



A Well-Designed Life

From hotels to motorcycles to olive oil, there's nothing
Philippe Starck can't make look amazing



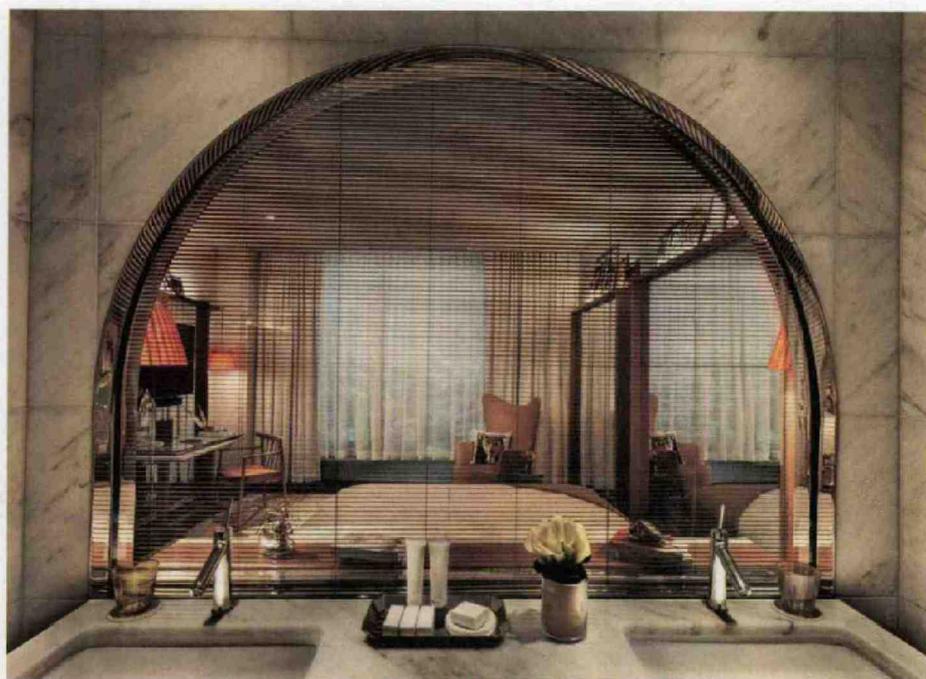
On a sunny day in May, Philippe Starck describes the scene from his window in Comporta, Portugal. Waves crash around a fisherman hauling in his catch for the day. Undulating dunes frame the window's periphery.

Starck and his wife flew in from Milan this morning. Tomorrow, they leave for another beachfront locale. The itinerant duo owns homes across the world: a place on the Venetian island of Burano, a cabin on Formentera that's a handful of nautical miles from another abode in Ibiza, which is a short flight from a house in Cap Ferrat. "We live everywhere," Starck says over the phone. "Mainly in the plane."

This restless hopping about suits the 68-year-old just fine. The world's first superstar all-purpose designer—he's created everything from hotel interiors and furniture to toothbrushes, motorcycles, and olive oil for more than 40 years—finds focus in movement, although when the whirl stops, he prefers to surround himself with nature.

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The French native got just that with his latest hotel project, the SLS Seattle, which is housed in 16 floors of a new downtown tower, The Mark, and is set to open in November. The trunks of the Pacific Northwest's towering old-growth trees became "a symbol of the hotel, like a surrealist piece of art," he says. Woods in various tones, patterns, and genres blanket the premises, from floors and ceilings to tables and stools (the bark motif is carried through on guest room rugs). The public



spaces and 189 accommodations exude what would be called, in Northwest hipster parlance, a "grounding vibe," thanks to butter-soft green leathers, cowhide prints, and burnt-orange lampshades that emit a campfire-like glow.

The look fits Starck's design credo—just don't call it his "aesthetic." "I have not *esthétique*, I have philosophy," Starck says in French-inflected English. "I try to make the right product with the right material at the right price for the people. I make

something which surprises, which upgrades the people who will use my product. There are a lot of people who work with *esthétique*, but *esthétique* has a big relation with trend, and everything which is trendy becomes out of trend."

He may not aim for trendy, but his designs have become exactly that. His Louis Ghost Chair, a riff on a Louis XV seat recast in translucent polycarbonate, has sold more than a million pieces since 2002. The Juicy Salif citrus squeezer,

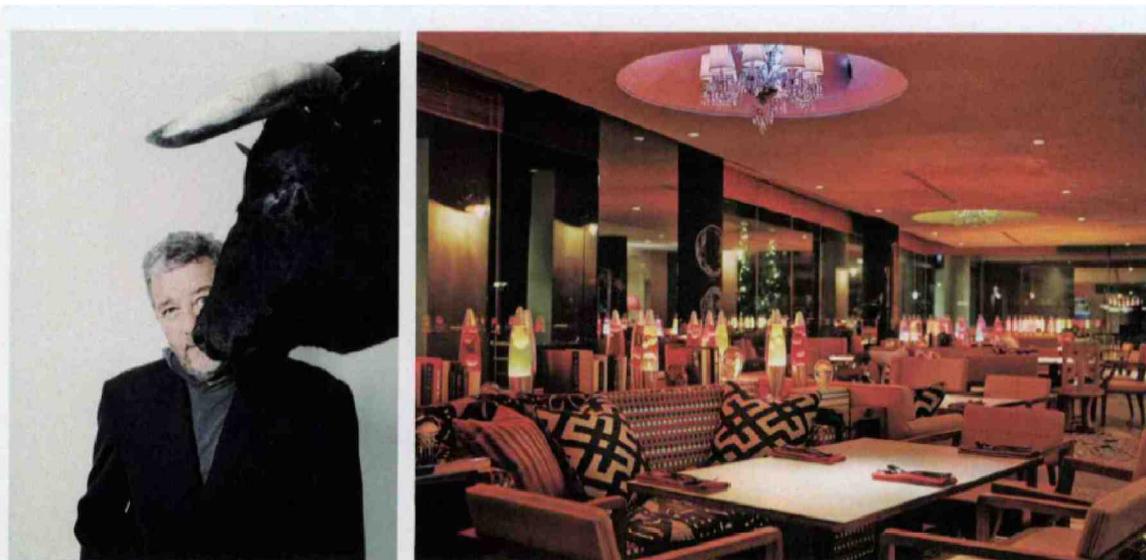
Above: a room at the SLS Seattle; below, clockwise from left: the Lou Speak armchair for Driade; the Juicy Salif citrus squeezer; a pair of Starck Eyes sunglasses

perhaps the only lemon squeezer that has been displayed at the Museum of Modern Art, resembles a long-legged aluminum spider. The cone-shaped Hot Bertaa Kettle's cartoonishly elongated spout seems to have been cribbed from the snout of a *Looney Tunes* wolf.

Starck's restaurants and hotels, meanwhile, exude



Starck Smilar (S. K. S. Smilar)



languid glamour in a meticulously curated world of whimsy. Certain themes recur throughout his interiors: a pristine white-on-white palette begs to be mussed up; chandeliers and straight-back chairs play to royal tropes; and organic shapes temper the glitz. Over the years, **Starck** has joined forces with a handful of hotel brands, including Morgans Hotel Group (Delano in South Beach, Clift in San Francisco, and St Martins Lane in London) and Mama Shelter (in Bordeaux, Lyons, and Marseille). But he is perhaps best known for his 12-year business partnership with Sam Nazarian, founder and chairman of SBE Entertainment Group, which has resulted in a stable of SLS Hotels across North America. "It's a privilege when you can work with someone you've grown up admiring," Nazarian says of Starck. "Our relationship is a combination of friendship, partnership, and brotherhood that has really evolved over the years. When I look for a partner, I look for someone who is visionary enough to push boundaries. **Philippe Starck** is the definition of a visionary designer." In addition to the Seattle hotel, SLS will debut Starck-designed properties in the Bahamas and Philadelphia within the year.



Clockwise from top left: Starck channels Ernest Hemingway at his Paris office; the Beast & Butterflies restaurant at M Social Singapore; a room at SLS Brickell in Miami

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The son of an aeronautical engineer who invented the twisting lipstick tube, **Starck** started as a nightclub designer in the 1970s. Back then, clubs were dens of intellectual life, he says, "productive places where photographers, *artistes*, *politique* people, philosophers," would meet to discuss how to build a better society. "All the people who have power today in Europe [were] in my nightclubs when I was 25," he says. In 1983, his avant-garde work caught the eye of French President Francois Mitterrand, who asked **Starck** to design his personal residence at the Élysée Palace. "I was called the enfant terrible, the rebel," **Starck** recalls. "And it was incredibly smart [of Mitterrand] to choose me because I was not the

establishment, I was not bourgeois, and these people found a young guy to move the system, to bring a new *idée* for people."

Despite his many fruitful collaborations over the years, Starck likes to work alone. From June to September, he forgoes all hobnobbing in order to work undisturbed. His restless energy lends itself to a biorhythmic schedule of 45 minutes of sleep alternated with three hours of work, often done while in bed naked, as he told *Harvard Business Review* in 2013. "It's a monklike life because you are completely disconnected from everything," he says. "It's beautiful to fly every day in your imagination, to see new concepts in your brain, to crystallize them. It's like an addiction to a drug, which gives you this possibility to dream and dream and dream." He pauses. "We can say I am a professional dreamer."

Given his vast repertoire, one can't help but wonder whether there's anything left he wants to design. "We shall see," **Starck** says with a laugh. "Every moment there is a new *idée*; every moment there is a new need to find a new solution. That's why the future is always the best, and tomorrow is a new territory of adventure." ●

Julien Mignot (Starck)