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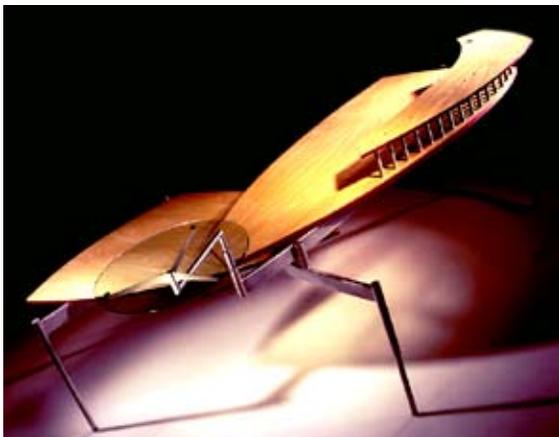
BY TIFFANY MEYERS

AT WARP SPEED

FLIGHT-JUNKIE (AND INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER) DARIO ANTONIONI HARNESSSES HIS BACKGROUND IN AEROSPACE ENGINEERING TO CREATE FURNITURE FOR THE FUTURE.







OPPOSITE: THE SPUTNIK DESK, A CAPACIOUS WORKSTATION WITH AERODYNAMIC CURVES, "VERY SIMPLY EXPRESSES MY LOVE FOR EXPLORATION, THE FUTURE, AND FLIGHT," SAYS ANTONIONI. PHOTO: ORANGE22

THIS PAGE: (ABOVE) THE MANTIS WORKSTATION FEATURES SLABS OF MAHOGANY AND LONG-GRAIN ASH THAT ROTATE FROM A CENTRAL APEX. PHOTO: STEVE HELLER

(BELOW) THE FUTUREDESK. "PRODUCT DESIGNERS GENERALLY DESIGN FROM THE OUTSIDE IN," ANTONIONI SAYS, "CONCENTRATING ON THE THING IN FRONT OF THEM. I TRY TO FORGET ABOUT WHAT THE OBJECT LOOKS LIKE, AND INSTEAD THINK ABOUT ITS FUNCTION." WHILE THIS FUNCTION-FIRST ORIENTATION MIGHT NOT BE READILY APPARENT IN ANTONIONI'S PORTFOLIO OF DEPENDABLY BEAUTIFUL FORMS, THE FUTUREDESK CONCEPT, WHICH CURRENTLY EXISTS ONLY ON PAPER, WAS BORNE OF HIS INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF A DESK IN DAILY LIFE. RATHER THAN DESIGNING ACCORDING TO THE LIMITATIONS OF A DESK—WHERE THE CONCERN CENTERS ON THE NUMBER OF PENCILS OR FILE FOLDERS ITS DRAWERS CAN HOLD—THE FUTUREDESK "IS LIMITLESS," SAYS ANTONIONI. MADE OF TOUCH-SENSITIVE LCD PANELS, THE FUTUREDESK WOULD DISPLAY A RANGE OF CUSTOMIZABLE DIGITAL TOOLS—INCLUDING KEYBOARDS AND MULTIPLE COMPUTING WINDOWS—AS 2D INTERFACES. ANTONIONI'S ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO PARTNER WITH AN ELECTRONICS COMPANY WITH THE EXPERTISE TO DEVELOP THE TECHNOLOGY. PHOTOS: ORANGE22, JOSE CABALLAR

When asked to name the designers who have most influenced his work, industrial designer Dario Antonioni rattles off a list of figures whose innovations fit more appropriately in airport hangars than on display at the Cooper-Hewitt. They're people like Howard Hughes, the Wright brothers, and Burt Rutan, the aerospace engineer who decided NASA was moving too slowly toward commercial space tourism so he created his own shuttle, the *SpaceshipOne*.

Antonioni, who founded his Los Angeles design lab, Orange22, in 2000, has been infatuated with flight since childhood, which he spent building model airplanes and devouring books about the two bicycle mechanics who took flight in Kitty Hawk, N.C. The smooth, curvaceous lines of aircraft carriers themselves do inform many of Antonioni's better-known designs, from his Luna Chair, with its powder-coated, "lunar landing" legs, to the futuristic Sputnik Desk, billed as "more a space station than a workstation." But what most thrills Antonioni about flight is that its pioneers had the effrontery to innovate beyond the limitations of available technology, creating new possibilities in the process. It floors him to think that Hughes, for example, enabled commercial flight by convincing people—thinking people—to crawl into massive, steel vessels that would catapult them, inconceivably, through the skies.

The word "limitless" is one of Antonioni's favorites, and his repertoire of work bears that out. His furniture, showcased at major furniture fairs across the world, dissolves the barriers between design and technology, while his retail environments—including spaces for DKNY, Ralph Lauren, travel boutique Flight 001, Ducati, and Fred Segal's Conveyor, among

(RIGHT) THE FORCOLA, A FOLDING CHAIR THAT DOUBLES AS AN OTTOMAN, INSPIRED BY VENETIAN GONDOLAS. PHOTO: DANIELLA THEIS

OPPOSITE: (TOP) PART OF ANTONIONI'S ENDEAVOR COLLECTION, THE LUNA CHAIR, PERCHED ON POWDER-COATED "LANDING LEGS," ACCOMPANIES THE LUNA 2, A SOFA WITH THE SAME SPACE-AGE LINES. PHOTO: ORANGE22

(BOTTOM) THE MISSION ONE IS A LOUNGE CHAIR UPHOLSTERED IN A SYNTHETIC NYLON WEAVE THAT FEELS LIKE SNAKE SKIN TO THE TOUCH. PHOTO: ORANGE22



others—establish complete worlds unto themselves. Antonioni's newest venture is a line of travel products, launching in the fall of 2005, that he says will redefine the shapes of familiar objects, from cosmetics bags to money belts.

THE FRUSTRATED AEROSPACE ENGINEER

When 31-year-old Antonioni describes himself as a frustrated aerospace engineer who never got to design a plane, he's partially referring to his furniture, but the statement can also be taken at face value. Before earning his degree in industrial design from Pasadena's Art Center College of Design, Antonioni spent three years studying aerospace engineering at the University of Michigan, until the program's theoretical emphasis left him longing to work with his hands. Industrial design was his solution, a bridge between theory and his perception of himself as "a maker of things," a role he speaks of as nothing short of magic.

"Anyone who makes something that didn't exist before is a magician," he says. "You perceive a thing in your mind, refine it

and articulate it, until the next thing you know, you're walking in it or holding it in your hands. That's an amazing and powerful experience, and I can't ever imagine getting tired of that feeling."

Knowing this, it's slightly less surprising to learn that Antonioni built the first of Flight 001's three stores himself, pounding away with hammer and nail until he'd transformed the small, dilapidated storefront in Manhattan's West Village into a sanctuary for the modern jetset. "His energy level was just astounding," says Brad John, co-owner/founder of the travel store. "He was always yelling and screaming—but in a fun way. And he loves to make really odd sounds with his mouth."

Antonioni aims to create interior environments that tell stories, and in the case of Flight 001, the narrative centers on the famed Pan Am Flight 001, which circumnavigated the globe in the 1960s. The space, with its walnut paneling, Pirelli tiles, and airport iconography, evokes the bygone glamour of international travel at the time. "All space is narrative," he says, "because we're

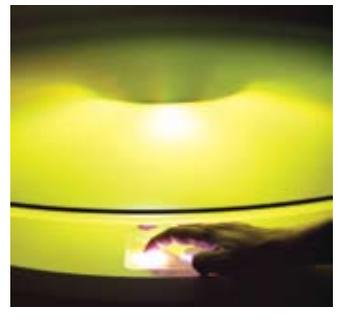
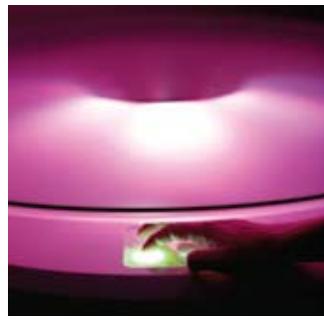
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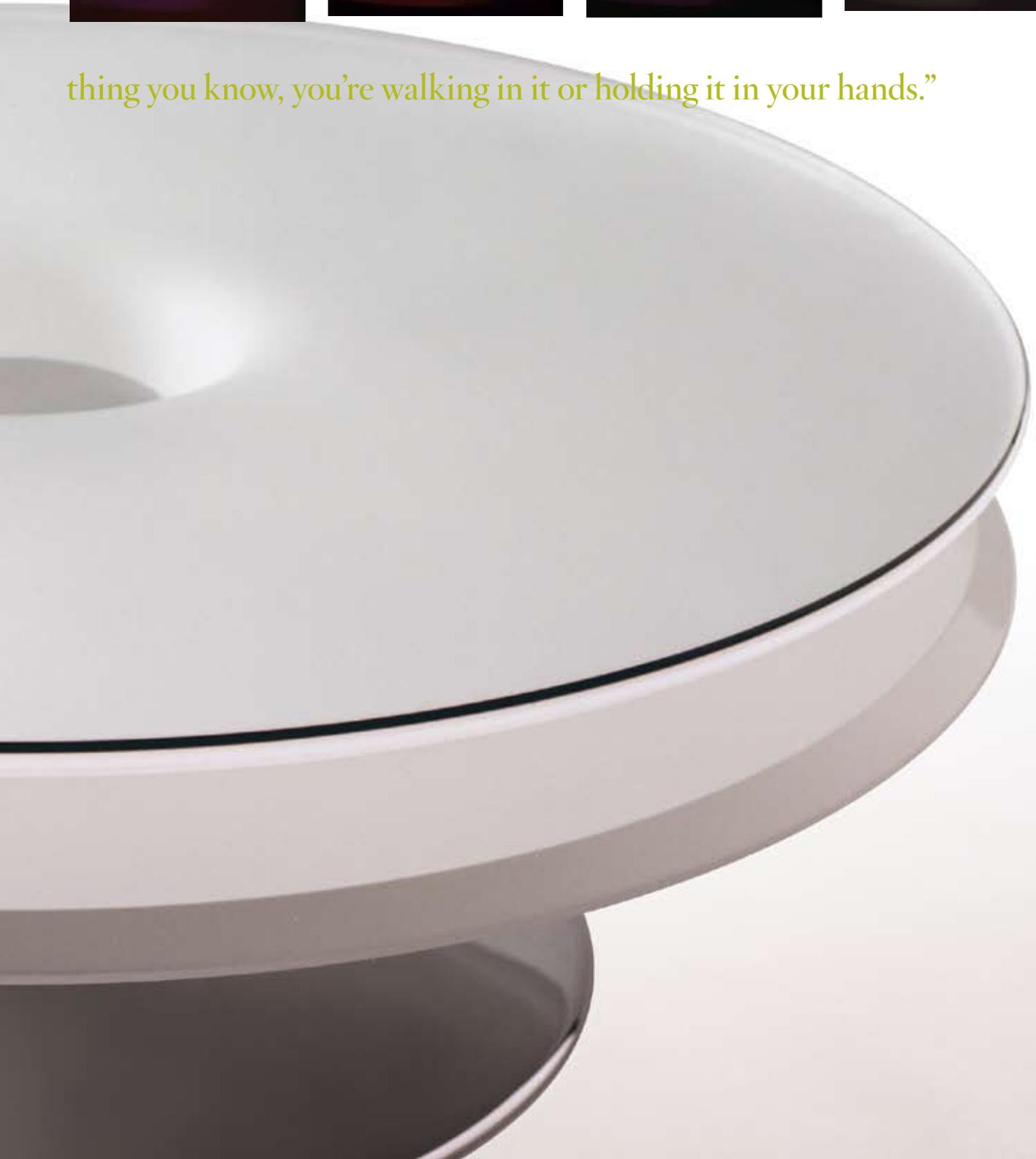
“You perceive a thing in your mind, refine it and articulate it, until the next

THE AURORA TABLE, PART OF THE LIVING FURNITURE SERIES, REFLECTS WHAT COULD BE DESCRIBED AS ANTONIONI'S ANIMISTIC APPROACH TO FURNITURE MAKING, WHEREBY OBJECTS ARE DESIGNED TO BEHAVE LIKE LIVING ORGANISMS. THE AURORA TABLE—WITH A GLASS VORTEX TOP THAT'S EMBEDDED WITH A NETWORK OF USER-CONTROLLED LEDS—RESKINS ITSELF, CHAMELEON-LIKE, AT THE TOUCH OF A BUTTON, SENDING OUT A BREATHTAKING ARRAY OF SHIFTING LIGHT PATTERNS.
PHOTO: BRAD SWANETS





thing you know, you're walking in it or holding it in your hands.”



RIGHT: THE KINETIC, GLASS-TEMPERED TOPS OF THE DISCO (TOP) AND WALTZ (BOTTOM) TABLES SWING IN RESPECTIVELY UNPREDICTABLE AND MEASURED MOTIONS, REFLECTING THE SYNCOPATION OF EACH DANCE. PHOTOS: ELITE MFG

OPPOSITE: (TOP) IN 2004, ANTONIONI OPENED A SHOWROOM, HOUSED IN THE FRONT HALF OF HIS DESIGN LAB, TO CHAMPION THE WORK OF DESIGNERS HE THINKS THE WORLD BEYOND THE FURNITURE-FAIR CIRCUIT SHOULD SEE. "I REMEMBER MY OWN STRUGGLES AS A YOUNG GUY TRYING TO PIMP MY WARES, BASICALLY," HE SAYS. "THIS WAS A WAY TO GIVE BACK." WHEREAS THE SPACES ANTONIONI DESIGNS FOR CLIENTS TEND TO TELL STORIES, THE UNDERSTATED, MUSEUM-LIKE SHOWROOM SERVES AS A BACKDROP, HE SAYS, "ALLOWING THE WORK TO TELL THE STORY INSTEAD." PHOTO: BRIGHAM FIELD

(BOTTOM) THE EOS FAMILY OF FLOOR LAMPS. EOS IS THE MYTHOLOGICAL GREEK GODDESS OF THE DAWN, WHOSE "CELESTIAL LIGHT BEAMS ON THE WORLD WITH REDDENING SPLENDOURS BRIGHT," ACCORDING TO AN ORPHIC HYMN. THE TUBULAR, MILK-WHITE LAMPS SWAY GENTLY AS LEDS DISPLAY PATTERNS OF SIMILARLY CELESTIAL LIGHT. PHOTO: VISOPIA

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creatures with legs and eyes, and we move in and through a space, and we walk out. That's a motion-based narrative, with a beginning, middle, and end. I see that as an opportunity to intersect that reality with another layer of narrative."

DESIGN ANIMISM

If Antonioni's retail spaces unfold like environmental narratives, then his furniture designs are like material poems, drawing from a surprisingly more diverse set of references than his flight fixation might have you believe. With his Mantis Workstation, for example, slices of mahogany and long-grain ash rotate from a central apex to imitate the movements of a praying mantis, while his Waltz and Disco Tables feature kinetic, tempered-glass tabletops that swing with measured and unpredictable motions to reference the syncopation of each dance.

Many of Antonioni's designs are undertaken with a kind of animistic approach to furniture making, an inclination most fully realized in the Aurora Table, part of his Living Furniture series. Embedded with a user-controlled network of LEDs developed by Aaron Rincover of Los Angeles' Visopia, the glass tabletop displays a range of shifting patterns of light, programmable from a remote control, to mimic the halo effect of the aurora borealis. Were they not so wedded to his larger vision, the high-tech bells and whistles would run dangerously close to gimmickry. For Antonioni, however, technology isn't the end itself but a means to explore his fascination with objects that behave like living organisms, as the Aurora Table reskins itself, chameleon-like.

FROM THIN AIR

It's easy to imagine Antonioni hurtling through the 750-square-foot construction site of Flight 001, yelling and screaming—but in a fun way. His passion for ideas is boundless, and he discusses his FutureDesk concept with the fervor you'd expect from a man of Italian, Argentinean, and Greek descent. The piece, which currently exists only on paper, hinges on the notion that a desk should be more than a clunky slab of wood on which the clutter of life sits. "Instead," he says, "let's make something that *is* your life. This piece is an extension of the user." Once realized, the FutureDesk would clear out the tangibles of office life, unsightly realities like file folders and stacks of paper—even the computer.



The desk, in fact, is the computer. Made of light-sensitive LCD film sandwiched between angled panes of glass, the desktop would exhibit an array of digital tools as 2D interfaces. Downloadable keyboards and multiple computing windows would glide across the surface, or disappear altogether, at the touch of the screen. Antonioni's ultimate goal is to capture the attention of an electronics company—Apple comes immediately to mind—with the expertise and deep pockets to develop the technology. "Instead of designing according to the limitations of a desk," he says, "where the concern is how many pencils or file folders can its drawers hold, the FutureDesk is limitless."

In the course of a conversation, Antonioni tosses out dozens of visions like this for a brave, new world. He proposes retail spaces with digital walls that undulate and change colors, salvaging the shopping experience from the banality that is "going to kill retail." He waxes poetic about the potential for RFID, or Radio Frequency Identification, to "revolutionize the way we interact with products." With his trademark manner of speaking in italics, he tells you that "the technology is available to make this happen *today*," but what he really means is that today isn't soon enough. And if Antonioni seems impatient to see his ideas realized, blame it on the warp speed with which he pulls them out of thin air. **S**

