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LESSONS IN LOOKING GOOD

FOUR BRANDS REVEAL THEIR LOVE AFFAIR WITH BEAUTIFUL THINGS

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Four different brands, four different design philosophies. But it's probably safe to say that fabric house Pierre Frey, skincare brand Malin + Goetz, tableware expert Ekobe and bathroom fittings specialist Grohe have a lot more in common. The movers and shakers behind them were all recently in town and shared with us how design and creativity have made their brands stand out from the pack.

1 BATHROOM TALK
Paul Flowers, Senior Vice President of Design, Grohe

Faucets, sinks and showerheads aren't always the sexiest items in a house. But the recently-opened Grohe Spa Boutique at Marina Square has some impressive bathroom fixtures. The German brand has gone from being a bathroom fittings company to a design force, thanks to the 40-year-old Flowers, who has repositioned and reinvigorated the design department since joining in 2005. Products such as the Grohe Ondus showerhead and the Grohe F-digital Controller, a wireless



Who said shower heads aren't sexy? Grohe Spa proves otherwise.



Paul Flowers.

temperature controller, have won the much coveted Red Dot Awards, and the team won the Red Dot Design Team Of The Year 2011/2012 last year at Essen, Germany, to boot.

What was it like winning the Design Team award?

Paul Flowers: It is something very special because, unlike a design award, you can't apply for it. This is something bestowed upon you. Lots of big companies like Apple, BMW and Audi have won, but up until Grohe, no company this small — and nobody in the sanitary industry — had.

What is the creative process at Grohe like?

My team in Germany is very diverse, with people from different countries, different age groups, different genders. Everything we do, we learn together as a team. I think that

the whole concept of design, and creativity is you must improve constantly, you must get better. We should watch more, listen more and talk less. I train all my team members to watch all the details in life. I think all of the answers to creating the best products are really in front of us.

How do you see bathroom design and bathroom fittings evolving?

People are according more time to the bathroom and the products that they choose. The bathroom is the last personal sanctuary in your home. You can lock yourself away and take personal time. In showers, we're introducing speakers for audio therapy, as well as RGB lights or aromatherapy. In the morning, you may have a shower in a blue environment to invigorate and wake you up, and in the evening where you want to calm down and relax, you introduce tones of red, which are

warm and relaxing. We are looking now at how products can change your state of mind.

2 FABRIC GURU
Matthieu Frey, Group Representative Asia Pacific, Pierre Frey

It's a feat that a highly successful company like Pierre Frey, the French luxury design house specialising in wallpapers and fabrics, has remained staunchly family-owned for three generations. "My grandfather started the company in 1935, my father is now doing all the designs. My two brothers and me are handling different aspects of the business," said Singapore-based Matthieu Frey, who's in charge of the Asia-Pacific market.

Part of the job includes showing up for design exhibitions like the inaugural 100% Design Singapore, which the 31-year-old described as "very satisfying", citing Singapore as a big design hub in Asia.

How has the growing Asia-Pacific market influenced Pierre Frey?

The Asia-Pacific market is so big and diverse. Our first two markets were Australia and Japan, and their tastes are different from each other. And (from) our later markets like China. The Asia-Pacific is now ready for interior decoration. The people here have a passion for it and they want to understand French interiors. And we are the only fabric house to weave our fabrics in France. Clients love that we're a family-owned business. When we sell them a fabric, they know it's from us. We weave it ourselves.

Is it tough to remain a family-owned business in this industry?

It's a struggle everyday. We had offers, but my father wants us to be independent. Our strength is controlling the business and design. Being family-owned gives us the power of decision-making. We can choose who we want to work with, collaborate with anyone, from artists to luxury brands like Hermes.



Gaya print chair.

Who comes up with the fabric designs and chooses who to work with?

My father is the eye of the company. He started at 18 with my grandfather, and was made head of design at 80. He gets ideas everywhere: From travel to the art he's buying. For example, our Gaya fabric for this year was actually inspired by a set of paintings he bought from an old man when he was in Bangalore. Every Pierre Frey fabric has a story — there is a direct source of inspiration. As for collaborations, we have built up relationships with designers and artists — the recent Andrea Putnam collaboration came about when the Putnam studio came to us (because) they liked that we still weave our fabrics in France.

3 IT'S SKIN DEEP
Andrew Goetz and Matthew Malin, founders of Malin + Goetz

When cutting-edge hotels around the world like The Mondrian, Ace Hotel in New York and Ovolo 2AR in Hong Kong start stocking up on your products, you know you have something terrific on your hands.

But it wasn't a free ride for Andrew Goetz and Matthew Malin as the founders of the New York-based skincare company explained when they dropped by to promote a new product developed with body waxing concept store Strip.

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Founders of Malin + Goetz, Andrew Goetz (left) and Matthew Malin. PHOTO: HOWARD FONG

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