newdesign

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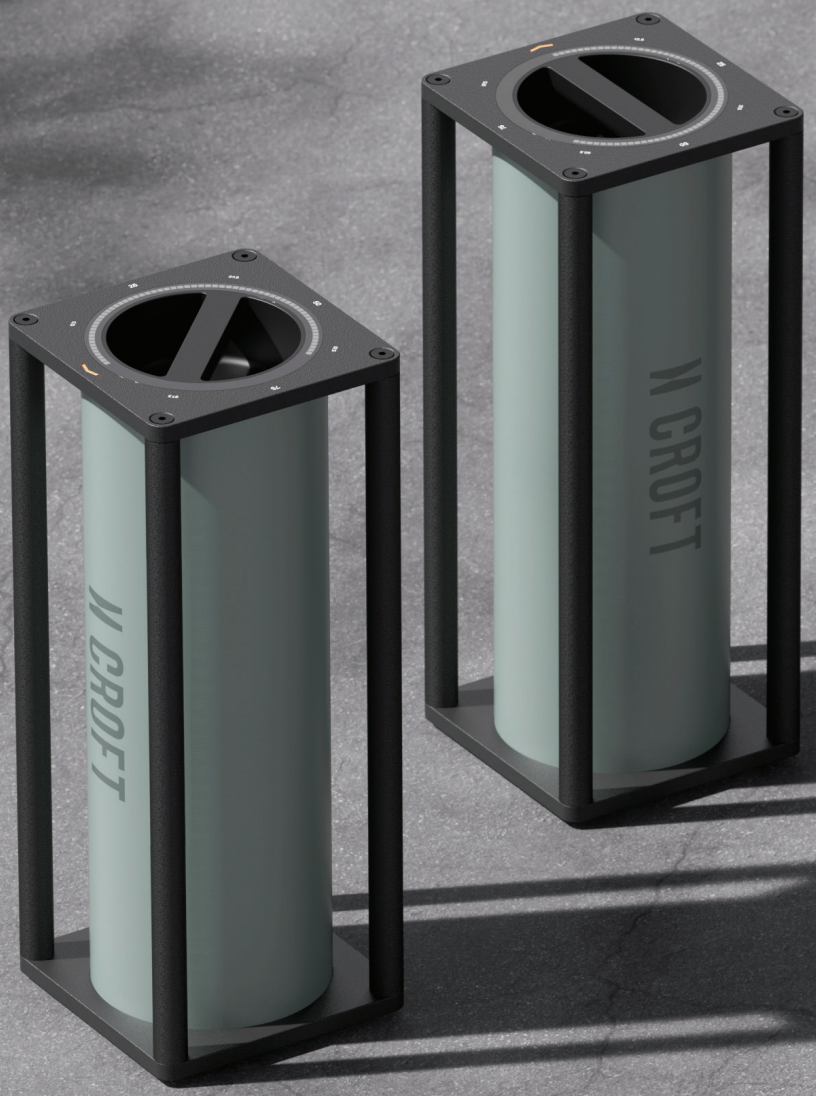
Power for the people



Wax lyrical
Candle holder

Tunnel vision
Le Shuttle branding

Growth chart
Creating success

Books | Exhibitions | Brand | Briefcase

Profile

Opposite page | Jim Rokos. Photo credit: James Hopkirk

Different angles

Founded by designer & artist **Jim Rokos** in 2012, the practice is fascinated with glass, producing a range of vases, candleholders and decanters and creates intriguing art pieces that aestheticise their own utility and express their personalities by coming to life in use

Jim Rokos trained in industrial design at Central Saint Martins. Several years after graduating he founded ROKOS so that he could bring his inventive ideas to life.

Rokos creates objects that sit in the intersection between industry and craft - each is made with the utmost care and are of exceptional quality, made without compromise at any stage of the process, from design to making.

new design: What is your design background and career to date?

Jim Rokos: As a child I would make candles out of the wax that Babybel cheese was packed in. It is a soft wax that can be warmed and formed by hand. The red wax needs to be pressed into the string that will be the wick before it is padded with more wax to form the candle. As a dyslexic child, my strengths lay in visual and 3D thinking, so I naturally took a creative route through education.

I started my career as a modelmaker in the film industry. One of my first jobs was as a junior modelmaker on the Muppet Treasure Island. I continued modelmaking for some years, but it was frustrating that, as a modelmaker, you would mostly build to drawings, rather than more directly use imagination.

I went on to work as a photographic assistant for some years, while simultaneously inventing, patenting and prototyping a cat food bowl with a lid and a pedal.

It worked like a pedal-bin – the cat would press the pedal to raise the lid so that it could feed. The bowl's primary function was to keep flies out, that can lay eggs in wet food and transmit disease to a cat. Prototypes of the bowl were featured in newdesign in 2001 and the bowl won on the pilot of the BBC's Best Inventions TV show. Although more than 50 thousand bowls were sold, the company Pedalbowl Products Ltd. never went into profit before the company closed when the factory in China lost part of the tooling.

I then went back into working on films and TV including Tomb Raider and Band of Brothers, which paid off the costs of developing the bowl.

I took some work as a film extra before trying out teaching for a year as an assistant at a special needs school in London. I used to tell the kids not to worry about what everyone else was doing and to 'focus on your own work'. Now I feel that it is the same with trends. By not following trend, it is more likely that work can be 'timeless'. For me, original ideas are more important than trend. The designers who make ground breaking work are the ones who inform the future trends. If I was to teach, I needed a degree and wanting to keep my options open, I embarked on the two-year master's in industrial design at Central Saint Martins. Although I did not have a BA degree, I think that I was accepted onto the MA on the back of the cat food bowl. I did however find that I had many gaps in my knowledge, including not being able to use photoshop, Illustrator or the available 3D software. I had made technical drawings and models for the cat bowl by hand.

After graduating, I was clear that I wanted to work in design rather than teach. However, I struggled to gain employment.

Eventually I gained internships with poetic lighting designer Michael Anastassiades (Waterloo) and later the stainless-steel manufacturer Artdinox (Delhi).

Artdinox explained that a fruit bowl idea that I had developed would not be commercial because of the high amount of work involved to make it. They let me keep my design so I developed the idea and took it to the buyer at Conran. He seemed to like the bowl and explained that a 'vendor' should supply more than one item. So, thinking it would be easy, I started the ROKOS brand to create a range of objects… it is not easy.

Below | 13° 60° 104° Decanter.
Opposite page | 22° 36° 48° Bowl. Photo credit: John R Ward
| GAUGE vase: Photo credit: John R Ward
| 22° 36° 48° Bowl

new design: Some background on your work and projects?
Jim Rokos: I am fascinated with glass, producing a range of vases, candleholders and decanters.

It first started with the 22˚ 36˚ 48˚ (bowl). It is expressive in that it can sit at the three different angles which it is named after. After this, one idea led to another, like passing on the baton in a relay race. Thinking what else could sit at three angles, I developed the 13˚ 60˚ 104˚ (wine decanter). As you drink, it can be lent over, as though it is getting drunk. The decanter won the Red Dot Design Award.

The decanter suggested a challenge: can a similar container be made that leans over on its own, as the liquid level inside reduces? This was answered by the Gauge vase which also comes to life in use. The weight of the water holds the vase upright on its spherical base, so as the flower opens it draws water from the base which causes the vase to lean over, as though wilting. The Gauge won the German Design Award. I can start by making sketches which develop over a long period of time. When they are shapes with no concept, I will continue drawing. When I come back to a sketch later on, it gives a different perspective - a bit like looking at someone else's drawing. When a shape has developed and possesses an idea that is logical and suggests a story, I can see its potential. I need to have a sample made to see if it can work. I had learned technical hand drawing when working in the art departments on films and now my drawings can be a drawing like that which is given to a glass blower to build from. An advantage of the hand drawing is that you can often work full size. If the prototype works, I start drawing in 3D Rhino so that a precise drawing can be easily modified and saved. I print out sections of the drawing to assemble so that they can be attached to the wall and considered full size. If it is a complex organic shape, I give the drawing to a designer who is specialised in 3D computer drawing.

new design: What is the biggest challenge in your work?
Jim Rokos: The biggest challenge by far has been finding a maker who delivers an exceptional quality of work in small numbers at a price that is commercial. I have now found such a maker in borosilicate.

Profile

Below and opposite | ≤231 MIN candleholder. Photo credit: John R Ward

new design: Your most recent piece is a floating candle holder – or time piece – where the duration of the candle's burn time may be preset by measuring the amount of water contained .Could you provide some background on the project?

Jim Rokos: I was watching the film 'The Favorite' in the cinema and because of all the candle lighting in the film I started daydreaming about designing a candleholder. Borosilicate is used to build chemistry apparatus because it is excellent at withstanding high or fast changes in temperature, so the material was ideal to contain fire. The day before lockdown, I bought some church pillar candles. I discovered that they would float in water, so started making sketches for a glass holder which would contain water. The glass needed to hold the candle upright, otherwise it would float on its side. I had the idea that the candle could release itself from the constraint and so capsize and extinguish itself. When I realised that the amount of water contained would determine the moment of release, the form of the shape almost took care of itself.

A decorative object led by science, the candleholder allows the user to determine the burn time by the amount of water contained in the holder.

The invention consists of a floating candle, the lower part of which is initially constrained so that it will burn at the vertical angle. As the candle gets shorter its bottom end rises upwards to the point that the constraint is no longer effective and the candle revolves over onto its side, extinguishing itself in the water. For less burn time, add more water.

Named after its maximum approximate burn time of 231 minutes, the ≲ 231 MIN is formed from the highest-quality, borosilicate glass, mouth-blown on a lathe using the same processes that create laboratory glassware.

Candle waste is minimised and there is a reduced fire risk as a result of the self-extinguishing feature. Its playful nature also lends itself well to dinner parties where the burn time can signify the end of the event and encourage guests to depart.

The design can also double-up as a vase.

Measuring 32cm in height by 18cm in diameter, the hand-crafted ≲ 231 MIN weighs between 0.3 and 0.4kg. The design is available in clear, amber, white and ribbed glass.

new design: What are the design projects under way at the moment and planned for the future?

Jim Rokos: I am currently working on a wine glass that may accompany the 13˚ 60˚ 104˚ decanter. Also a candleholder with a similar principle to the ≲ 231 MIN, however it will not be possible to adjust the burn time – this one will be suitable for restaurant dining because the flame cover will be small and not block the diners' view of each other. |

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