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PARTYISM

Alexander Bogner in Isabel Marant by Signe Vilstrup



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An excellent party requires an excellent party-giver. True hospitality is subtle but certain features come to mind, contemplating the talents that characterise a good host. Just as it is amusing to be presented with new, unexpected things of whatever sort; drinks or food, music, entertainment or décor, it is key - as a guest in any event – to feel it's safe to ask about having special needs met. A good host makes you feel pampered, exudes the sense that anything is possible and that things are under control. A good host invites good people, has a sense of dynamics, and is concerned with relations. And most important: the host should also have fun – when this is the case, it can somehow or other be felt in every corner of the soirée.

With a background in naval architecture and design, Alex de Beaufort has since 2013 been Design Director of the Hermès sur-mesure department, an atelier where a highly specialised team of engineers and craftsmen accommodates requests from clients on any project or object that is not in a collection. This can be anything from special bags, fishing gear and party objects, to (wooden) bicycles, skateboards and surfboards, hockey sticks and rickshaws to interior design of cars and sailboats. Whereas such service appears – and certainly is - highly extravagant, made-to-measure is not an unusual luxury in the equestrian world. Here, bespoke equipment is more of a necessity to secure a safe and gentle contact between the rider and the horse. “This service has always existed in the company” Axel de Beaufort states when DANSK asks about the thoughts and visions behind the bespoke and special orders department. “In the 19th century, Hermès created made to measure harnesses for horse carriages. It is part of the DNA of the house.”

The essence of the sur-mesure service is to meet the Hermès clients in any special need, dream or desire they might have. Additionally, the atelier proposes objects to inspire and to show how far the know-how can go. “We try to keep ourselves amused and engage with projects that bring us joy” he says. A special request can take up to one or two years to accomplish depending on the complexity of the project. A lot of steps go into the process, including doing research to find new techniques and know-how which means sometimes finding the right expert craftsmen outside of the team to work with - a task that can't be rushed. “We are not in a hurry. It is not our philosophy to undertake as many projects as we can. It's more about finding the right project and constantly innovating and surprising our clients with unexpected objects.” So what makes a project appealing enough for the Hermès sur-mesure department to take it on? “A project is appealing to us when there's a crossover between functionality and craftsmanship, we like to create objects that are both poetic and functional, pieces charged with emotion, the fruits of a limitless imagination. Axel de Beaufort says. “We ask ourselves, how can we make fishing gear? If it's just to take a fishing rod and place the Hermès logo on it, then there's no point.” It goes without saying that this wasn't how Axel de Beaufort and his team went about it. What set the angling venture in motion was the envisioning of collaborating with former partners - experts in silk - meaning Axel de Beaufort and his team could originate their own (fantastic) flies for fly fishing. And this is often the case in the workshop: it is human relations and meetings with people that fuel the projects. “After I began working at Hermès I realised how the house places humanity at the heart of its model.” he says. “We sometimes work with external craftsmen who share the same values and pay attention to detail. A proper object takes life. When transformed from just pencil on paper – a sketch – to something that really is something. So many stories go into an object for it to exist.” Axel de Beaufort is not eager to point out what project he has

enjoyed most to work on (“I have to say all projects we make are really exciting. Life is short – I try to have fun in what I do” he smiles), but states: “what stays with me is all the people I've met along the way, who have so much know-how, and work so hard to maintain it. And then - the transmission of savoir-faire – when a company is passed on from one generation to another. That this is still possible moves me a lot.”

It was also working with a family-owned company that the Hermès jukebox (“a jukebox that stops time” as Axel de Beaufort describes it) was conceived. A few years ago the sur-mesure department ran a campaign called The Hermès Dream. Stores were asked to fantasise freely and conjure up their dream object. The idea of the jukebox came from Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré: “We worked with an amazing company in Manchester, England, who'd specialised in jukeboxes, everything made by hand. I talked to the manager – the father – and asked if there was something he had dreamt of doing, but never had the chance to do? He was quite hesitant and didn't tell me” the Director explains and continues “I noted upon how everyone shuffles nowadays, and proposed the idea of a jukebox to counter all this shuffling. Where one could listen to albums, to LP's. And the man looked at me and said, that was what I had wanted to do. It turned out, he had conceptualised it already, and he was ready to get it started.” With the jukebox came a small array of party objects – amongst them, the crystal disco ball. “Working with the disco ball was more about know-how than luxury. At first it was thought of as an object for scenery and decoration of sorts, but in the end it really became quite popular”, Axel de Beaufort says and reveals on a side note that it has already rotated from the ceiling at Hermès in-house gatherings. Its popularity doesn't surprise DANSK. Nothing intensifies celebratory vibes (and adds sweet melancholy) to a dance floor like a disco ball, and who wouldn't prefer the light beams blazing over them to be cast by Hermès?

For readers who happen to be in Copenhagen – or are looking for a decent reason to go – during this mid-fall (Oct 15th- Oct 24th), the Danish Architecture Center (DAC) will host the public event Hermès in the Making. A rare chance to meet artisans from different métiers of the house of Hermès and see them use their tools and demonstrate their expertise.