



## LEADING LIGHT

*Álvaro Catalán de Ocón shines a light on artisan skills*

So much plastic waste is contaminating our oceans that it forms a 'seventh continent' the size of mainland Spain. This is a particular issue in tropical countries where rain washes this pollution into the rivers. To address the problem, Álvaro Catalán de Ocón, a product designer based in Madrid, developed a process that gives pollutant waste a purposeful second life. Working with indigenous artisans, PET Lamp's design uses intricate weaving techniques to create a product which raises awareness about PET plastic bottle waste.

Catalán de Ocón studied product design at the Instituto Europeo di Design in Milan before graduating from Central Saint Martins in 2004. His early designs were an immediate success with his university thesis project, Glow Brick, still being produced today by Suck-UK. After graduation, Catalán de Ocón set up his own studio in Madrid to provide the space and facilities to develop and market his innovative designs. The recognition Catalán de Ocón received for his work solidified his reputation as a socially conscious and materially focussed product designer.

In 2010, Hélène Le Drogou, a psychologist and activist, invited a group of professionals from varied backgrounds—including Catalán de Ocón—to accompany her on a trip to Colombia. The cohort was asked to consider how further degradation of the increasingly polluted Colombian Amazon river, a major source of ocean pollution, could be prevented. PET plastic waste is a major contributor to the pollution of the Amazon. PET (polyethylene terephthalate, a form of polyester) is one of the most popular consumer pack types worldwide. Its economical and durable properties make it perfect as a food or drink container, particularly as a water bottle. This is, however, a double-edged sword: its widespread use increases the risk of incorrect disposal and, in places such as Colombia, there are inadequate resources to manage appropriate collection and recycling. Focussing on PET plastic bottle waste, Catalán de Ocón conceived his design ideas for the PET Lamp.

The original concept was inspired by the Chasen, a bamboo whisk used in traditional Japanese tea ceremonies. Catalán de Ocón was drawn to the Chasen for its simple yet sophisticated design. ▶





