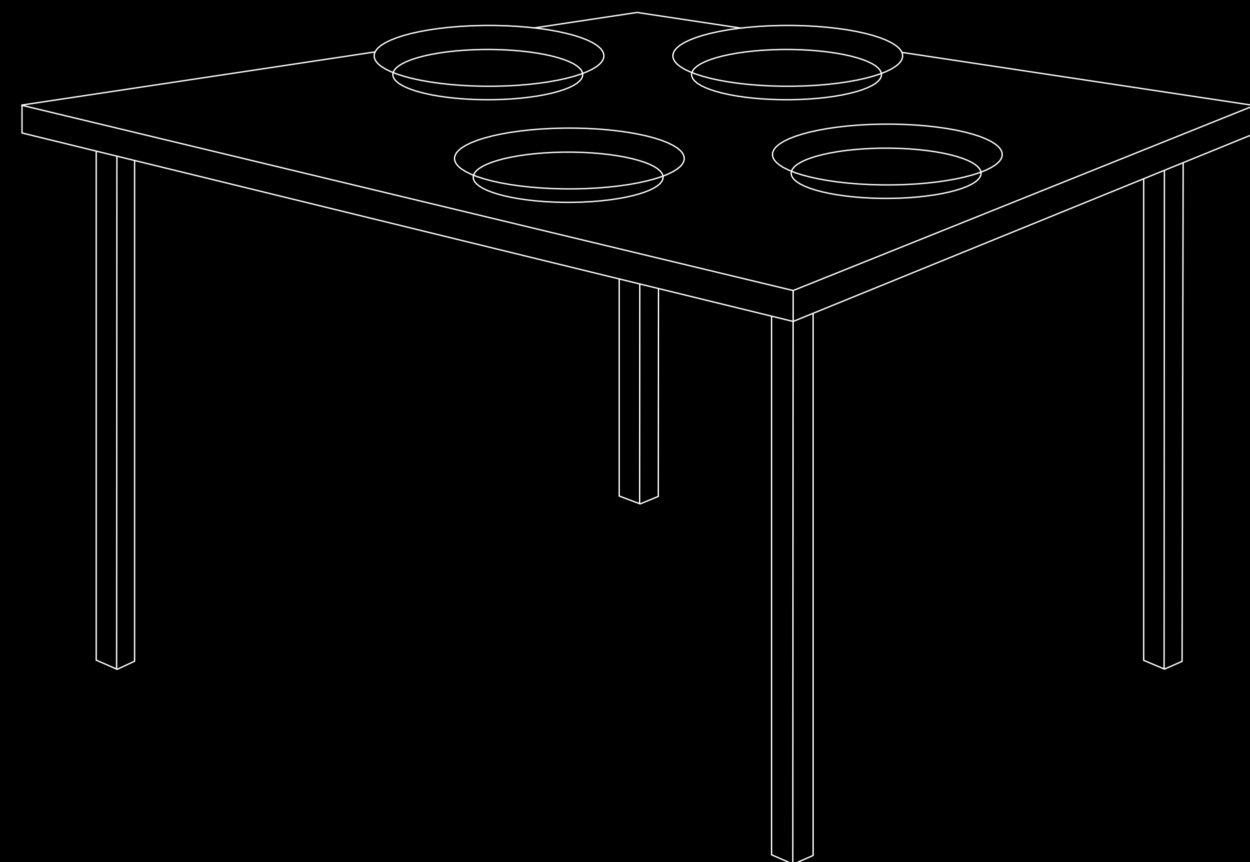
Dean & DeLuca fired up New Yorkers' passion for bread. The best that the city had to offer in the way of bread was concentrated in the white-tiled, former garment factory, with its high ceilings reminiscent of a market place and white marble floors with steel-tube shelving. It was a culinary hot spot with dozens of types of cheese from small producers all over the world with a constantly changing assortment of bread to go with them.

Before Dean & DeLuca there was only the ubiquitous Wonderbread, an elastic white loaf that yields under the pressure of a thumb, only to return to its original form seconds later. "Almost like a marshmallow," Amar explains. There were actually Russian, Polish, Jewish, French, Portuguese and Italian baked goods, but their producers were spread out over all five city boroughs and which required a certain perseverance if you wanted to obtain them, which only a few Manhattan residents had and tourists even less so.

Amar is now Dean & DeLuca's "Mr. Bread". International expansion started when the New York food institution was acquired by an investor, first on the North American continent followed by Singapore, Japan, Thailand and Korea. Amar faces new challenges. New kitchens need to be designed, prospective bakers trained who didn't grow up with the smell of fresh croissants.

The man from Marseilles has never been to Asia and is looking forward in particular to visiting Japan. "Everything they do there, they do with dedication." Just like himself. "Il faut cuisiner avec son coeur. You can fry two eggs with love and the result is amazing." He firmly believes in slow cooking. How does that square with the principles of an investment fund? Amar smiles pensively. "I didn't tell you that."

Text: *Doris Chevron*
Photos: *Peden + Munk*



Intimate public sphere On ethical and aesthetic aspects of the dining table.

An essay by Daniel Martin Feige

One of the most significant works of American-Taiwanese director Ang Lee is the film Eat Drink Man Woman (USA/TW 1994, d.: Ang Lee), which was released before he achieved Oscar success. The film depicts the conflicts and fragile unity of a Taiwanese family consisting of a widower and his three daughters. The father is a master chef from Taipei who has largely retired from the restaurant business and who now cooks a glorious banquet for his daughters every Sunday – a ritual that the daughters, who all still live with their father, do not value very highly at the beginning of the film.

The subject of the film is the possibilities for and limitations to intergenerational understanding, convergence and difference of eastern and western ways of life and closeness and distance among family members during the ritual of eating together. Besides the people and the act of cooking, a significant protagonist in the film is the location where meals are shared – the dining table, which becomes a stage for the tragedies and comedies acted out by the family. The different tensions and possibilities for understanding are shown at various tables in private and public spaces. The dining table as a gathering of an intimate public group becomes the focal point and the venue for the process of social negotiation.

MEETING PLACE AND PRIVATE CIRCLE

In many families, the daily ritual of sharing a meal together, whether in the kitchen or dining room, constitutes a counterpole to the breathless daily routine of our western industrial society oriented towards efficiency. It is intended to provide a shared space where the family can come together and exchange their thoughts on commonplace, or not so commonplace, matters. In contrast to the hustle and bustle of routine activities, eating together, even when it is in itself a ritual, creates the space to encounter one another in a different way than routinely - in the form of the conversation or simply through gestures. Conflict between family members can actually be fought out as well. Sociologist Angela Keppler provided an excellent analysis of the dynamics of the situation in her book "Tischgespräche" ('Table Talk'). The dining table is also a place where individuals can permit themselves to take time out from purely rational action.

The fast pace of society is reflected in the dominance of bar tables in public spaces. These are tables where you are supposed to consume food as quickly as possible with no trace of the intimacy of a public group being created. Shared or solo eating at the dining table proves to be a counterpole to this.

If the kitchen is surely the most intimate, and at the same time most archetypal, place for the dining table, it can also be found quite naturally in many public spaces, in particular in restaurants. It is in these places that we see what has always been typical for it in socio-political terms – it is not the place for an anonymous public group, but a place where specific people meet each other. Public space becomes a public group not least because people claim a place by sitting down together at a – reserved – dining table. If this type of public group is as a matter of principle permeable, because it allows someone else to sit down at the table, the dining table also becomes the sign of demarcation in the public space.

You can of course sit opposite each other without engaging with one another, and it can happen that people fail to encounter each other. All of us have surely at some time sat at a table with other guests with whom we had little to discuss. However, it is out of the confrontation with an anonymous mass of people that surprising moments frequently result and we begin to discuss with someone who leads a totally different life and who pursues interests that are so different from our own.

Even if this does not happen, the possibilities of what sitting together at the dining table actually involves are played through – the gathering of a public group that is both intimate and temporary. This is how public groups are created and maintained – as always, ephemeral and fragile. In his essay 'Origin of the Work of Art', the philosopher Martin Heidegger spoke of how the temple gave ancient man a view of himself and gave the world a certain appearance. It is only in and through, as it were sacred rites relating to the temple, that a community, and likewise a shared world, can be established.

It would of course be going too far to declare the table to be a sacred object. However, Heidegger himself was a philosopher who was particularly interested in everyday objects and who tried to ascertain what their essential role was in determining what we are. The dining table is perhaps not an everyday object like others if it is true that it allows an intimate public group to be formed. Sitting down at the table together is an archetypal practice in our society, allowing us to communicate who we wish to be and what connects us to others – something which Heidegger claimed was the role of the temple for the ancient world. We can take another insight from Heidegger regarding this practice. The public group that is formed by and through sitting together at the table is not a public group that existed previously. It is more a public group that is likewise created by and through the forms of dialog at the table, which also shape it and continue it.

This reference to a public group, that here always means a collection of specific people, finds expression in the terms we use to refer to such tables. When we say that the truth must finally come out on the table, the word table is used metonymically as a form of public communication – something that was previously hidden, as in this example, was under the table and therefore not visible for others, must now be made public.

Using the idiom of various people sitting at a round table in order to tackle a problem clearly shows the relationship between the aesthetic design of tables and a normative order. Here a round table expresses an order based on equal footing among the partners in the dialog. Even if such an order is strictly subject to convention, the form of a dining table can express a symbolic order. A person sitting at the head of a rectangular table is already in a very formally exposed position. The table, together with the whole system of objects – to use Jean Baudrillard's expression – in which it is located, is destined to be highly symbolic.

AESTHETICALLY FORMED PUBLIC GROUP

However, the shape of the table and where and how it stands are not just relevant from a symbolic point of view because dining tables are never just functional objects – they are aesthetic objects, too. As such, they are used to form an aesthetic backdrop and horizon for the practice of eating, in itself always an aesthetic matter. The aesthetic qualities of dining tables go far beyond their giving the spaces in which they stand a certain character, even during the times in which they go unused and interacting with other objects to a greater or lesser degree. Their aesthetic qualities are definitely not due to ornaments or the beauty of isolated parts of the table. Even a plain table made from high-quality materials has its very own aesthetic appeal: clarity and a concise expression that something here harmonizes – this latter point is itself an aesthetic element of such a table. The materials used to create tables, whether wood, plastic, glass or metal, are never exchangeable in this context and are determined by a myriad of symbolic functions. They obviously make an aesthetic difference to the whole. In his book 'The Languages of Art', the American philosopher Nelson Goodman described various symbolic functions of aesthetic objects. One symbolic function that he considers important is what he calls "exemplification", whereby an object shows us its qualities. Objects are not just symbolic because they represent something. They are also symbolic because they reveal something about themselves. The materials used to make a dining table are therefore not interchangeable. The surface and its function – especially when it is not just produced industrially but when the final finish to and in the material is the result of manual work – are not arbitrary, and the shape of a table is not irrelevant. The organic, living character of wood, which metaphorically seems to breathe, is completely different to the cool conciseness of a table made from stone and the striking elegance of a table made from glass. If these types of material are combined in a table, they cannot as elements be offset against each other. Based on and through their combination they each take on new aesthetic qualities by accentuating each other.

For dining tables as objects of design, the choice of materials and the way they are shaped of course serves the functions of the object. The American architect Louis Sullivan went down in design history with his pithy slogan that form should follow function. However, the concept incorrectly requires that function cannot be determined in purely abstract terms and that form naturally follows on from it to a certain extent. The proposition that a dining table is there for people to eat together or individually may not be false from a design theory perspective, but, at least in an abridged form, it skips the specific element of design. Dining tables are objects of design because the function that they fulfill is formed aesthetically. It is a function that has been designed and developed, and the type of table at which we eat makes a whole difference. If it really is true that design begins where functions develop, then it is also true that you cannot talk abstractly about the function of a dining table. On the contrary, we should consider a history of the dining table in the light of each lifestyle in which it is situated. At the same time, we must acknowledge the extent to which dining tables have shaped and influenced the shared ritual of eating down through history. In other words, whoever contemplates the function of the dining table and its role in creating a specific type of public group and community must see this function in such a way that has repeatedly been reinvented and developed in different ways throughout the history of the design of such a table.

In the same way that Heidegger's ancient temple creates a sacred community, tables at which we eat create a type of temporary or permanent community. Sitting together at a dining table gives us a space to communicate with ourselves and with others about who and what we are. As these reflections have shown, the type of table at which we sit to do this does not make a big difference in just aesthetic terms alone.

Drawings: Gerwin Schmidt

A universe of details

Shinichiro Ogata explains the philosophy behind his restaurants and store designs

Left page and following double page: Shinichiro Ogata has made it his task to define Japanese aesthetics for the next generation. Beauty, he says, is transition, like that of light to shadow in the table situation in the restaurant Yakumo Saryo.

Cooking, architecture, packaging – everything involves creativity and to come up with new ideas, I don't set aside specific times like mornings or evenings. Solutions pop up in the most unexpected situations. Touching is very important, to feel shapes and textures of objects with my hands. Other times I sit for hours in a room and meditate the perfect size of a window where clients will sit down and eat and enjoy the view.

The space that I designed for guests is the most precious environment and it is there, where also the most creative moments happen. Often I use architectural models and I change them at least three or four times, until I am convinced that I should not go further. As a perfectionist I must watch out not to kill beauty with perfection. You have to tolerate, even engineer miniscule mistakes, cracks or misplacements. And that's what defines beauty in Japan: transient nature, fading seasons, the blooming, the aging. At Yakumo Saryo restaurant the black floor in one of the rooms is slightly worn off – not damaged, but aged. And it should stay like that. It is natural. People come and go. Why hide it? On top of an iron sculpture we currently placed a withered, dying hydrangea that signals the end of summer. But when time comes, the plum tree in front of the restaurant window will be the first among trees in spring to be in full bloom. That's why I chose the shape of the plum blossom as our logo, the symbol of beginning and awakening.

Nature puts everything into perspective, and my values are based on that. So I ask myself: Am I thinking about a project only as a human being or also as a part of nature? Often nature will interfere, will prevent a project from happening. But I take it calmly. My experiences taught me that this is not the end but the means to another end. Most likely an unforeseen turn will take place afterwards and the consequence will be another beauty that I would not have been aware of otherwise. Over the years I also came to the conclusion that things fall into place by themselves, but first you have to show your effort, go through pain, desperation and disappointment. You cannot circumvent that. There are no shortcuts. As an example, I found all the locations of my restaurants and shops by walking for days through the city. And the places, where I thought, 'oh, this would be perfect, but is it available, can I afford it?' - they all worked out. For Yakumo Saryo for instance, I found the place and signed the contract on the same day. It was magic. Important is also to know, that nothing will ever happen, if you think you have all the time in the world at your hands. Make sure that time puts pressure on you.

Scale for me is not an issue. Be it a big hotel or a tiny plate – it always comes down to the smallest parts. If you fail them, you will not succeed with a building either. Spirits live in the details. If you did not attract them there, why should you attract guests on a larger scale in a restaurant? Look around – you will not find any sharp edges at Yakumo Saryo. Tables, windows, wall corners, frames – I smoothed them all out. And that is only one aspect of a universe full of details that make guests comfortable and the atmosphere gentle. By the way, the perfect height for a table to eat Japanese dishes is 65 centimeters, slightly lower than in the West, so you have more space under your elbow when holding a bowl of rice in your left and the chopsticks in your right. Otherwise you would have to lift your arms higher, which is straining.

In our fast technologically advanced world not everybody finds the inner calmness to appreciate serene places like Yakumo Saryo. Don't misunderstand. I would never push my values onto my guests. I rather lure them into my world. They come, see and feel and if they are not at ease, they won't come back. And that is OK. In a way, I consider myself a community builder, a matchmaker who provides the setting for likeminded people. If they feel comfortable within my environ-

Left page:
Size is no criterion. For Ogata, the smallest pieces are always the most important. 30 types of tea are served in the tea house – in an arrangement that is stage-managed down to the last detail.

Above:
The best ideas often occur when they are least expected. Shinichiro Ogata sits at a window for hours on end in order to create the perfect view.

ments, they will come back to share their values with others. To make a dinner reservation, you have to be introduced first through one of our longtime guests. Or you can first experience Saryo on your own for breakfast or lunch, which gives you and us the opportunity to get to know each other and to find out if our chemistry fits. We are a restaurant and we have perfected the meaning of serving, however, that does not mean that we are servants.

My life is one big contradiction: on one side, there is this world of perfection I long for, the harmony of all things connected through environments I create. On the other hand, the process of creation is chaos. You cannot control creation, it is like a wave, which you try to jump on, and if you are lucky will carry you to new insights. I live this conflict every day. I enjoy it, but I never feel that I can reach perfection. Being imperfect is the story of my life. I chase the flawlessness every day, a little here, a little there and during this eternal journey creative energies arise.

Some people compare my work to that of a film director, who pulls the audience into his realm. The cameraman is the chef, the film location is the restaurant and the food is the story. However, I always observe from the perspective of the movie-goers, and not from the seat of the director. That's why I came up, for instance, with the idea of frozen chopsticks. Knives only cut and forks stab to deliver food to the mouth. Chopsticks – in Japan we say ohashi, only deliver. They signal that food is already prepared, sliced, ready to be eaten. They are extensions of your hands. How they touch your lips, mouth and tongue defines how the food will taste. This is scientifically proven. For a full traditional Japanese meal, a basic set of four different ohashi that vary in shape, thickness and color should be enough. With thin sticks you cannot grab thick udon noodles so you use these instead for delicate raw fish slices. The dark charcoal sticks on the other hand are solid and heavier, good for picking meat. As for sweets, it is preferable to use freshly cut green bamboo sticks. Their color insinuates festivity, a New Year celebration, a wedding, or a birthday. The user should feel that the host did everything in the name of service and respect: He went to a bamboo forest in the morning, cut the wood, and carved the sticks. In my case, I added a personal twist on top of that. Bamboo chopsticks in my restaurants are put in the freezer first before I place them in front of the guest, to preserve the freshness and color of the wood. In contrast, the round and slightly thicker chopsticks made of cedar wood are served wet, so that rice doesn't stick to them. This is not an invention of mine; it was already tradition.

Today, Japan is going through difficult times – politically and economically. That's why we should not forget that we are blessed with our geography. As islanders we have always taken in what Asia has to offer since ancient times. The best of it we saved, stored and archived neatly. That's why Japan became a stockyard of ideas, wisdom and culture. Some concepts that were born in China are still around here today, although they don't exist in China anymore. So I guess we can master these difficult times too.

I mentioned already the spirits that live in the details. But taking care of details does not mean that you can create spirituality. It will pay you a visit only at its own pleasing. My spaces are designed as set-ups for inviting spirituality. You approach temples in Japan

Above:
Japanese confectionery is prepared in Ogata's Higashiya Ginza and then artistically packaged in accordance with traditional rules of arrangement.

Right page:
Create something from tradition and think of someone in the far future – this is the notion that accompanies Shinichiro Ogata in his shop designs and products.

on a long path of ancient stones, one steps through a garden and when you arrive, there is basically nothing, except an overwhelming feeling of spirituality. This concept gives me direction and encouragement. That said, it is almost disappointing that my personal lifestyle is so urban. But I cannot escape it. I cannot just retreat into the mountainside cut off from modern life. I don't have that freedom, but what I can do is to recreate moments of an introspective life close to nature in the middle of Tokyo. I work hard and late every day. Listening to my inner voice, my inner roots, and imagining where I grew up surrounded by nature in Nagasaki, gives me strength. Often my mind drifts back to my childhood to find answers. Japanese people have always kept traditional ancient places in their hearts. That's why I travel as much as possible through the country to keep them alive in my mind.

One last observation. Anything can be created. The real challenge is how to multiply and distribute your creation, your product. It is easy to manufacture a one-of-a-kind object and spend a million yen. But how about creating thousands of the same merchandise and bring the production cost down to a fraction of the original cost so that people can afford it? If handcrafted Japanese products don't sell anymore, a part of our tradition will die. That's why my work must continue, whatever it takes, to keep our unique craftsmanship alive.

As told to Roland Hagenberg.

Photos: Hiroki Watanabe

Beyond the sense of time

The Tawaraya Ryokan in Kyoto is a total work of art of noble understatement. A conversation with the 12th generation of owners

Left page:
The central atrium welcomes guests and changes with the seasons. In spring there are trees in blossom, in the run-up to Christmas colored small pink cotton balls on the branches anticipate the coming year.

Following double page:
Every room has its own view of the wealth of shadowy hues in the mossy garden, where bright maple leaves remain visible until well into the fall.

It is 1 pm when we enter the building. We remove our shoes at the door, putting on gray-beige slippers. Inside, the guest is bathed in a patina and twilight that first filter and dim the light of day before almost fully absorbing it in the heart of the house. You then soon lose any sense of time.

The Tawaraya Ryokan has accommodated high-ranking and prominent guests of every era over the last three centuries. Ryokans are traditional Japanese inns that were originally established for traveling merchants. The oldest surviving ryokan in Japan dates back to the eighth century. Tawaraya is probably the most famous of all ryokans.

Toshi Satow, who has owned the hotel since 1965 - first woman in 11 generations - established the current legend. Tawaraya is regarded as a hotel where you should have stayed at least once in your life. She clings to the traditions of Kyoto, skillfully organizing the interior, where classical, largely handmade materials and objects are arranged with selected pieces from the European mid-century, and she has modernized with courage and with caution.

Her son joined her in managing the hotel. Morihiro Satow is in his late 40s and studied art history at Columbia University in New York. He wishes to secure a future for the hospitality landmark Tawaraya Ryokan in which Japanese tradition is combined with western sensitivities to serve the highest ideal of Zen – harmony. Furthermore, it should provide his family with an adequate living in a hotel market that is undergoing change.

Your hotel has been in existence for around 300 years. It is the 12th generation, and the first to engage in social media. How can you combine such a powerful tradition with a time that is growing increasingly fast? Lifestyles are changing radically and we wish to respond to this without changing the character of the ryokan. It is probably my generation's duty to safeguard the spirit of the hotel, to maintain tradition and to attempt to modernize very cautiously and gradually. Just take the change of lighting from incandescent light bulbs to LEDs as an example. Of course you save electricity costs with LEDs, but it is more difficult to get the amount of light right. This is a big issue in a building where light plays such a large role.

Can you provide more examples? Guests from Europe or the USA, for example, are not used to sitting down on the floor to eat. Even in Japan, it is very often only the older generation that does this. This is why we are changing the design of the seating and tables and providing more legroom. Many guests wish to be reachable and work at their laptop in their room during their stay. This is why we are introducing small, unobtrusive desks. There are now suites with their own bedrooms where the beds can be used at all times. You can therefore take a nap during the day, which is a big requirement with jetlag. Tradition dictates that futons are brought out in the evening and stored away in the closets in the mornings. But that was before jetlag arrived.

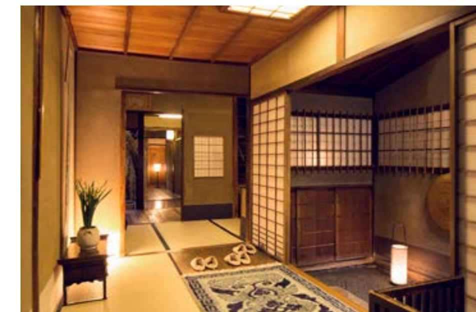
Does this entail a loss in terms of the Japanese character? No, because habits change in Japan in every generation too. Dining tables, like the ones we have made from red Negoro lacquerware, only appeared in Japan in the modern period. Before that, each member of the family ate at their own small table.

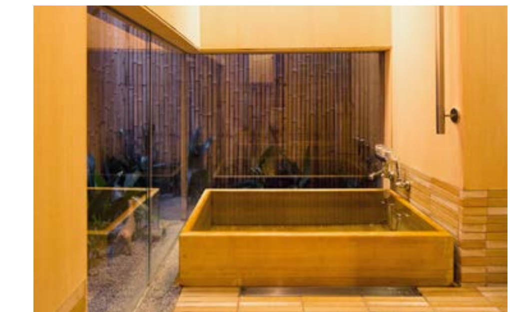
What smells so good? It's the new tatami mats. They are made from rushes and padded with rice straw and are hand-made nearby by one of the few specialists who can still make them. Tatami mats are replaced in all the rooms every year. We always do this at the turn of the year. Many new Japanese houses no longer have rooms like this.

Nothing of what you have replaced seems to be brand new and nothing of what has always been here seems to be worn. Whether the centuries-old screens, an ancient burial object or an Arne-Jacobsen chair – everything contributes to the overall work of art of simple, sense-filled presence

Left page:
Shojis, the screens hung in front of windows and closets and made from a wooden lattice covered in washi paper, are an important element in traditional houses. The number of layers of paper determines the precision and sharpness of the outline of the shadow.

Below:
The line of sight on the ground floor is broken by shojis as well as the new Scandinavian-inspired study with its Finn Juhl sofa. From here, the observer's gaze is drawn to the wooden bath tub in the atrium.





in accordance with the aesthetic concept of wabi-sabi, the nobility of the unobtrusive. The hotel that you see here carries my mother's signature. It is her work. She took on the legacy when her brother died. Mother has a special gift of bringing together eras and cultures and still shapes everything that you see here. She designed much of the furniture, she talks to the paper makers and chooses all the objects in the rooms. However, she doesn't like public appearances and doesn't like traveling.

What is she currently working on? She is currently changing the type of the shojis that we design, the paper walls that filter out the daylight. They consist of a wooden frame with a lattice structure and the washi paper in front of it. Our new shojis don't just have one layer of paper, but two or three layers one on top of the other. Only the bottom layer is fixed to every bar of the lattice with glue – the other two are only fixed at the edge, i.e. they are loose. That's the reason why the shadow that the lattice casts on the paper is more diffuse than if there were only one layer of paper. The outlines of the lattice are not delineated in such clear, sharp lines on the paper but are soft. We find it much more pleasant and warmer.

Jun'ichirō Tanizaki wrote in his book "In Praise of Shadows" that beauty is not only to be sought in objects but also in the contrast of light and dark, in the game of shadows that is played out between objects. How significant is the way in which light penetrates the room? It is very important. The intensity of the light as well as how light is screened off and allowed to pass. The gradation of shadow determines the actual beauty of a room. Every room here in the ryokan has its own and unique view of the garden. However, there is a bamboo blind hanging down to around eye level in front of each window to prevent light from dazzling and drawing attention to the garden, since the dark colors and the composition of the garden refresh the spirit.

What is the significance of the tokonoma, the wall recesses in which painted scrolls hang and in front of which objects and flowers are arranged? The details are very important for these decorative corners too. There are precise traditional rules for them. The height at which the pictorial scroll hangs and its harmony with the proportions of the wall is just as important as what is portrayed upon it. If the picture is hung high, it creates tension. Hanging it lower dissipates tension. It is hung high for example for the tea ceremony. Many pictorial scrolls are thematically linked to the seasons. That's why they're replaced at regular intervals. They illustrate a Buddha-related topic for the festival of Buddha's Enlightenment in December, for example. The guest sits in front of the decorative recess, thereby becoming part of it.

A great attraction are the baths and tubs made of podocarp. They are already filled with water when guests arrive and are covered to prevent them from cooling down. The wood is robust and smells very good, which is important in a bathroom. When a guest is sitting in the hot water, his or her gaze is directed straight into the garden. The towels are woven specially for us with a well thought-through structure. They are made from cotton with gauze so that they feel gentle to the skin and retain a great deal of moisture in the fabric without being perceptible.

Here are ancient vases from Lalique and distinctly Scandinavian influences. How do you square European accents with your Japanese heritage? In one of your suites, we have set up a small study with a two-seater sofa from Finn Juhl and a lamp from Poul Henningsen. The reconstructed study of my father, the photographer Ernest Satow, which today serves as a lounge, also contains Scandinavian furniture. It fits in well with the more modern rooms but not in the traditional spaces. My mother also designed furniture in the Scandinavian style, especially the low zaisu wicker chairs without legs for the dining tables. They were produced here in Japan, but the company no longer exists. We won't be able to replace them, but fortunately they don't break. My mother's house is filled with Bauhaus – furniture from Marcel Breuer, as well as the Barcelona chair by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. But that would not fit in here. There are very good antique dealers in Kyoto who always send my mother the latest re-editions or their best antique pieces for selection.

The ryokan is filled with lovingly arranged flowers in ancient vases – an interplay of transience and permanence. My wife rearranges the flowers every day. The flowers required for this grow in a small roof-top garden, so they are always very fresh. The type of floral arrangements and their significance match the seasons and the festivals that are celebrated in Kyoto. The atrium through which guests enter the hotel contains a cherry tree in spring, a wisteria in summer and, towards the end of the year, a bush with small pink cotton balls that look like very delicate flower buds. They represent the hope for spring.

Modern technology is carefully hidden away. How do you reconcile technical progress with traditional aesthetics? It is not at all easy with the large flat screens that people want today. For example, one is hidden in a sideboard painted by a renowned artist with motifs of the three large traditional festivals in Kyoto. Perhaps the problem will disappear in a couple of years because everyone will then have their own little tablet PC. We will then need a much faster Internet connection instead.

Everything appears to be performed manually. Do you use any technical equipment? Of course. Vacuum cleaners, for example. But details are also manually cleaned as that's the only way of doing it perfectly.

How do you train your staff? We have around 60 people working here in the hotel, with 18 rooms. Every guest has their own room warden. The older members of staff pass on the knowledge of how something is done and all the details that need to be considered to the younger ones. Of course, guests should never see how such work is done. We take great pains to ensure that nobody notices it.

Apple founder Steve Jobs stayed here. What did he do? He came here with his family several times, staying a week on each visit. He was almost always working. He sat at the very same desk at which you're sitting. That Apple Powerbook is the computer at which he worked.

Interview: Anne Urbauer
Photos: Yasuyuki Takagi

Above:
Morihiro Satow is the 12th generation of his family to manage the ryokan. The legacy of the more than 300-year-old ryokan is in expert hands with this professor of art history. – The floral arrangements are his wife's great passion. – Gardens without classical elements like fountains and stone lanterns are inconceivable.

Right page:
Historical screens tell of old customs and are only shown on certain occasions. For the rest of the year they are stored away as works of art.

The rational woman

Writer Joan Didion's kitchen was an oasis of normality in the Hollywood excesses of the 1960s and 70s

Left page:
Joan Didion in her living room in Los Angeles in the 1970s. The now 81-year-old is considered to be the leading voice of New Journalism and one the greatest living writers in the USA.

Following double page:
Borscht, artichokes, parsley salad: Joan Didion cooked down-to-earth dishes for a group of capricious friends who did not always live by the letter of the law. It was seen as the height of coolness to be invited to Didion's dinner table.

There are perhaps three things that Joan Didion has really needed over the 81 years of her life: writing, family and cooking. Preparing shared meals was a daily custom for her until the death of her husband, John Gregory Dunne, in 2003. Every afternoon at four, she would mix herself a drink, sit at her kitchen table and read the pages that she had written during the day. She would then devote herself to preparing dinner.

Cooking must have been very close to bliss in Didion's case. A photograph from the 70s shows her with a – very rare – smile on her face. She is standing in the kitchen surrounded by Le Creuset pots radiating what looks like fulfillment.

This is not something normally associated with the author Joan Didion. She has been described as a woman filled with anxiety and racked by migraines, socially incompatible and a style icon, as portrayed in 1968 by photographer Julian Wasser with her yellow Corvette Stingray, and as the most important and most autonomous writer of the American modernist movement.

The books by the woman from Sacramento tell of America of the past 40 years with a clear and unideological eye.

In "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" she wrote about the great political upheavals of the 60s, in "Play It As It Lays" she describes the emotional death of a woman in Hollywood, and in "The Year of Magical Thinking" and "Blue Nights" she tells of what it is like to lose a husband and then shortly afterwards a child. Didion's style is unparalleled. It is curt and cool and yet full of tension and suppressed energy.

Joan Didion has written recipes in the same way she has written books. These could be found in handwritten form on the crowdfunding platform "Kickstarter" at the time of a planned documentary about her. Joan Didion is able to compress a recipe for risotto into 40 words and to make the short instructions for a very personal parsley salad to sound like a poem. Ever since, American media have been trying to "read" meaning into Didion's recipes.

While the New Yorker gourmet website "Grub Street" wondered whether Didion's crème caramel recipe was as charming as Didion herself, the author was unable to understand the charm thing on the Internet platform "Buzzfeed", saying that her charm was cool, almost unfriendly and not sweet. It is almost impossible to imagine any other author able to spark a debate about her character with a harmless dessert recipe.

One indication that Didion is as serious about cooking as she is about writing books – she did not permit any errors with cooking or aberrations with regard to seasoning. "She was a fantastic cook and cooked every day. She prepared beef Wellington for a fixed dinner for 35 people while putting together, for example, a salad for those who didn't eat any meat," recalls Eve Babitz, Hollywood party girl, muse and expert in the society scene of California in the 60s. She described her friend Joan as the one single sensible person in the scene during that period. While all the other dinner guests at some stage ended up on the floor in a state of intoxication, as was usual in the 1960s, the hostess simply continued cooking without drugs and for half of Hollywood.

Whoever was invited round to the home she shared with her husband, the author John Gregory Dunne, was part of the inner circle of the entertainment world. The two writers first lived in Malibu and then in the rather bourgeois Brentwood. They wrote screenplays and were long considered to be Hollywood's "It couple" or, as colleague Josh Greenfield put it in a biography of Didion published in 2015, "celebrity fuckers" – an unkind description of people with a great interest in stars.

Whoever entered their house was immersed in a universe of French linen tablecloths, old china, flower-patterned chintz sofas and glass elephants that were arranged as if for a photo-shoot for an edition of Vogue and in such a perfect way as to give Joan Didion the impression that this was where she could find protection from her own inner world. The more emotionally unstable her central characters appeared in her novels and essays, the cozier and grander the interior design of the Didion/Dunne home looked. And

Henry Clarke/Vogue, October 01, 1972; (c) Conde Nast

the invitations they issued were also part of the realpolitik they pursued in their struggle to achieve social capital.

Actress Natalie Wood came to eat, as did director Tony Richardson and the band "The Mamas and the Papas". Politicians, journalists, intellectuals and egomaniac Hollywood stars dined through the night, which was a rarity in a Los Angeles that used to turn in early. Didion had an infallible instinct about what to cook for which guest. Something light for Patty Smith – how about chicken ragout and yellow capsicum with baguette? Something earthier for Richard Roth, producer of "Manhunter" and "Blue Velvet" – perhaps baked ham with coleslaw. In fall, Didion would love to serve the borscht so beloved of author Nora Ephron. Or gumbo. Or pea soup.

The main reason for the power of her dinner parties and cookery nights was a perfect division of labor. Joan and John had their roles down pat. While the husband acted as the master of conversation, delivering great speeches at the dining table, Joan stood in the kitchen and thereafter usually sat quietly among the Hollywood stars, mentally collecting material for her books. Over all the years, Didion and Dunne worked together to redefine the concept of the "power lunch" and to reverse the relationship of power. Through the selection of a single dish they were able to show Hollywood's power players how power actually works and what it tastes like. This applied in particular to Didion's special lunch: cold leek soup, antipasti, baguette and white wine. As Dunne described it, the lunches "were put together in such a way that they were intended to underline one thing – the people were at our house, on our territory. It would be considered impolite for a guest to break our rules. We were therefore no longer employees of these people. We were their hosts."

Text: *Anne Philippi*
Photos:
p. 50: *CSU Archives/Everett Collection/picture alliance*
p. 52/53: *Henry Clarke/Vogue, October 01, 1972;*
(c) Conde Nast
p. 54: *Julian Wasser*
p. 55: *John Bryson/Sygma/Corbis*

Above:
The photographs of Joan Didion standing in front of her Daytona-yellow Corvette Stingray taken by Julian Wasser for Time magazine in 1968 established her reputation as a style icon, and to this day continue to influence advertising campaigns like that of the French fashion label Céline.

Right page:
The husband and wife team of Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne was an alliance of two independent, ambitious, free spirits. They collaborated on screenplays. She wrote her, to date, most famous book, "The Year of Magical Thinking" in 2005, following Dunne's death.

Further information
Biographies, Masthead

Biographies

Tim Boreham
lives in Sydney, where he co-founded The North Journal, a quarterly magazine in the format of a daily newspaper dealing with the creative economy. He is also passionate in his reporting of great surfing events like the "Triple Crown" in Oahu, Hawaii. For bulthaup culture he visited Simon Woolley, the founder of Antipodes Water Company in Whakatane, New Zealand.

Doris Chevron
lives as author and filmmaker in New York, working at Condé Nast as a correspondent for Architectural Digest. She was amazed when she learned the address of the bakery of deli Dean & DeLuca in the New York neighborhood of Chelsea – she mailed that it was "a location for galleries and fashion boutiques or ad agencies".

Daniel Martin Feige
teaches as a professor of philosophy and aesthetics with a special focus on design at Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design. After studying piano and philosophy, he gained a doctorate Frankfurt / Main in 2009. Besides questions pertaining to the philosophy of design, he mainly addresses questions of philosophical aesthetics and the theory of art. He published a book on the philosophy of jazz with Suhrkamp-Verlag in 2014 and a book on the aesthetics of computer gaming in 2015.

Shinichiro Ogata
established Simplicity Co., Ltd. in 1998. Pursuing the concept of redefining the next generation of Japanese culture and design, Ogata has developed his own establishments including the Japanese dining club and tea house Yakumo Saryo, the Japanese restaurant HIGASHI-YAMA Tokyo, the Japanese confectionery brand HIGASHIYA, and the product line S[es]. In addition to his own company's brands, Ogata is responsible for the design and direction of a wide range of projects in architectural, interior, product, graphic, and packaging design. In 2008, he managed the direction and overall design for the paper tableware series WASARA. In 2011, he completed the interior and spatial design for The University Museum, the University of Tokyo's INTERMEDIATHEQUE and was appointed Affiliate Associate Professor. Starting in 2013, he took charge of the interior and spatial design for skincare brand Aēsop's stores in Kyoto, Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, and Fukuoka, and in 2014 for Hyatt Hotel's Andaz Tokyo Toranomon Hills. He recently released his first book, HIGASHIYA.

Peden + Munk
Taylor Peden and Jen Munkvold live in New York and Los Angeles and are currently regarded as style setters in product and food photography. They work for Apple, Condé Nast Traveler, Crate & Barrel, GQ, Hollywood Reporter, House Beautiful, LA Times Magazine, Martha Stewart Living, Mr Porter, The Ritz-Carlton, Sunday Times Style Magazine, The New York Times Magazine, Travel+Leisure, Wine Spectator, Vogue Nippon. They supplied the visuals for the books "A New Napa Cuisine", "The Grilling Book", "Sweet" and "Comfort Food". Peden + Munk captured the early morning scene at Dean & DeLuca's bakery in Manhattan for bulthaup culture.

Anne Philippi
lives as writer and author in Los Angeles and Berlin. She worked as a reporter for the German edition of Vanity Fair and as Hollywood correspondent for GQ. Her debut novel "Giraffen" appeared in 2015. She is currently working on a new book and a series of blogs. For bulthaup culture she portrays the writer Joan Didion as a down-to-earth cook and hostess in the excessive Hollywood society of the 1960s and 70s. Ever since she lived in Los Angeles, Anne Philippi explains, "I've been obsessed with Joan Didion, her life and her style of writing."

Masthead

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