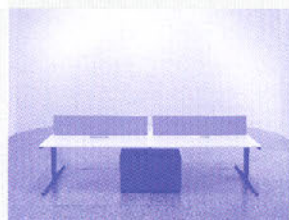
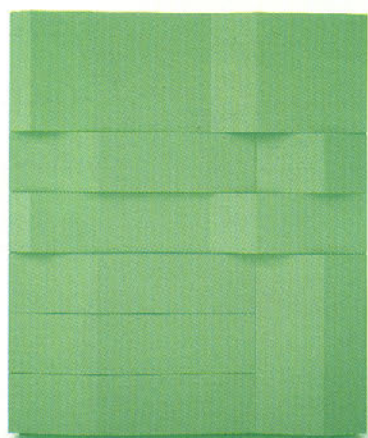






# SIMPLY STYLISH



DOMINIC LUTYENS VISITS  
MARIO RUIZ IN HIS  
BARCELONA STUDIO TO  
FIND OUT WHAT MAKES  
ONE OF SPAIN'S HOTTEST  
DESIGNERS TICK





The layout and look of the studio of internationally-renowned designer Mario Ruiz alone suggest that his designs are cutting-edge, as they indeed are. Although it occupies a belle époque-style building (complete with concierge and stately staircase) just off Barcelona's elegant shopping drag, Avinguda Diagonal, Ruiz's studio, which he designed, is distinctly 21st-century. Its interior is clean-cut, ultra-modern, with not a rococo cornice in sight. Walls are painted simply in white or charcoal grey. Design magazines such as *Wallpaper\** and *Architectural Digest* are stacked on pristine white enamel shelves in the hallway. Ruiz and his team of full-time employees (four people altogether) design with computers, but tellingly a life-size model of a chair stands on one table: Ruiz's approach is also physical and hands-on, as respectful of craft as it is reliant on technology.



Born in Alicante on Spain's east coast in 1965, Ruiz studied industrial design at Elisava Design School in Barcelona, where he has been based ever since. He began designing in 1988, initially focusing on industrial design and electronic goods — state-of-the-art TVs, phones, cars, ovens and technical office furniture. In 2003, he branched out into domestic furniture, lighting and bathroom fittings. His clients range from Spanish companies including Gandía Blasco, Metalarte, Sellex, Joquer, Dona Living, Viccarbe and Vieta, to Italian companies Lapalma and Citterio, and US office furniture firms Steelcase, Haworth and Hbf. Ruiz has a huge workload but he knows how to enjoy himself — when he can make the time: we meet just as city-wide electro festival Sonar, which he loves, is about to kick off. Though, alas, he tells me that this year he is too busy to attend.

A thoughtful designer, Ruiz describes himself as 'introverted and shy'. Just as he is no attention-seeker, so his designs, while looking undoubtedly futuristic in their streamlined forms and predilection for cool neutrals like white and silver, are understated. Yet the soft-spoken Ruiz has strong views as to what makes his work inventive. For starters, aesthetic innovation, he says emphatically, is a red herring: 'I don't believe in it. I don't think it's even ethical. Innovation is about solving problems, about improving the functionality or technology of an object. The form an object takes is the direct result of that.'

But Ruiz's definition of cutting-edge design is intriguingly paradoxical. A design, he believes, is not just ground-breaking for pushing boundaries when launched but for standing the test of time. 'With medicine, for example, you know immediately if it represents an advance in science. But with design, the question is, "Will it still be useful, desirable in years to come, regardless of

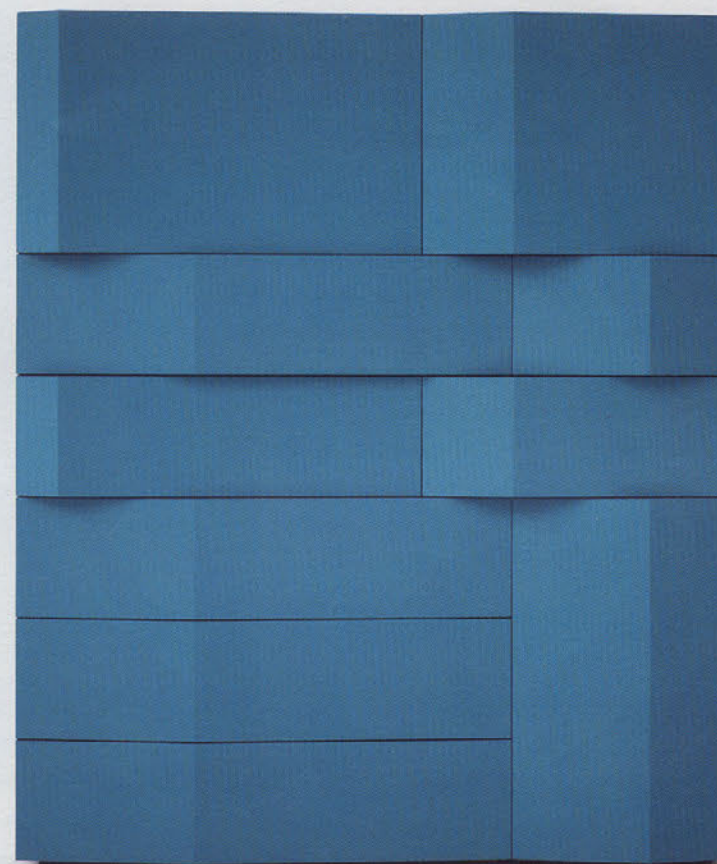
competition from other products constantly flooding the market?"' A good example of the latter, he says, is his taxi meter, Taximetro, of 1999, for the company Taxitronic. 'It's lasted all these years and is still in high demand,' he says. 'Taxi drivers in New York use them, and millions of them have sold around the world.'

Ruiz, who picked up a Wallpaper\* Design Award in 2008, eschews flamboyance for its own sake, favouring instead the creation of 'honest goods'. 'I don't want to make products that attract attention by their appearance but which work well because they've been thought through,' explains Ruiz, whose products are regularly launched at such prestigious events as the Milan Furniture Fair, Neocon in Chicago and Light+Building in Frankfurt. 'My highest aspiration is to make products as part of an intelligent project, objects which last a long time.' Ruiz might not like to dwell on aesthetics, but his products look, relatively speaking, timeless; a result surely of the importance he places on functionality.

Indeed, for Ruiz form most definitely follows function. He is particularly enthusiastic about his brand new, technologically-audacious bent plywood sofa for Lapalma. 'It's made of the longest piece of plywood in the world,' he says with



TEQUILA by  
Mario Ruiz for  
Metalarte



PLAY by  
Mario Ruiz for  
Dona Living

Other striking Ruiz designs include his pared-down Tequila wall lights for Metalarte, and multi-faceted Play storage systems for Dona Living.

Despite the primacy of function over form in Ruiz's designs, these are always good-looking. Take his Play out-

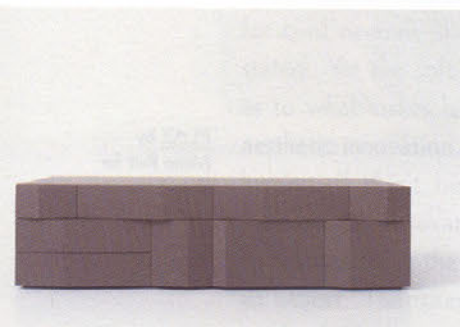
'Innovation is about solving problems, about improving the functionality or technology of an object. The form an object takes is the direct result of that.' MARIO RUIZ



obvious pride. For this project, Ruiz experimented with bending plywood in multiple directions in such a way that it didn't break. And he pulled this off at his first attempt, thereby taking the manipulation of bent plywood (by the likes of Alvar Aalto) to another level.

Interestingly, however, he doesn't fetishise technology for its own sake, or prioritise it over manual ways of designing: the starting point for every design is a hand-drawn sketch. This in no way compromises the fact that he creates avant-garde designs. He believes that one of his most ground-breaking pieces is his SoLine table-top speaker for Barcelona-based Vieta. 'What makes it particularly innovative is that it's battery-powered and cordless, making it suitable for indoor and outdoor use.' You could be forgiven for thinking that the intriguing form of this unconventional, snow-white, boxy speaker is driven by a love of a retro-futuristic aesthetic: with its bulbous protrusion erupting at its centre, it wouldn't have looked out of place in the movie 2001: A Space Odyssey. But the form of this quirky bubble was purely expedient. 'An inverted speaker is incorporated into the top so, as the sound travels down, the bubble under it evenly disperses the noise,' says Ruiz. 'The bubble shape was the best solution for dispersing the sound. The speaker is encased and inverted to minimise dust getting into it.'

PLAY by Mario Ruiz for Dona Living



FLAT by M. Ruiz for Gandía Blasco



Other striking Ruiz designs include his pared-down Tequila wall lights for Metalarte, and multi-faceted Play storage systems for Dona Living.

Despite the primacy of function over form in Ruiz's designs, these are always good-looking. Take his Flat outdoor furniture collection for Gandía Blasco, which won a Red Dot design award this year. In the hands of Ruiz, even such normally dreary items as coffee-makers, phones and ovens are supremely elegant. Envy the office worker, then, who can make a coffee or a phone call using one of Ruiz's crisply designed products.

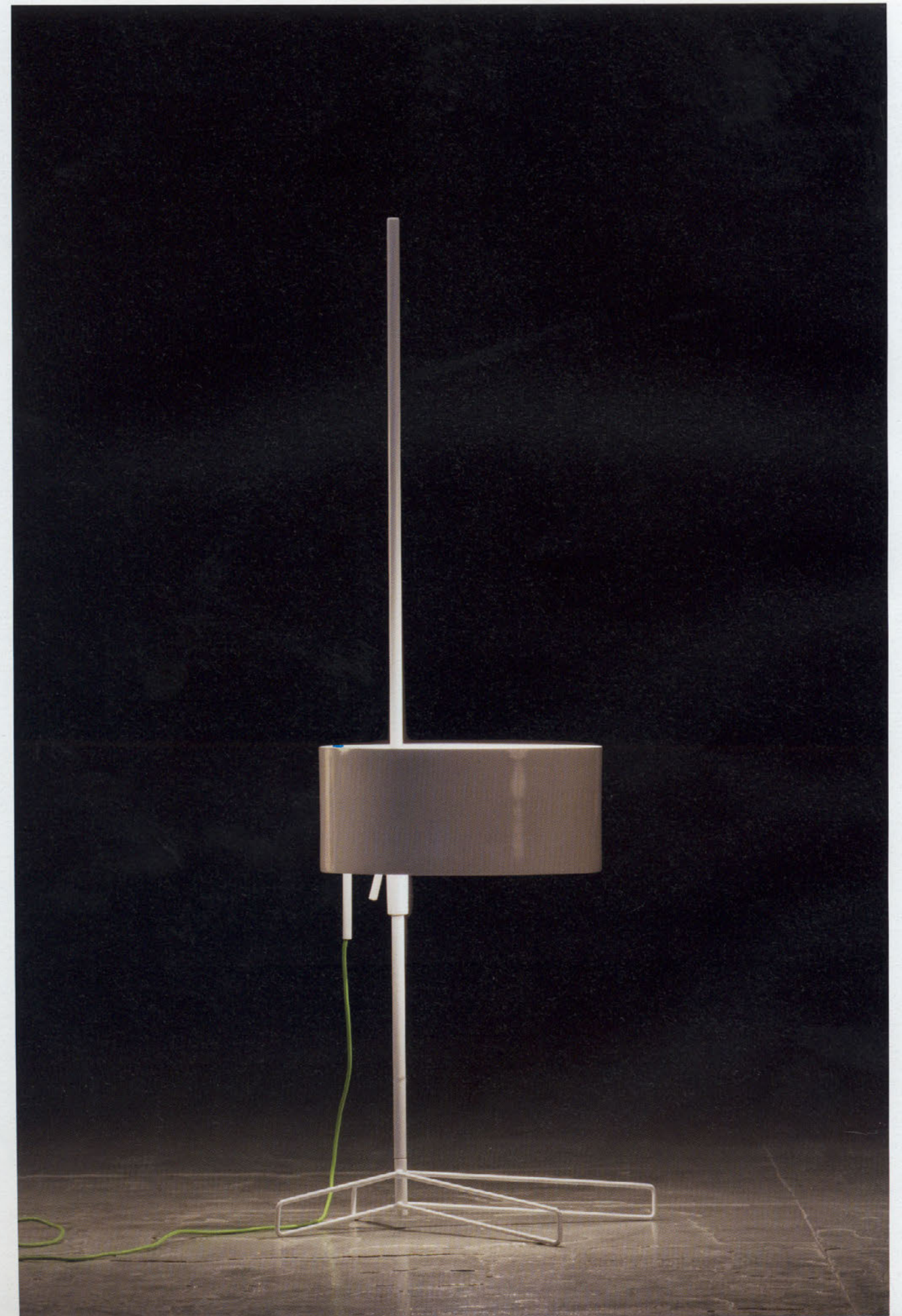
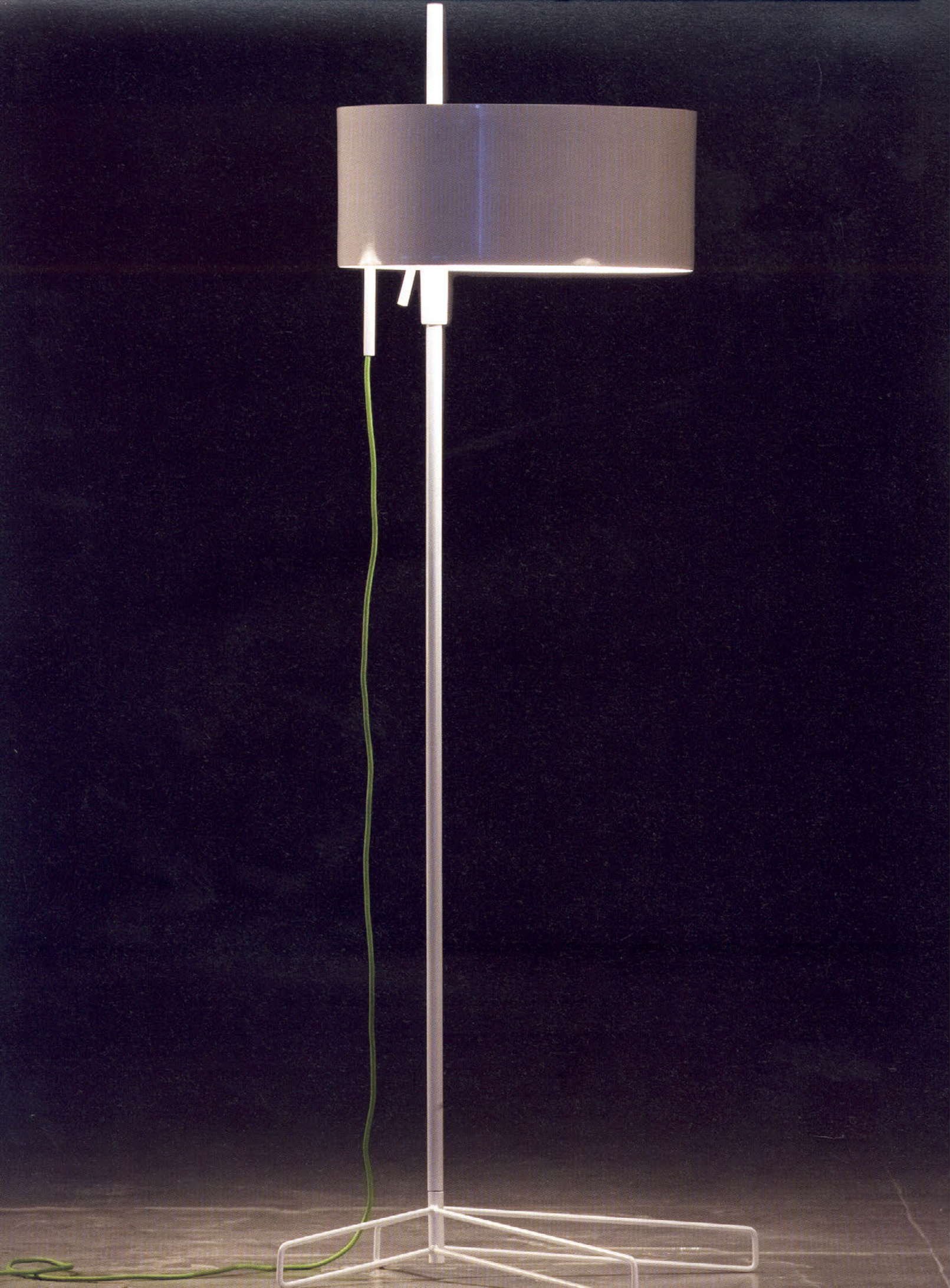


TIME

by MARIO RUIZ for JOQUER











## THE EDIT



IN THIS ISSUE, WE HAVE PUT A SPOTLIGHT ON THE CREATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPAIN'S TOP MANUFACTURERS AND THEIR DESIGNERS. HERE, EMILIO PIMENTEL-REID, SHOPPING EDITOR AT ELLE DECORATION UK, HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF THE BEST PIECES TO COME OUT OF THE COUNTRY'S DESIGN COMPANIES



