

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

Philippe Starck

The prolific designer and tireless traveler on why gimmicky hotels are passé and how to live like a sybaritic monk

HE’S CONFOUNDING, by design. For over five decades, Philippe Starck has gleefully played limbo with the markers of genre and good taste. A prolific design talent, he has consistently turned out everything from provocatively silly and memorable mass-produced household items (gun-shaped lamps, garden-gnome stools, stackable plastic Louis XV chairs) to newfangled windmills and even plans for the world’s first spaceport, in his capacity as creative director of Richard Branson’s Virgin Galactic project.

To discerning nomads though, the French-born Mr. Starck is best known for popularizing the designer hotel, having conceived the interiors for such pioneering properties in the 1990s as the Royalton in New York City, the Mondrian in Los Angeles and the Delano in Miami Beach. Now 68, he remains as busy as a one-armed paper hanger, dividing his time between homes in Cap Ferret, the Venetian island of Burano and Spain’s Formentera, and working on more gigs than he cares to remember. We recently caught up with him at the SLS Brickell hotel in downtown Miami, his latest collaboration with developer Sam Nazarian. As ever, Mr. Starck was in divinely contradictory form.

First rule of design is: don’t be stupidly luxurious. Never make things fancy for the sake of it. I want people to come to a hotel because they feel that they are at home. The era of gimmicky hotels is over. When you read in a magazine about a new boutique hotel you want to immediately remember the address so that you can avoid it.

A great hotel combines: intelligence, culture, efficiency, comfort and always a touch of poetry.

Every hotel has its own: tribe. The same tribes travel to New York, Paris, Milan and Tokyo. You just have to comfort people and assure them that if they love, let’s say, SLS in L.A.,

they will love the new one in Miami because they are practically the same. You don’t have to throw in a pineapple or an art deco detail for the same concept to work in Miami. The difference comes from the tribe, not from location.

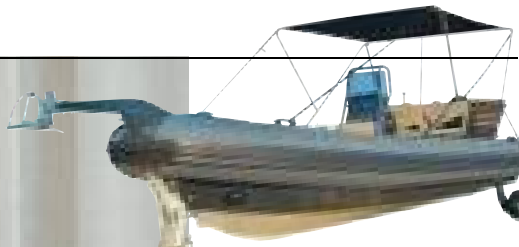
My ideal customer is: young-minded and creative. Those are the people I design for.

The object I wish I had designed is: none. We can’t reasonably wish for more materiality. If I really have to answer, though, I would say one of the design icons that have changed the world such as the artificial heart or the pacemaker.

I’m not a big fan of: trends. Buying something because it is “trendy” is a stupid behavior. When it comes to creation, it is crucial to think of something timeless with a real technological or ecological benefit.

My favorite hotel in the world is: La Co(o)rniche on the Pyla Dune in the southwest of France. Not because I designed it but because of the surrounding dune, the

CLEAR THINKING Mr. Starck designed the Louis Ghost chair in 2000.



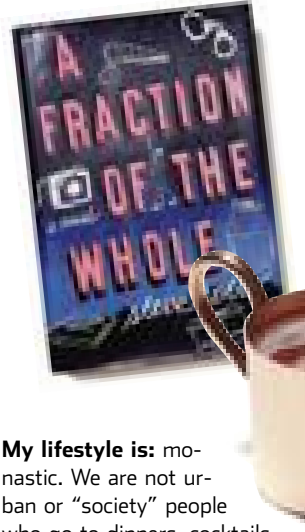
ITINERANT INNOVATOR Clockwise from left: Philippe Starck at the SLS Brickell in Miami, his latest hotel-design project; a Sealegs amphibious vehicle; director Stanley Kubrick; Parrot Zik 3 headphones; France’s La Co(o)rniche hotel, designed by Mr. Starck; the Pity Starck cocktail; recommended reading.

waves and the sunset. My second favorite would be the Post Ranch Inn in Big Sur, California. An American version of La Co(o)rniche, it is on a cliff, surrounded by sea spray and freezing Northern Californian winds. It is easy to lose oneself contemplating the many shades of gray of the sea and the whales below.

The thing people might be surprised to learn about me is: that I think of myself more as a movie director than a designer. The directors I feel closest in spirit to are Alejandro Iñárritu, David Lynch, Stanley Kubrick, Wim Wenders and the Darjeeling tea guy [Wes Anderson].

The last book I read was: “A Fraction of the Whole” [a Booker-Prize-shortlisted novel about an Australian father and son] by Steve Toltz—amazing personal view and sense of humor.

The ideal travel companion is: my wife, Jasmine. We live in a total symbiosis and don’t even need to talk to understand each other. Sometimes we go two weeks almost without speaking.



My lifestyle is: monastic. We are not urban or “society” people who go to dinners, cocktails or exhibitions. We call ourselves “luxurious monks.” We live like monks but in a more costly way. When we need things we have to get them fast as we are always traveling. We need high-tech equipment like an amphibious car-boat because we live in remote cabanas near the sea.

My ideal office is: in front of the sea. The sound of the waves, the wind from the seaside, the salt in the air, this is what I need to work. A proper working place like an office prevents me from working. How can you work with a feeling of obligation, with no pleasure?



I can work 24 hours a day but without any bad feelings.

At the end of the day: we have a Champagne or I [create] a cocktail. My latest one was the “Pity Starck,” made with low alcohol and low sugar: zero-sugar-added Champagne, 1 drop of Campari, 1 spoon of Scotch from Islay, 1 squeeze of lime, 1 ice cube in a frozen copper mug.

I can’t fly without: my iPad Mini full of thousands of carefully selected pieces of music and my Parrot Zik 3 [headphones] to listen to it. I also need my pencil and tracing-paper pad, which is specially produced for me to resist all kinds of weather and humidity.

The secret to working on a flight is: music. It is an essential tool of my life. But I hardly ever work on an airplane. I sleep.

On my next trip I am going to: several countries on the same day, as usual.

The one thing I enjoy most about traveling: is when I can be the pilot. I fly a Pilatus PC-12 “Swiss Army-knife” plane. It’s convenient because it has two large cargo doors to transport motorbikes.

The one thing I never spend money on when I travel is: souvenirs, because I prefer my memory.

—Edited from an interview by Horacio Silva

