Nature does not multiply things unneces-
sarily: that she makes use of the easiest and
simplest means for producing her effects;
that she does nothing in vain, and the like.
— Galileo

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Simple and practical design has a long tra-dition; from a pencil, smoke alarm or coat stand to an elegant laamp held together by magnets, the work of f a new generation of designers readdresses s the ordinary by pro-ducing products that are simple, practical and affordable yet visually striking.

The digital age has offered new opportunities to designers, and this show highlights the advances brought by rapid manufacturing [RM], which allows designers to create functional objects that can be used on a regular basis; everyday items made from the minimum number of pieces as possible.

Many of the designers in the exhibition respond to a current trend towards frugality and a return to basics in a climate of economic uncertainty. Where the one-off limited edition once prevailed, designers and consumers are now searching for simplicity with quality, a desire to create and own products that are enduring, functional and simple.
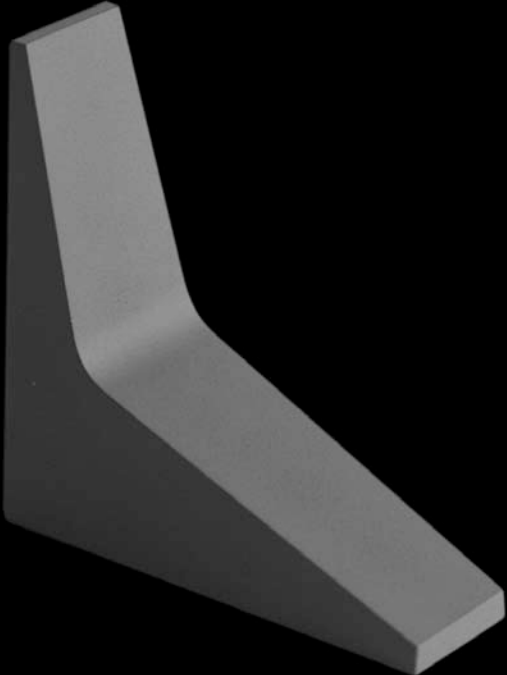
Industrial Facility

Analarm vibration watch

Manufactured by IDEA Japan
Design by Industrial Facility

Twinstopper
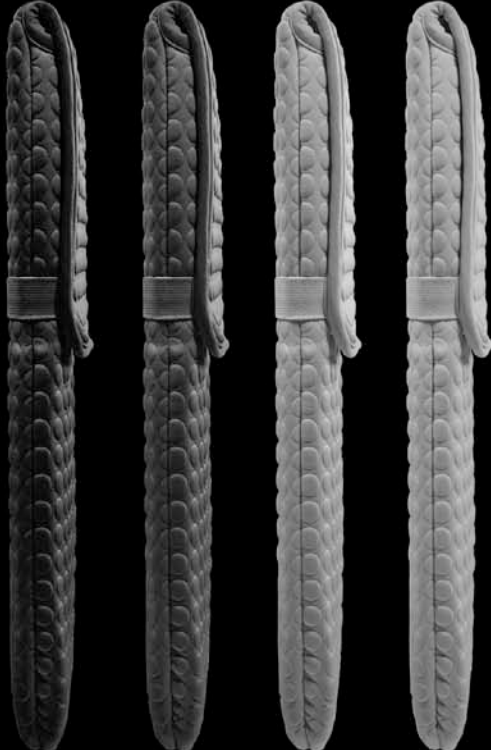
Manufactured by Droog
Design by Industrial Facility

Branca chair

Manufactured by Mattiazzi
Design by Industrial Facility

Bubble bags

Lacie 7
port hub

Manufactured by Lacie France
Design by Industrial Facility

Lite plug

IF 400
knife rack

Manufactured by Taylor's Eye
Design by Industrial Facility
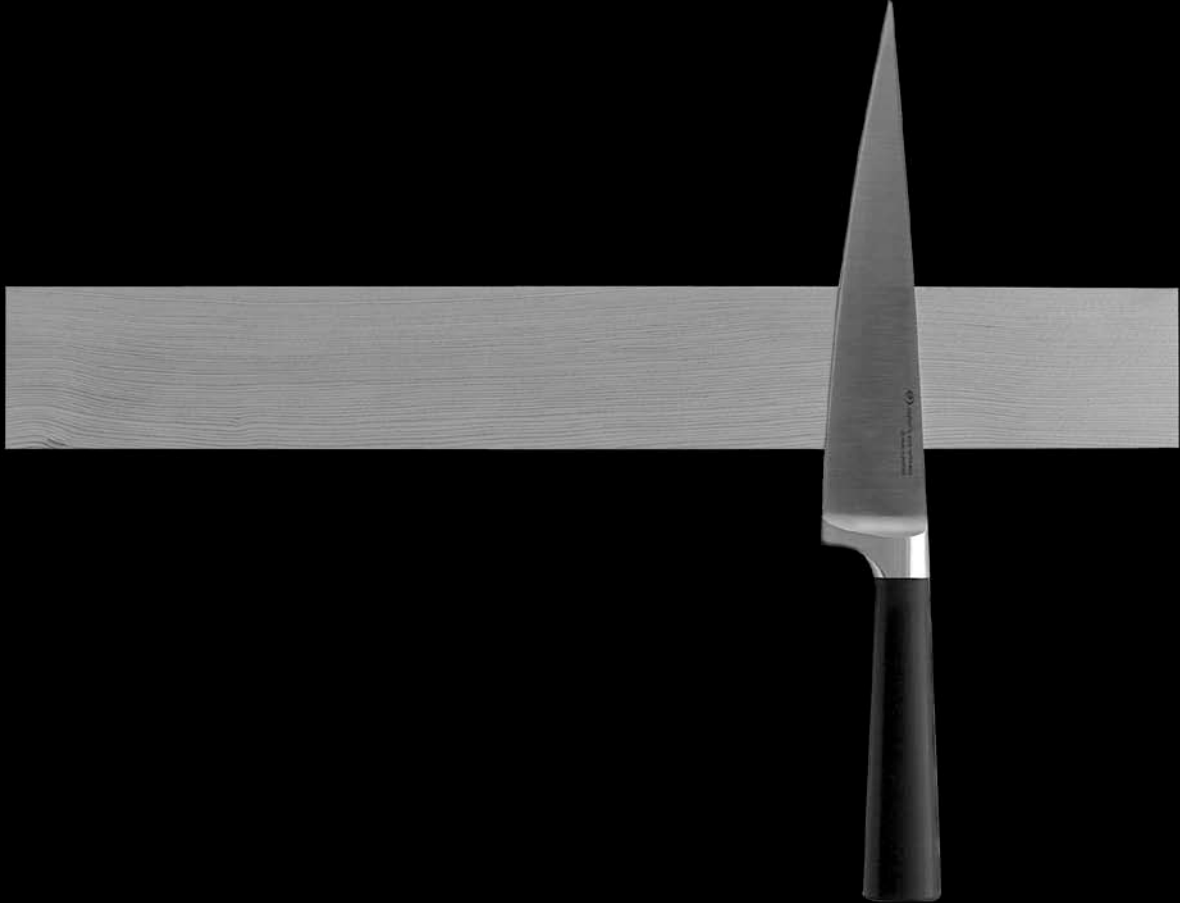
IF 400 knife

Manufactured by Taylor's Eye
Design by Industrial Facility
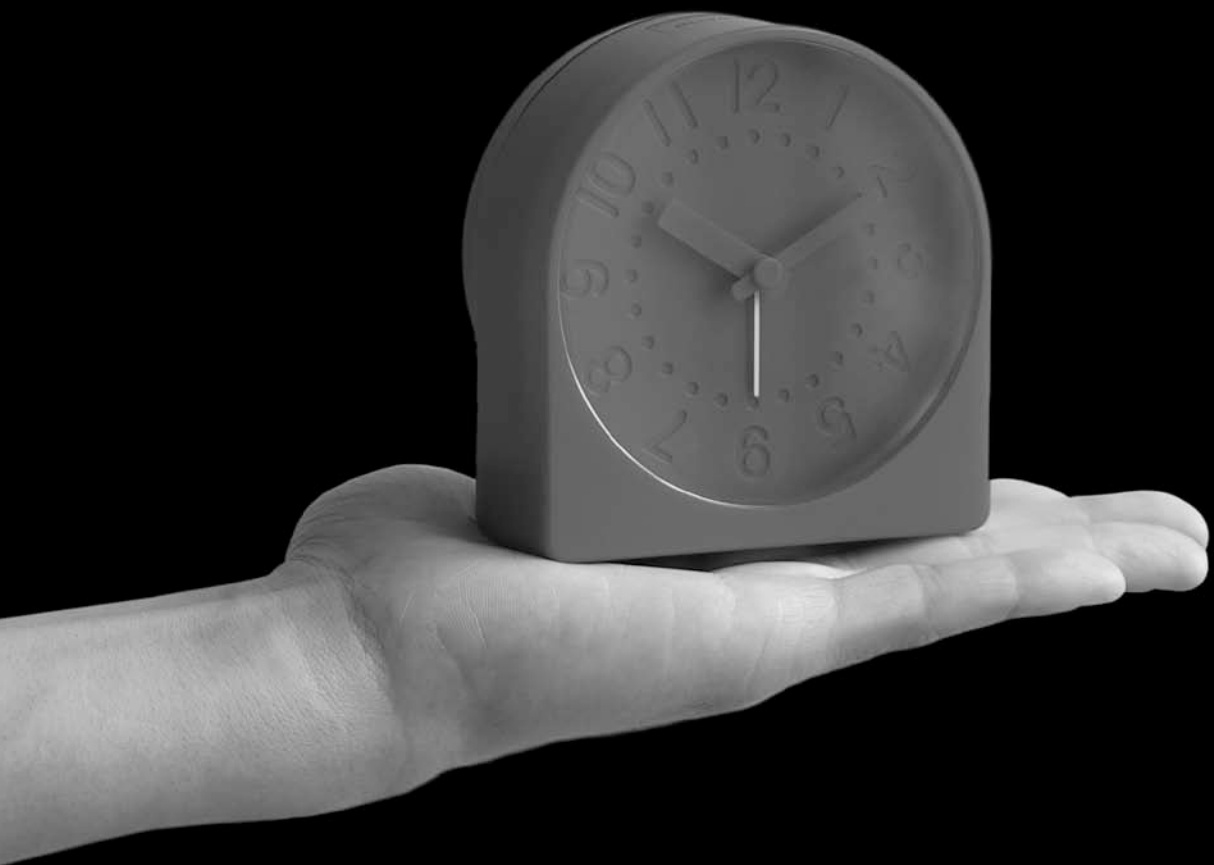
Chantry
knife
sharpener

Manufactured by Taylor's Eye
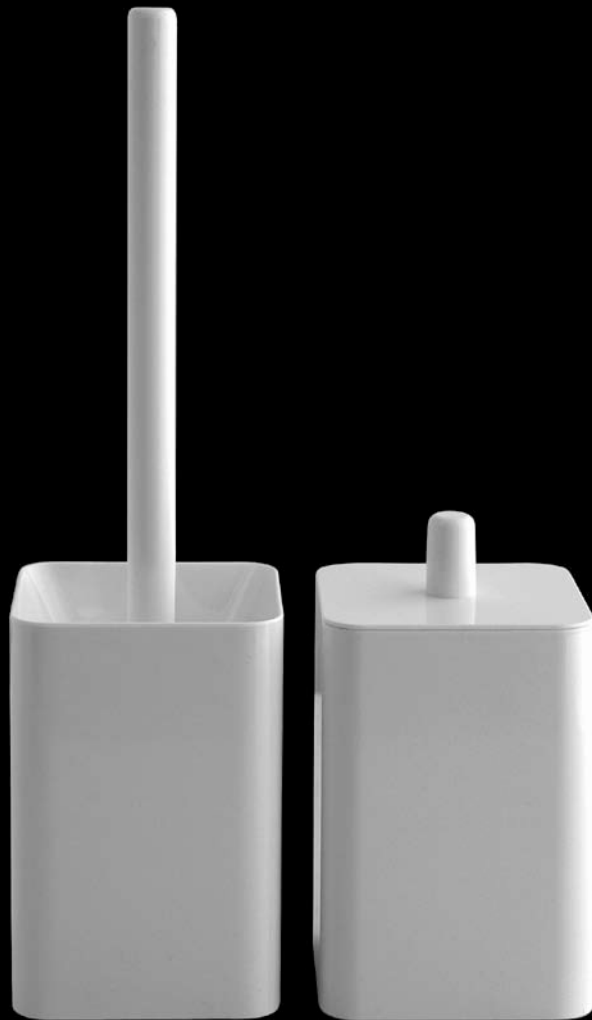Design by Industrial Facility

Bell clock

Manufactured by IDEA Japan
Design by Industrial Facility

Muji toilet brush

Manufactured by Muji
Design by Industrial Facility

Simple design now
— Nuno Coelho

From a pencil, smoke alarm or coat stand to an elegant lamp held together by the strength of magnets, the work of a new generation of designers readdresses the ordinary in our everyday lives by producing products that are simple, practical and affordable, yet visually appealing. Whether mass products or prototypes, the work of this new generation of designers stands comfortably next to more established designers such as Sam Hecht and Kim Colin of Industrial Facility, or Jasper Morrison. The unifying element is a shared belief in the pursuit of simplicity.

The first and middle years of the Noughties saw the phenomenon of so-called design art – craft-based, one-off or expensive limited editions showcased in gallery settings. By contrast, the last years of the decade saw a move towards design concerned with making the ordinary, often neglected objects of our daily routines useful, affordable and beautiful. This was evident in a design exhibition curated in 2006 by designers Naoto Fukasawa and Jasper Morrison called Super Normal. The exhibition consisted of a collection of unobtrusive anonymous objects combined with design classics or objects created by contemporaneous designers. The aim was to show the beauty of functional, durable, simple, and well-made everyday objects.

More recently an exhibition entitled Design Real opened at the Serpentine Gallery. Curated by German designer Konstantin Grcic, the exhibition is concerned with simple design objects that are the result of complex multidisciplinary processes. Its focus is not on stylistic form, or the signature design pieces by a celebrated designer, but rather on the industrial processes of the objects.

The first decade of the 21st century as a whole was also characterised by a paradigm shift, one encompassing a technological revolution. The digital age brought new opportunities which radically changed all aspects of our life. Digital technology made reproducing, buying and sharing music, video and graphics much easier and widely available. Now the fast, digital reproduction of objects is becoming increasingly available with the fast developments of Computer Aided

Design (CAD) software and new 3D digital printing technologies. Stereo lithography, as this process is also called, produces objects by depositing layer upon layer of a specific material like molten plastic or ceramic. The objects are automatically 3D-printed using 'additive manufacturing technology'. Known in the design industry as rapid prototyping [RP], a computer-generated design can go from being an initial idea to a manufactured item in six months or less.

New generation of rapid prototyping is fast giving way to rapid manufacturing [RM]. This shift means that in the near future people will be able to 3D-print their own objects in a variety of materials and colours at their nearest digital print shop. Rather than needing a complex factory and industrial processes to machine-make an object – which are necessary at present for making even the simplest object – creating things with factory-like precision may become so much cheaper that millions of ordinary people will be doing it . † Molotoch, Where Stuff Comes from

If objects are signifiers of our contemporary existence it seems relevant, if not pertinent, to bring to the attention of a wider audience – via this exhibition – design which combines the traditional notion of practical simple design with the future possibilities of 3D-printing. This type of design reflects our contemporary fast-changing world in which analogue technologies are used alongside digital technologies. In other words, we are living in a world initially shaped by digital migrants, that is people who were born before the digital revolution, for a new generation of digital natives who are forever radically changing the way we communicate, socialise, consume, design and produce artefacts.

New Simplicity combines prototypes, recent design classics and recently manufactured products with new pieces produced using the latest technologies in 3D-printing. The participating designers will be showing designs made in the past alongside more recent ones to illustrate a design approach that, while based on continuity, does not neglect technological innovation.

The new products produced using 3D-printing technology were designed to take advantage of its specific properties, whilst being commercially viable. Luka Stepan's elegant ballpoint pen, made in one single piece, dispenses with any springs or additional elements; instead the pen itself is designed as a spring, with a slit at the top that opens up to replace the cartridge. Or take David Sutton's minimal wallet formed in one piece, with no moving parts. Another example is Alex Hulme's self-assembly torch in which the small incisions in the concave element of the torch – into which LED pins are bent into contact with the batteries – could only be possible using rapid-manufacturing technologies.

Then there's Jon Harrison's light which comprises four components, each is built a fraction of a millimetre away from the other. When objects are created using rapid-manufacturing, it means that, once removed from the machine, they are converted into one moving, adjustable mechanism which doesn't need to be assembled and cannot be dismantled. This end result could not be achieved via any other manufacturing process other than rapid forming.

The exhibition teams up emerging designers with their mentors to showcase simple design not as a style manifestation but as an evolving approach addressing the radical technological and social shifts occurring today. This is the key theme explored by the exhibition. At the core of each project is the need for simplicity – however, this installation also highlights that even the simplest of things are made using complex processes.

As well as creating new products, this exhibition follows the conventional wisdom that design must fulfill a practical function. The everyday usability of each exhibit is therefore a central theme in this show. Simple and practical design has a long tradition and past, with a continuity of principles spanning almost 100 years. This approach emanates from the Modernist movement epitomised by the Bauhaus functionalism of the 1930s. Pursuing a radical left-wing Utopian ideal, the Modernist movement believed that simple, good design, that worked well, improved people's lives. Underpinned by a rationalist philosophy, Modernist designers shared a belief in mass-production and technology as the best way to achieve good affordable

design for everybody. It mirrored the rise of scientific philosophy and functionalist sociology – such as those propounded by Rudolph Carnap and his notion of logical positivism - as the major forces in shaping Western modern thinking and, by implication, social policy and legislation.

Dieter Rams' notion of 'good design', for example, follows the Modernist view that form follows function. It is rooted in notions that good design is rational and functional. It is about keeping design to a minimum – as restrained as possible. This same approach is also evident in the work of the younger designers featured in this exhibition. Alex Hulme's calculator or Thomas Wagner's shredder are inheritors of a similar approach and philosophy. "Improving something as developmentally mature as a calculator is a real challenge; but a closer observation revealed that people often struggle to use and visualise the memory function. The memory in this calculator is visible on one of the buttons, thus improving its functionality. The user can see what is being held in the memory and use the number stored in it like any other button," says Hulme.

David Sutton's approach shares the same pursuit for simplicity. His interest lies in how objects describe themselves, telling us how they might be used, made or work. His coatstand made from a flat sheet material is an exploration of the use of folded steel to create both structure and form. The repeated form efficiently utilises the flat material in such a way so as to reduce waste through the product manufacture, while creating a simple yet understandable form.

The difference in today's approach is not how designers condense the design to its most essential, either by simplifying the form or reducing the technical complexity to what is really needed, but on its wider social and technological context. For instance, with the introduction of the iPhone, and more recently the iPad, electronic appliances company Apple took advantage of miniaturization and developments in captive touch screen technology. The focus is not on its less is more aesthetic or in form follows function, but rather on the design of its interface accessed through a flat touch screen. By creating a multi-functional gadget that takes advantage of current convergent digital technologies Apple challenges traditional functions associated with mobile electronic products. Rather than being just a mobile telephone, the iPhone allows several different functions that tap into the new social, communication and working habits of our digital world.

Jonathan Ive is visibly inspired by Dieter Rams' aphorism, Less but Better. By combining user-friendly and intuitive interfaces with a contemporary interpretation of modernism and its associations with so-called 'good design', Apple successfully distinguishes itself from its competitors. It positions itself as a premium brand target at a specific urban market niche. The commercial success of Apple however, relies on the perfect symbiosis and shared vision of its founder and president, Steve Jobs, and the head of its design team, Jonathan Ive.

A concern with usability is also evident in the work of Industrial Facility. "Design has become image-based, and whilst images can be great to look at, they are not always so satisfying to use", comments Sam Hecht. When commissioned to design a new watch, Industrial Facility studied watches and discovered that even though many of them, particularly digital watches, had alarms, they were difficult to set, and so were rarely used. This, according to Industrial Facility, is because these types of functions are 'layered' into a product and not brought forward. Their challenge was to design a watch with an alarm function that is as easy to set as one on an alarm clock. Industrial Facility wanted to add a vibration function because this could then act also as an alert watch for during the day. The result is a vibration alarm watch that is easy to use and aesthetically pleasing.

Another example, also by Industrial Facility, concerned with how people use objects is a series of knives designed for British company Taylor's Eye. Their IF400 knives series shaped in the old-fashioned simple tapered oval shapes challenges preconceived notions that optimum functionalism is only achieved through good ergonomics. According to Industrial Facility, the drawback of designing an ergonomic knife, which is shaped to fit the hand perfectly, is that

it limits the many different ways people actually hold and manipulate a knife. This traditional shape means that even with the eyes closed, people know which way the handle is facing, making it also ideal for short-sighted or blind people. As such, and perhaps coincidently, it could be described as an Inclusive design product, which ironically is a design approach deeply rooted in ergonomic studies.

In our contemporary polarised, mainly urban societies which offer several alternative lifestyles and cultural identities to choose from, notions of good design cannot be narrowly defined by specific principles. As Harvey Molotch cleverly illustrates in his seminal book <u>Where Stuff Comes From</u>, "art and utility, frivolity and seriousness, form and function, do not conflict, but work together as part of any creative enterprise".

Only a couple of decades ago, design was rarefied and became an adjective for an aspirational lifestyle. Nowadays there are abundant examples of more humorous design, such as some of the work promoted by the Dutch design group Droog. The Cinderella Table by Jeroen Verhoeven, for instance, which boasts the curvaceous forms of an 18th-century French commode, transgresses any functionalism to become purely ornamental. His pieces become examples of self-expression, affordable only to a small group of people. The reference to historical forms and production techniques brings it closer to decorative arts than design. Or the Neo-Baroque creations by Dutch designer Marcel Wanders, who has been, over the last few years, replacing Philip Stark as the designer of spectacle and illusion. It is design that fulfils a specific need, an emotional need for self-expression both for the designer and buyer. It reflects a need to express a particular lifestyle, social aspiration or taste.

Other designers, such as London-based design trio Troika have a more thoughtful approach to design. Like artists, designers can have conceptual aims; they have a desire to provoke thought as well as, or instead of, providing something useful. Their work often combines digital technology with references to analogue technology or other formal traditions. This tension, between the past and future

possibilities, is perhaps, where they situate themselves. Troika's focus on digital technology and its impact in shaping not only our daily lives but also our intellectual development make it as relevant and useful as the more functional solutions designed by the proponents of Modernism.

Ironically, frugality - manifested through the products we consume, buy and use – has become a fashion statement in itself. Beyond the financial cycles and fads, the attitudes and motivations of the designers in this exhibition, their search for simplicity, quality and desire to improve the ordinary perhaps represent a broader societal return to basics. Design has also been greatly stripped of its Utopian left-wing idealism. What has changed also is the dogmatic approach to so-called good design.

Biographies

Alex Hulme: A graduate of the Royal College of Art, he has worked on numerous product, furniture and interior projects, with Tom Dixon, Nokia, Samsung and in London at Studio McDaniel. Recent projects include collaborations with Mothercare, Umbro and Hutchison Whampoa (3 Mobile). www.alexhulme.com

David Sutton: born in 1977 in Australia where he trained, then at the RCA. He has previously worked for PearsonLloyd and BarberOsgerby on a wide range of furniture and product projects. He received the Conran Foundation Award in 2007 and is now developing his own studio with a focus on both furniture and product. www.davidsutton.co.uk

Industrial Facility: formed in 2002 by Sam Hecht and Kim Colin to explore the junction between industrial design and the world around us. They have won international recognition with numerous awards, exhibitions and publications. www.industrialfacility.co.uk, www.retailfacility.co.uk

Jasper Morrison: internationally acclaimed designer who set up an Office for Design in London in 1986. Recent projects include a line of kitchen appliances for Rowenta, the Pots & Pans for Alessi, a range of sanitary ware for Ideal Standard, the r5.5 chronograph for Rado, the Basel chair range for Vitra and the Trattoria and the Pipe seating range for Magis. In 2006 he founded Super Normal and in 2009 the opening of the Jasper Morrison Limited Shop London. His Office for Design is currently based in London, Paris and Tokyo. www.jaspermorrison.com

Jochem Faudet: born in 1980 in France and brought up and trained in the Netherlands, he worked on lighting concepts for Philips Lighting among others before completing his MA at the RCA. He now runs his own practice focusing on lighting products. www.jochemfaudet.com

Jon Harrison: UK designer who studied furniture and product design on the Design Products course, tutored by Michael Marriot and Luke Pearson, at the RCA. He has worked with a number of renowned designers and received several awards such as the Blueprint magazine Graduate Designer of the Year, Liberty's Design Bursary and the British Council Top 10. www.jon-harrison.com

Luka Stepan: born in 1980 in Slovenia, he studied in Ljubljana and at the RCA, and he is now based in London. He founded his own practice, working on projects ranging from products and furniture design to exhibition and interior based work. Some of the projects he has been involved in have won awards, such as Red Dot, 2007 and Designpreis, 2008. www.lukastepan.com

Mathias Hahn: a London based product designer, he was born in 1977 in Germany, and studied at Essen University and the RCA. He has worked for Tom Dixon and was one of the founding members of OKAY studio in 2006. With a background in industrial design, his recent works take a twisted angle at familiar object categories. www.mathiashahn.com

Min-Kyu Choi: born in 1980 in South Korea, he is a new graduate of the RCA Design Product MA course, with a background in graphic design, illustration and interactive design. www.minkyu.co.uk

Oscar Diaz: a product designer based in London, having trained in Spain, France and at the RCA in London. He works with ideas applied to objects, furniture and spaces, often tweaking everyday objects or situations. www.oscar-diaz.net

Thomas Wagner: born in Denmark in 1977, he studied mechanical engineering and later industrial design before training at the RCA. He has worked for product designer Sebastian Bergne and is setting up his own studio. www.thomas-wagner.dk

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