Now and Then, Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby

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Laser cut aluminium sheet of Olympic torches, prior to shaping, 2012

Robotic welding of an Olympic Torch, 2012

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humble that made it instantly popular with the public,’ says Maise. Despite
the initial design focus, Tip Ton was not introduced as a school chair spe-
cifically, but rather as one that could work at home, in the office or in the
classroom. In comparison with standard office chairs – which it does not
resemble in the slightest – the Tip Ton is playful, even jaunty.

Fehlbaum explains that the possibility of universal applicability was key for
introducing the chair to the market. The form and experience it offered may
have been new, but those could be learned intuitively. ‘People do not want to
read an instruction manual before using a chair,’ he points out. Upon seeing
the chair for the first time, some have expressed concerns that it might tip
too far forward – but this is alleviated once people try it for themselves.
‘There might have been some sceptical voices, but the experience convinced
most straight away,’ Fehlbaum says.

The Tip Ton’s launch was covered widely by the media, and in 2013 Barber
and Osgerby won the Créateur de l’Année award at the annual trade show
Maison et Objet in Paris. That same year, the chair received the German Design
Award from the German Design Council, the Design Guild Mark from the
Furniture Makers’ Company and a D&AD Yellow Pencil for Product Design.
But Fehlbaum himself may have paid the chair its highest compliment: while
Vitra is always looking to improve on designs, he says, it would be difficult
to optimize or simplify the Tip Ton – in part because of the complex tools
its manufacture requires, but also because the design is already so resolved.
Currently, the only obvious change that will be made to the chair is a super-
ficial one: its colours, which will be refreshed every few years.

Enthused by the research they had done for the Tip Ton, Barber and Osgerby
were able to apply their new knowledge to another design: the Bodleian
Libraries Chair (2014). The renowned library at the University of Oxford
announced a design competition for a library chair that would – among other
requirements – demonstrate an understanding of the important historical
context of the institution, as well as respond to the fact that readers often
sit for six to eight hours at a time. Barber and Osgerby’s winning proposal
is an oak chair made using traditional methods by their long-term partner
Isokon Plus. The designers implemented their experience with the Tip Ton
by incorporating a similarly tilted skid, helping to improve posture during
long periods of reading.

Ultimately, the Tip Ton earned its place in the history of chair design by
presenting a new archetype to the market: a usually static piece of furniture
that enables movement and offers a new experience for the sitter. Vitra’s
own Design Museum produces posters representing the history of chairs
through a number of well-selected examples, the list being updated every
couple of years; the Tip Ton was added in 2012. The chair is also included
in the Art Institute of Chicago’s permanent collection.

article/the-tipping-point#slide-1>
Iris 1300, dimensions 1300 x 1300 x 400 mm (51.2 x 51.2 x 15.7 in), Established & Sons, 2008
Tibbo chairs and dining table, Dedon, 2016

Right: Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby, Dedon workshop, Lüneburg, Germany, 2016
For this private commission there were just two simple requirements: to design a sofa that was both large and comfortable. Such a loose brief allowed Barber and Osgerby room for creative freedom and experimentation. After a variety of directions were explored, the designers chose to pursue the idea of a deconstructed sofa where the solid oak framework, measuring 1970 x 920 x 1295 mm (77.5 x 36.2 x 51.2 in.), was exposed rather than concealed. So, rather than a purely functional support, the frame became an essential part of the aesthetic. As an alternative to regular fixed upholstery, six loose layers of contrasting coloured felt quilts were laid across the sofa frame, allowing versatility in the variable colour combinations.

Images: pp.168-9

The Carbon Fibre Table resulted from a private commission, which specified a large adaptable dining table that could also be used as a console. To allow for easy storage and manoeuvrability, Barber and Osgerby designed the project as a deconstructed plan, material translated of the images: faceless, hidden, impassable and hard. The result was a 3.5 kg (7.7 lb) case milled entirely from billets of 5083 grade aluminium, which, akin to the buildings in Ruff’s photographs, presented a curvilinear with no obvious point of entry. The box and prints were accompanied by original text by the Mexican writer Alexis Fabry and Olivier Andreotti of Toluca Editions.

The development of Lanterne Marine brought together a confluence of design themes that had long been a preoccupation for the designers: exploration of detailed handcraft with engineering, an interest in nautical design and a fascination with colour composition. The result was a series of large vases that involved the layering and stacking of the famous Venini colors to create new, almost modular compositions.

Due to the vulnerability of stacked glass, aluminium disks were used as spacers between the different components. These disks were subsequently developed into a design feature through the attachment of a metal frame that encased the base of the vase. It was a sculptural element, evocative of the understated vernacular and nautical objects from Murano, specifically the protective frames used on hanging boat lamps.

Three designs in two colour sets were produced and each variation in the range became an edition of thirty. The modular glass bases and tops were blown in a range of special Venini colors, the recipes for which are known only to one man at the factory. The bases hold the open, calla-like tops that are intended to hold water and flower stems.
Barber & Osgerby
Projects

Collaborators for over twenty years, Barber and Osgerby have applied their talents to everything from industrial design and furniture, to lighting and installations. The most comprehensive survey of their work to date, this book offers a unique, 360-degree view into their approach and working methods. A series of stunning images explores their work thematically, while six essays provide an exclusive look into career-defining projects. The final section comprises a chronology of their work, each entry accompanied by a project description.

Barber and Osgerby founded their design studio in 1996 and have since established collaborations with leading global manufacturers such as Knoll, Vitra and B&B Italia. Their work is held in the permanent collections of London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and Art Institute of Chicago.

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