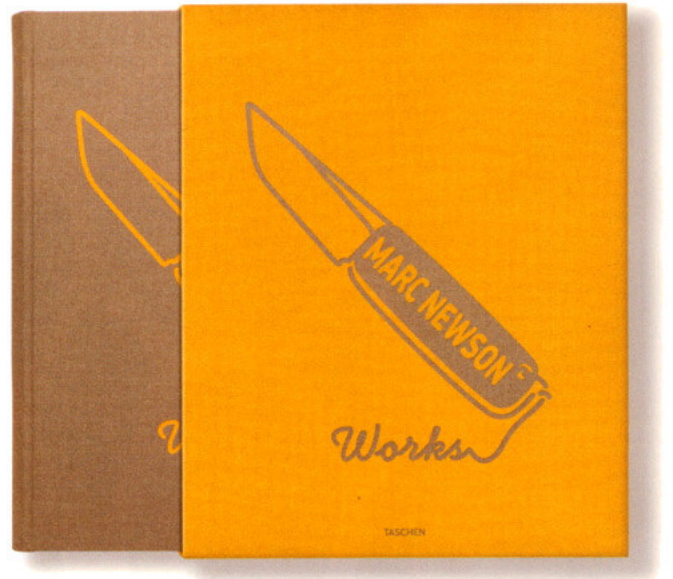
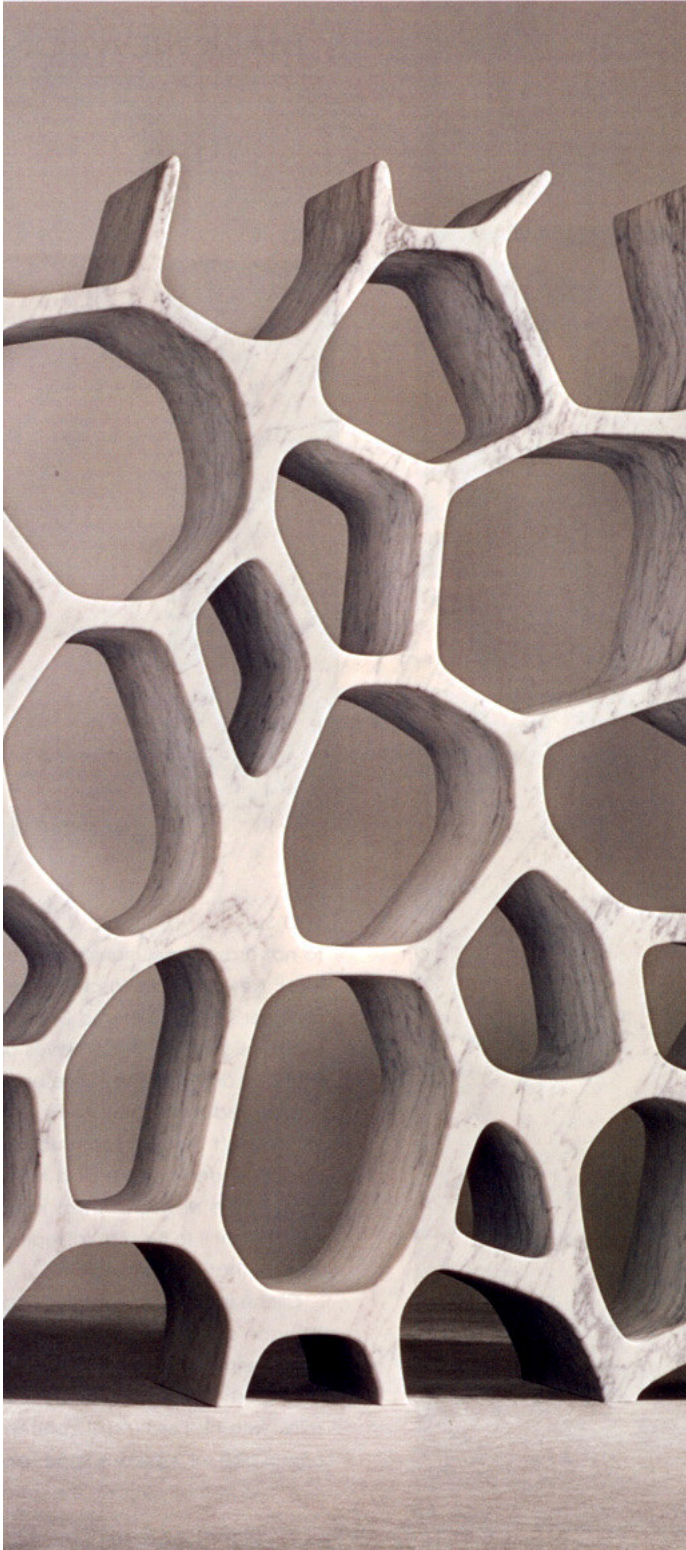


EXPOSITION

MARK NEWSON: MAN IN SPACE

TEXT: MICHAEL SLENSKE



**YOU SHOULDN'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER. BUT IT'S HARD** to not draw conclusions about the new 610-page design tome Marc Newson from Taschen. The bladed yellow graphic of the designer's \$7,500 Sintered Damask Knife all but screams: Expect sharp insights into the archives of a cutting-edge designer. Do that. Just don't ask the Aussie-born, London-based Newson about any implied symbolism.

"I haven't thought too much about what people might think and the connotations of a knife, but I'm not too concerned, really," says Newson. "I was just happy to find a cover I liked. I didn't want it to be a literal representation of anything that's well known. That's instantly cliché.

Cliché is all but a foreign concept to anyone who's followed Newson's career over the past quarter century. Whether it's hammering—and riveting—sheet aluminum for months into his auction-shattering Lockheed Lounge, upending Detroit's group think with his Ford 021C concept car, or intuiting optimal sub-orbital digs for Astrium's Spaceplane, this self-described "gun for hire" is constantly shifting the paradigm.

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"The interesting thing is that almost every company that I work with has an in-house design capability. They don't need me," admits Newson, who's revamped everything from Qantas A380s and Dom Pérignon bottles to G-Star jeans and the new Pentax K-01 digicam in recent years. "But I guess they come to me because they want to experience a different way of working."

That work style has always been hard-charging and hands-on, as evidenced in the book's exploration into Newson's childhood proclivity for dismantling "bilycarts" and retrofitting his uncle's wristwatch components, all before disrupting the jewelry department at Sydney College of the Arts with his furniture-esque *Walking Stick Bracelet* and *Spindly Chair*. From there, Newson details the \$10,000 Australian Crafts Council grant that not only allowed him to pay off debts (and buy new clothes) but fund his calling card *Seating for Six* exhibition, which featured his iconic LC1 chaise, the only piece that sold—for a paltry \$3,000 AUD to the Art Gallery of South Australia. Though he's since bought them all back, Newson says, "I had no idea that one day they would be valuable. I was young and traveling, and I couldn't keep all of this stuff. I wanted to move."

Initially, that meant moving to Japan with his then-girlfriend, who introduced him to the owner of Idée (for whom he would later make his neoprene wrapped Embryo chair). While camping in her apartment he crafted the mold for his Pod of Drawers in a tent, in the rain, with hair dryers to heat the fiberglass.

"I'd absolutely love to return to that way of working, but the reality is I just don't have time. I can do ten projects now in the time it took me to do one," laments Newson. "I'm running a business now, so I'm not able to just go and mess around in my shop, which is really what I'd love to be doing."

Until that day comes, his impressive balance of art and commerce will have to suffice. With sketches, exhaustive interviews and lush Struth-ian design photos, he leads us through the breadth of his various Qantas interiors and the overhaul of Riva's classic Aquariva speedboat via phenolic composite paneling, gauges made from his art-collector-coveted Ikepod watches, and neo-retro turquoise seating. Meanwhile, Newson's electroform nickel Random Pak chairs take an in-studio-situ perspective as they succeed (and fail) en route to the gallery floor at Gagolian.

In addition to spying his chock-a-block sketch books from nearly every project—after all, Newson pitched the 021C to Ford's J Mays with a single three-box study on paper—the designer explores "the good, the bad and the ugly" of his Unrealized Projects. Unlike his Kelvin 40 concept jet, which was a passion project for the

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aviation-obsessed Newson, these are objects commissioned by (or pitched to) commercial and municipal clients—a prototype torch for the Sydney Olympics; a briefcase hybrid for Bally, among others— that never went into production.

"I thought it would be interesting for people to witness the amount of work that goes into something and that basically just kind of vaporizes," says Newson. "I'm sure younger designers look at what I do and think my life is a bed of roses and everything happens exactly the way that I want it to, but it's really not the case."

What does materialize throughout the book — and Newson's work — is an increasing fascination with new technologies, whether that means decoding surfboard designers' "genetic" understanding of hydrodynamics or the modern marvels coming from the DARPA labs.

"What fascinates me about things like drones is the technology," he says. "It's wonderful that great things come of technology that are not necessarily created for ethical reasons."

One area Newson seems more circumspect about is proper interior design. Though he's creating the visual language for all the Qantas lounges as the airline's creative director, and his original design of Lever House is widely considered a modern masterpiece, Newson is disappointed by the regression of contemporary architecture trades over the past century. As a result, "the majority of every project is a prototype," he reasons. "So you can't ever really achieve the level of perfection as I do when I'm designing a product."

Perfection may sooner be achieved in space, should he ever get into orbit. Though the Russian Space Agency has invited him to three shuttle launches, even this rock-star designer can't yet procure the multi-millions for a seat.

"Maybe I can get sponsored by Discovery Channel," he jokes. "That would be kind of fun." Is Marc Newson: Man in Space the next frontier in the reality TV cosmos?

"It would be the ultimate reality show, wouldn't it?" ■