



MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES

# Actualité en France

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## Design: an asset in competitiveness



Cuisinière La Cornue

**In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher came up with a visionary catchphrase – “Design or resign”! Today, design is recognised as a key factor in competitiveness and it is an area in which the French stand out for their original approach.**

With 170 objects on display, the exhibition “Design, où es-tu ? L’Observateur du design 13” (being held at the Cité des Sciences in Paris until 24 March) offers a representative panorama of design in France. Right at the exhibition entrance a beautiful La Cornue cooker, reinvented by Jean-Michel Wilmotte, marks the trend. “*Designing new products for traditional businesses with a recognised knowhow, whilst*

*preserving the original quality, is one of the pathways present-day design should explore,*” in the view of Anne-Marie Boutin, president of the French Agency for Promoting Industrial Design (APCI), which has organised the exhibition.

### A host of applications and a considerable economic challenge

Design is used in all fields and, as well as companies, it concerns the private individual, who is drawn to the aesthetic as much as to the functional qualities of the products on offer. From the mobile phone to the sleek vacuum cleaner, through the latest snug cradle for premature babies or the lighting system for surgical units by the company Maquet, buyers are attaching ever-greater importance to the form of the objects they are going to use.



«The Nest»

According to the results of a study carried out by the APCI, the economic value of design is considerable. Turnover in the sector is believed to be between 1.9 and 3.4 billion euros. More than 30,000 people are working primarily in design. The total number of people involved in this activity is estimated at between 46 and 56,000.

### Great French names in design

“*I like to open the doors of the human brain,*” says Philippe Starck, one of the most famous French contemporary designers in the world. Known for his interior designs and his furniture collections, combining creativity and functionality, Philippe Starck has also worked on a concept known as “democratic design” aimed at the general public.



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Jean-Michel Wilmotte is the man who developed the concept of “interior architecture for cities”. With the passage of time, the Wilmotte & Associés agency, which has 185 employees of 40 different origins in some 20 different countries, has diversified notably into museography, urban development and design.

Christian Liaigre, for his part, offers traditionally crafted furniture in unusual forms. Over the last 25 years, he has made a name for himself through his unique and refined high-quality work, combining restraint with great elegance.

### **High-quality French education and a significant international dimension**

The quality of France’s higher educational institutions in all fields of decorative arts is universally recognised. Establishments such as top-level art and design schools, the Ecole nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs and the Ecole nationale supérieure de création industrielle, each year dispense artistic, scientific and technical training to nearly 1,500 young designers.

Companies all over the world fight over French designers, who are regarded as visionary, creative and capable of reconciling the design of beautiful objects with state-of-the-art technologies. The managers of these companies are looking, in particular, for an alternative to British and American culture. BMW, Audi, Kia, Lenovo, Philips, Bombardier and Nokia are among the many companies to have hired French designers, who are also beginning to move into the design agencies, notably in California.

For their part, French design agencies are setting up offices abroad and developing partnerships with local organisations. They are capable of adapting to specific demands; for instance the MDB agency, which took great pains to ensure that the first Korean high-speed train reflected the country’s identity, or In Process, which designed a mascara specifically to meet the needs of Korean women.

Cooperative ventures are also expanding at an institutional level. A European project, for which France is the project leader, is currently being conducted with Germany, Finland and Romania. Moreover the APCI is organising promotional operations with Ubifrance, the body responsible for supporting French companies in their export projects, and the Institut Français, which runs cultural campaigns outside France. These public bodies have also joined forces with various foreign partners, such as the Centre for Design Promotion in Seoul or the Centre for Design Promotion in Hong Kong, to organise the Business of Design Week.



### **Events in 2013**

The design world in France is highly active and lots of events are held each year. We can already announce the European Designnovation conference taking place in Paris on 28 and 29 January 2013, on the theme of “clusters and creative industries”, and the eighth International Design Biennale, at Saint-Etienne from 14 to 31 March.

To prepare for the future, schools in the France Design Education association are also holding meetings between businesses and young graduates at the Bourse de Commerce in Paris on 7 February. The aim is to demonstrate that the use of design promotes growth in businesses and enables them to weather economic difficulties. More and more company directors are persuaded of this and have already placed design at the core

of their development strategy.

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