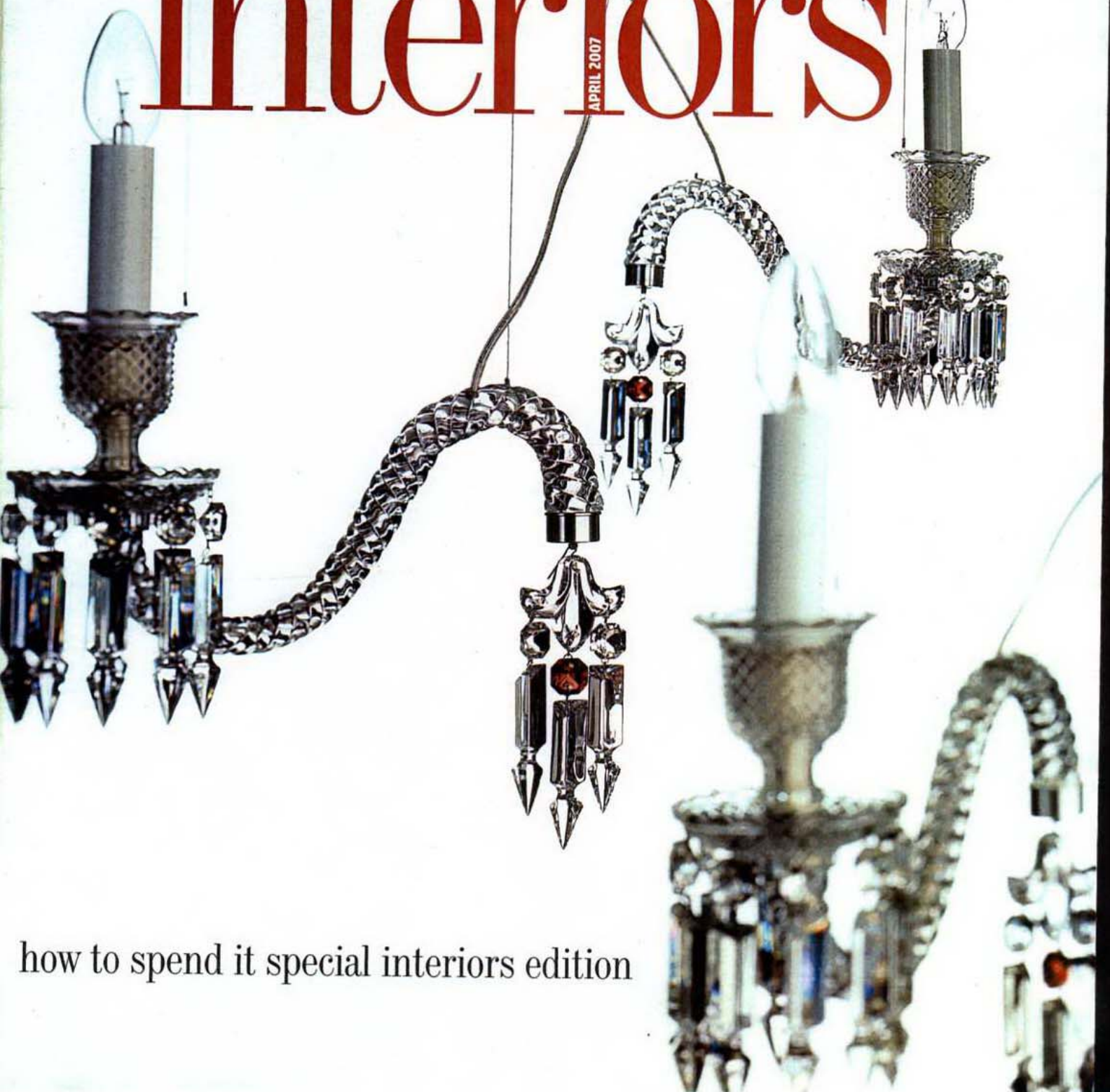


FINANCIAL TIMES

# superior interiors

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how to spend it special interiors edition

Exuberant and exploratory, a new generation of Spanish designers is taking the world by surprise, reports Nicole Swengley.

# GROOVE ARMADA

**H**ot on the heels of the maverick Spanish designer Jaime Hayón, whose theatrical exuberance (baroque bathrooms, quirky ceramics and cabinets with 12 different-shaped legs) has taken the design world by storm, comes a new wave of young Spanish designers who believe in taking an even more experimental approach to home furnishings.

Who, you might think, would offer house space to a chair built from the fibrous husk of coconuts (PussyLawn chair, £600) or a lamp made entirely of snippets of Velcro (Face to Face, £350)? Yet both designs are generating orders from homeowners for Valencia-based designer Luis Eslava. London's Design Museum displayed the lamp during a three-month installation earlier this year, while the recyclable coconut fibre chair is currently starring in a worldwide design tour, 300% Spanish Design.

Or what about a sail-like chair made from folded polypropylene that's playfully called Marilyn, I Can See Your Knickers? As well as proving commercially viable for Spanish partnership El Ultimo Grito, this offbeat design was recently acquired for the V&A Museum's permanent collection.

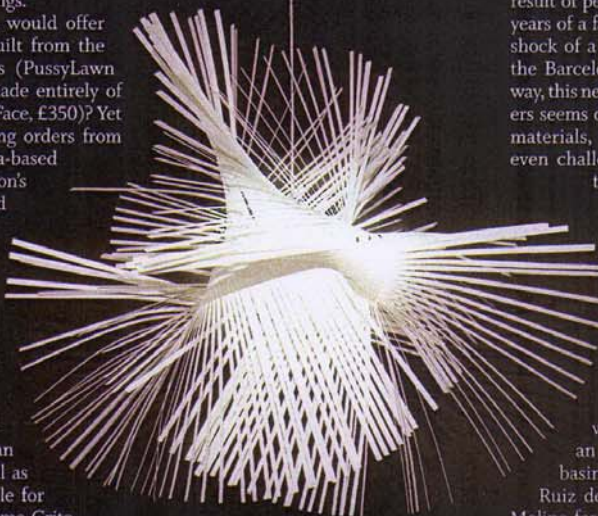
"Spanish design is really taking off because the new, younger designers are very exploratory – their ideas have a freshness and energy," says Zeev Aram, owner of the London contemporary furniture store Aram, which recently staged a well-attended show by Jaime Hayón and a group exhibition highlighting work by

relatively unknown young Spanish designers. Modern furniture retailer Noel Hennessy even suggests: "Spanish designers could well take over from the Italians within the next decade because their work is more exuberant and decorative than the pared-down Italian aesthetic and it's hitting the spot with homeowners."

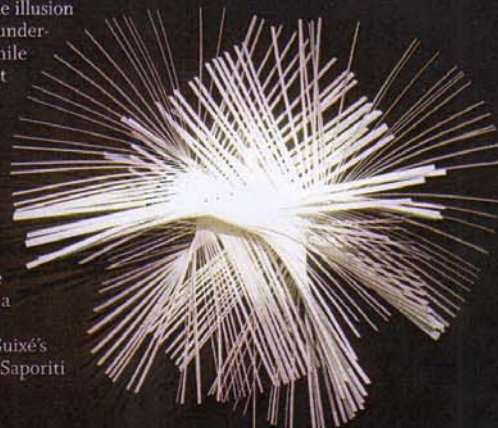
Perhaps this burst of creativity is the result of pent-up energies repressed by 40 years of a fascist dictatorship, or the after-shock of a design explosion surrounding the Barcelona Olympics in 1992. Either way, this new generation of Spanish designers seems determined to experiment with materials, explore new techniques and even challenge received opinions about the way we use our furnishings.

Redefining familiar concepts is a recurring theme among the younger Spanish designers. Dipping your toes into the frondy, greeny-blue felt strips of Seagrass, a hand-loomed wool rug designed by Nani Marquina (from £1,665), creates the illusion of paddling in an underwater rock pool; while an innovative compact basin (£314), by Martín Ruiz de Azúa and Gerard Moline for Spanish bathroom manufacturer Cosmic, which combines high-tech materials (roto-moulded polypropylene) with low-tech delivery (a garden hosepipe, £172, replaces a conventional tap), would make a practical yet fun addition to a laundry room or outhouse.

Or how about using Martí Guixé's doughnut-like Big Wheel for Saporiti



Main picture: Mikado Light, hanging £425, standing £513, by Miguel Herranz for Luziferlamps. Inset: Virtual Shelf, about £55, by Díez + Díez Diseño for Miscellánia.



(from £4,075 to order) – a circular, leather-upholstered seat embracing an integral, steel-topped table – as a chic entertaining unit in the corner of a big open-plan living space; or Guixé's Galeria H<sub>2</sub>O chair (pictured overleaf, £788) which has a high, flared back, tiny legs and a very low seat on which he intends you to stack books in order to raise the seat height? Not everybody's cup of tea, perhaps – but established designer Tom Dixon argues the case for Guixé's work: "He thinks through how his designs fit into the contemporary world – he's not just making a conventional object."

Home furnishings designed by Roberto Feo and Rosario Hurtado, whose design company, El Ultimo Grito, is based in London, are similarly unconventional. The Good Morning Moneypenny coat rack (£15 to order) is made of rolled magazines in polypropylene, while their Make Believe project gives furniture a toy-like feel. Mico, for example, is a lightweight, rotation-moulded plastic sculptured seat-cum-table in kindergarten-cheerful colours that's equally suited to outside use when the sun shines (£136 through Magis).

El Ultimo Grito's combinations of materials are as quirky as their designs: polyurethane foam, cardboard and tape (Tape Chair, price on request); folded, wool-covered polypropylene (Marilyn, I Can See Your Knickers chair and barstool)

## "It's a personal exploration of ideas and materials rather than a response to what the market might want."

and a single curved stainless steel sheet (Grito pendant light for Mathmos, £45). Gareth Williams, a curator of 20th century and contemporary furniture at the V&A museum, which recently acquired these last two designs, is struck by the uncompromising nature of El Ultimo Grito: "They pursue their own particular vision rather than softening the designs for commercial reasons. It's a personal exploration of ideas and materials rather than a response to what the market might want." Yet far from alienating buyers, this approach clearly intrigues homeowners who are bored by what they see in the majority of furnishing stores.

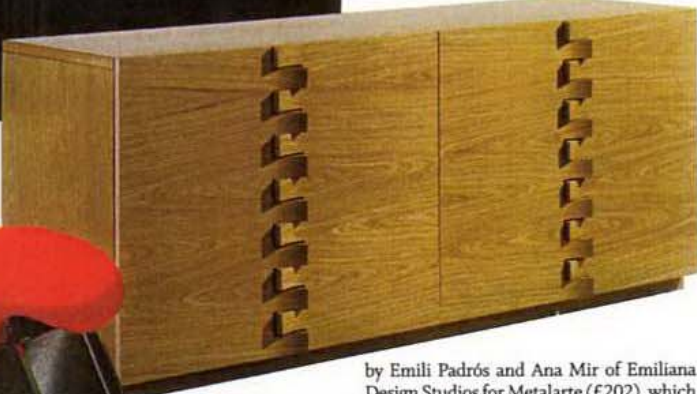
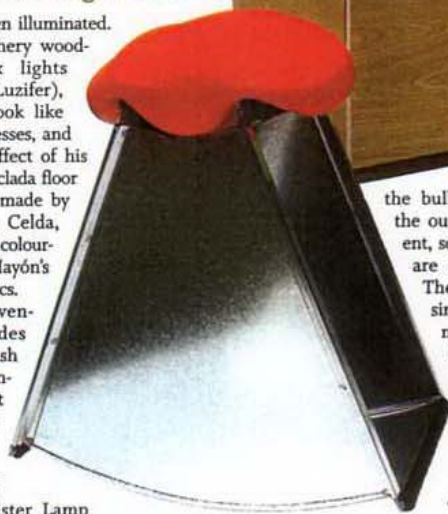
Such unorthodoxy can light the touchpaper for a cascade of brilliance, as seen in the Mikado lighting collection designed by Miguel Herranz for Luzifer (pictured on previous page, from £332). These sculptural, frothy designs look as dramatic switched off



as they do when illuminated. Herranz's feathery wood-veneer Sioux lights (from £194, Luzifer), designed to look like Indian headdresses, and the rainbow effect of his stacked-disc Ciclada floor lamp (£663), made by Manufacturas Celda, are as mad and colourful as Jaime Hayón's baroque ceramics.

The unconventional attitudes of other Spanish designers, meanwhile, result in flashes of whimsical humour. JM Ferrero of Estudihaac's Sister Lamp (pictured left, £160), with its nun's habit shade and crucifix light-pull, is typical of this Mediterranean playfulness, as is the Candela lamp by Juanico's Juan Benavente for Tronconi (about £224), whose top switch echoes a wick.

Ask Herranz how he sets about designing a product and the response is teasingly provocative. "My working method is both analytical and anarchic," he says. "My methodology is a lack of methodology." This maverick stance is also adopted by Jordi Llopis whose Baria wall light (£103), produced by Metalarte, employs two glass "skins". The inside one has an opal finish to diffuse



the bulb's light while the outer is transparent, so the two layers are clearly visible.

The lamp has a simple open/close mechanism to facilitate changing the bulb and cleaning both glass "skins". Why did Llopis take this approach? "Because I think it's important to advance ideas – to improve on objects already designed," he says.

It's a view echoed by Valencia-born, London-based Hector Serrano. "I try to create designs that people can relate to in a very human and emotional way by combining two apparently opposite concepts – innovation and familiarity," he explains. "The first one brings an exciting and unexpected element to the work and the second plays with memory." Serrano collaborated with cult Dutch manufacturer Droog on his Clothes Hanger Light (pictured overleaf, £109). You drape your shirt over its frame as a light shade,

Above, from top: **Voyeur Lamp, £700, by Hermé Ciscar and Mónica García for Lampister. Sideboard, £1,440, from the Zip collection by Hermé Ciscar and Mónica García for Requemu. Rocking Chair, £205, by Ana Mir of Emiliana Design Studio. Left: Sister Lamp, £160, by JM Ferrero for Estudihaac.**

hence the dual-purpose name. Just as jokey is Serrano's Captain Soap, manufactured by B-sign (£15 plus shipping from Vinçon). This polypropylene bathroom accessory is designed to keep soap and shampoo bottles afloat while you bathe, or if showering you can hang it on the taps to keep everything in reach. Two years ago he worked on a conceptual project called Netobjects – objects for the home that deliver digital information without the need for a computer, including a cuckoo clock that gives the news headlines every 15 minutes.

While Serrano is fascinated with new technology, other young Spanish designers offer a witty take on staple items of furniture. For example, the Virtual Shelf, designed by brothers Javier and José Luis Díez of the partnership Díez + Díez Diseño, is a vertical metal bookshelf that disappears from view when stacked with books (pictured on opening page, about £55).

Giving familiar furnishings an innovative new twist is all very well but the new ideas must work as well – if not better – than the originals. One particularly clever and effective idea is The Collector light, designed

by Emili Padrós and Ana Mir of Emiliana Design Studios for Metalarte (£202), which invites homeowners to store their favourite treasures inside a flask-shaped display case with a dimmable interior light. Another design that makes a virtue of simplicity while combining materials in an innovative way is the Ensombra garden parasol by Odos for Gandia Blasco (from £1,200). Made of galvanised steel with Formica strips which unfold around its central support like an Oriental fan, it's easy to use and looks incredibly smart.

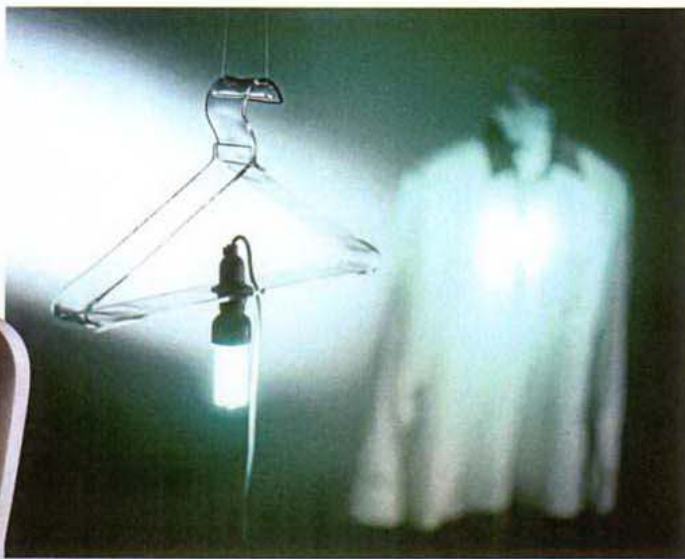
Encouraging homeowners to engage with their furnishings seems to be a driving concern for many young Spanish designers. Slate Boxes by Barcelona-based Curro Claret (in production next year) is a collection of black-painted cardboard storage boxes that can be marked in chalk to identify contents. "I enjoy designing objects made from modest, humble materials that can be changed by the user," he explains.

Some of the more user-friendly furnishings are coming from Emiliana Design Studio. These include the Vespa stool made from motorcycle saddles mounted on trestles (£271), the Flying Carpet, a curvy floor recliner (from £665 from Nani Marquina), the colourful, stacking, thimble-shaped Dedal stool (£180 from Punt Mobles) and a galvanised steel and polypropylene Rocking Chair (pictured centre, £205), which rocks laterally rather than forwards and back.

Sometimes the ideas have a simplicity that makes you wonder why no one else has

thought of them before. The award-winning Continua table, designed by Valencia-based partners Herme Ciscar and Mónica García for Martínez Otero, has a slim metal bar on which fittings, such as pen-holders, file-containers or lights, can be hung and a removable shelf. Another unfussy design from Herme y Mónica, as they call themselves, is Zip, a clean-lined furniture collection for Spanish manufacturer Requemu (from £1,440, side-board pictured on previous page). And when their bubble-shaped Voyeur (pictured on previous page, £700) and Damsom (£1,495) lights for Lampister were shown in a jewellery store in Valencia last autumn, the orders came pouring in. García explains that they simplify their designs in an effort to reach new conclusions: "If we let the nature of an object speak for itself, the end result is a calm, composed product with a high degree of subtlety."

And perhaps it's the simpler, more subtle Spanish designs that are most likely to appeal to homeowners and prove commercially successful. "We've always bought a lot of furniture from Spain for The Conran Shop from companies such as Punt Mobles because it's beautifully made and a good



alternative to Italian designs," says Sir Terence Conran. "I like its energy but I would prefer it

if the designers got a bit more serious. I worry that they are too concerned with fashion."

But Tom Dixon enjoys the playfulness: "They are poking fun at the pomposity of contemporary conceptual designs where

**Above: Clothes Hanger Light, £109, by Hector Serrano for Droog Designs. Left: Galeria H2O chair, £788, by Martí Guixé.**

objects are sometimes more like art pieces than practical furnishings."

Ask contemporary furniture retailers which designers will last the course besides the highly acclaimed Jaime Hayón and the majority cite Martí Guixé, Martín Ruiz de Azúa and El Último Grito. But Dixon refuses to hold a Spanish inquisition right now. "We should judge these designers in five years' time," Zeev Aram says. "But the omens are good. There's a lot of commitment here." ♦

#### THE SPANISH ACQUISITION

**Aram Store**, 110 Drury Lane, London WC2 (020-7557 7557; [www.aram.co.uk](http://www.aram.co.uk)). **Arrow**, 245-247 Cricklewood Broadway, London NW2 (020-8450 0000). **B-sign**, 003493-451 9607. **The Conran Shop**, [www.conran.com](http://www.conran.com). **CP Hart**, Newnham Terrace, London SE1 (020-7902 5250) and branches. **Curro Claret**, 003493-414 3069. **Diez + Diez Diseño**, see Miscellània. **Droog**, [www.droogdesign.nl](http://www.droogdesign.nl). **El Último Grito**, [www.elultimogrito.co.uk](http://www.elultimogrito.co.uk) and see Magis and Mathmos. **Emiliana Design Studio**, 003493-414 3480; [www.emiliana.com](http://www.emiliana.com) and see Metalarte, Nani Marquina and Punt Mobles. **Estudiac**, [www.estudiac.com](http://www.estudiac.com). **Hector Serrano**, [www.hectorserrano.com](http://www.hectorserrano.com) and see B-sign, Droog and Vinçon. **Herme Ciscar and Mónica García**, [www.hermeymonica.com](http://www.hermeymonica.com); for Lampister see Arrow, and see Requemu. **Jaime Hayón**, [www.hayonstudio.com](http://www.hayonstudio.com) and see Aram Store and CP Hart. **Jordi Llopis**, see Metalarte. **Juanico**, [www.juanico.net](http://www.juanico.net). **Luis Eslava**, 003466-122 9333; [www.luiseslava.com](http://www.luiseslava.com). **Magis**, 01279-508 111. **Martí Guixé**, [www.h2o.es](http://www.h2o.es) and [www.saporiti.com](http://www.saporiti.com). **Martín Ruiz de Azúa and Gerard Moliné** for Cosmic, see CP Hart. **Mathmos**, 22-24 Old Street, London EC1 (020-7549 2700; [www.mathmos.co.uk](http://www.mathmos.co.uk)). **Metalarte**, see Noel Hennessy. **Miguel Herranz** for Luzifer call Chantelle Lighting, 01282-877 877; Ciclada lamp, from Hewitts of Southport, 01704-535 000. **Miscellània**, e-mail [info@dinamica.com](mailto:info@dinamica.com). **Nani Marquina**, through The Design Net, 020-7820 7771. **Noel Hennessy**, 67a Great Titchfield Street, London W1 (020-7323 3360; [www.noelhennessy.net](http://www.noelhennessy.net)). **Odos for Gandia Blasco**, [www.gandiablasco.com](http://www.gandiablasco.com). **Punt Mobles**, 01664-464 000. **Requemu**, [www.requemusl.com](http://www.requemusl.com). **Tronconi**, [www.tronconi.com](http://www.tronconi.com). **Vinçon**, Passeig de Gràcia 96, 08008 Barcelona (003493-215 6050; [www.vincon.com](http://www.vincon.com)) and branches.



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