

INTERIOR DESIGN[®]

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into the light

A person is seen from behind, sitting in a meditative pose on a wooden floor. The room is filled with Pilates reformers. Large, irregularly shaped oval windows in the background allow bright light to stream in, creating a dramatic, high-contrast scene with long shadows and a hazy atmosphere.



Philadelphia hosts a retrospective of Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec's dazzling career, just one of many recent triumphs for the French siblings

brotherly love

For more than two decades, the atelier of the Paris-based Studio Bouroullec has played an integral role in defining the culture of product design. Since their first big break with Lit Clos, a cabinet bed for Cappellini in 2000, brothers and co-CEOs Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec have created no-nonsense, quietly revolutionary products for such brands as Kartell, Vitra, Hay, and Magis, as well as collectible works for the revered Galerie kreò. As one of the most sought-after firms anywhere today, their work has diversified over time, taking advantage of Erwan's technical expertise and Ronan's artistic hand.

Even during this pandemic period, the Bouroullecs have continued to elevate their simple, colorful, and honest forms with new products, interiors, installations, and honors. This includes creating the public interiors and furnishings for Tadao Ando's Bourse de Commerce–Pinault Collection contemporary art museum in Paris; a new bench and table for Emeco; vases done for tile-maker Mutina in collaboration with ceramics brand Bitossi; Ronan Bouroullec's first-ever solo show of 2-D artworks at kreò this fall; a new showroom in Los Angeles, the fourth for longtime client Kvadrat; and "Circus: Bouroullec Designs," a retrospective of their work that runs through May at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, occasioned by winning the institution's 2021 Collab Design Excellence Award. Vacationing in the Swiss Alps over the holiday season, Erwan Bouroullec spoke with us about the exhibition, the latest Kvadrat showroom, and how he and his older brother are confronting a new era in design. ➤



CREATIVE voices

From top: Erwan Bouroullec, co-CEO with older brother Ronan of Studio Bouroullec, in Paris. A model of a low barrier, bench, flagpole, and shimmering banner, one of three they designed for the public square at Bourse de Commerce–Pinault Collection, a new contemporary art museum in Paris by Tadao Ando Architect & Associates.



Clockwise from top left: *Rombini*, a 2021 vase for tile-maker Mutina in collaboration with ceramics brand Bitossi. A 2008 reinterpretation of an antique rush chair in translucent polycarbonate, *Papyrus* for Kartell. *Algues*, a seminal 2004 design for Vitra comprising plastic elements linked into a weblike structure. The grand, double-helix staircase at the Bourse de Commerce, outfitted with *Luce Verticale*, a custom 39-foot-tall pendant fixture in blown glass and metal manufactured by Flos. Abstract forms on *Vase Découpage*, a 2019 cylindrical cast-clay vessel for Vitra. "Circus: Bouroullec Designs," a retrospective at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through May 30. *Cilas*, a 2022 knit polyester for *Kvadrat* Febrik. The Danish textile company's showroom in Copenhagen, completed in 2017. In the Bourse de Commerce, custom versions of benches, tables, and textiles from the 2018 *Cotone* collection for Cassina, and a rug specially developed and produced with Manufactures Catry.



FROM TOP: GERHARDT KELLERMANN; CLAIRE LAVABRE/COURTESY OF STUDIO BOURULLEC; COURTESY OF BOURSE DE COMMERCE-PINNAUT COLLECTION; MICHEL GIESBRECHT/COURTESY OF STUDIO BOURULLEC

What spurred the exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art?

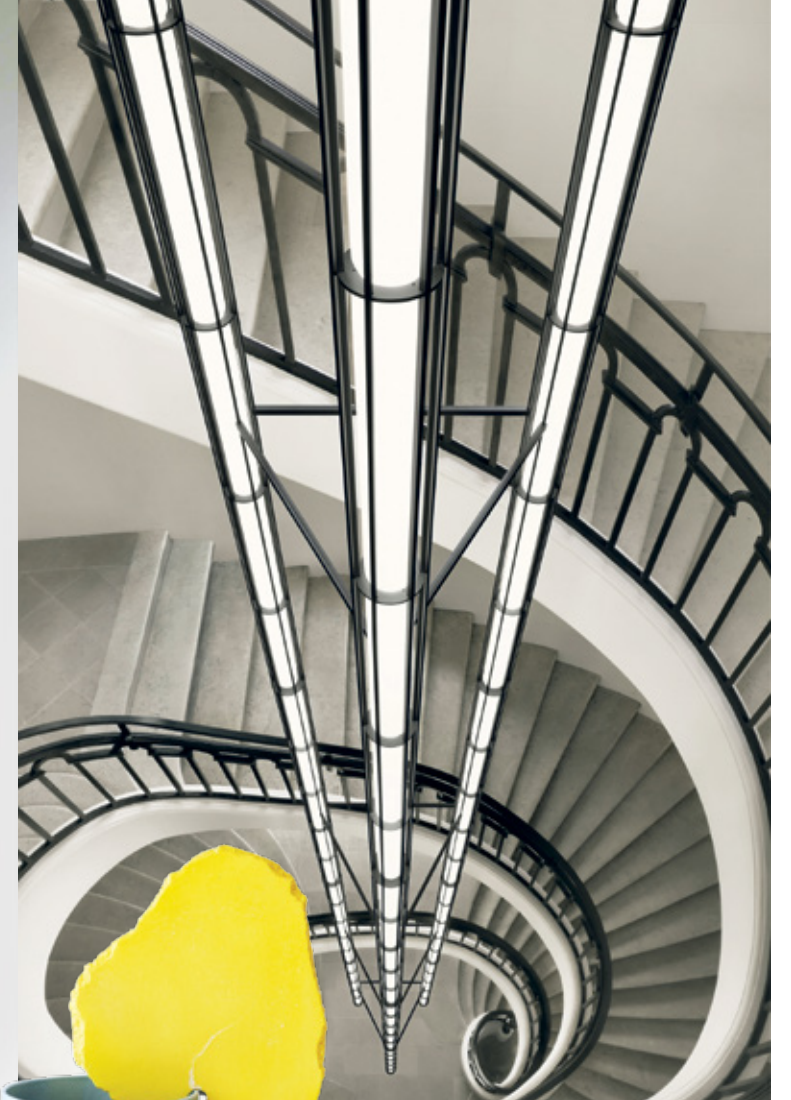
Erwan Bouroullec: Actually, it was very simple: You get your award, so you have to do an exhibition [laughs]. It had been delayed a few times due to COVID. We wanted to make a kind of show that gives the public a quite broad viewpoint of our work, so we brought in a number of pieces. Some are quite old, some are recent. It's about showing the diversity of our work. I think that's something particular to us. We work project by project; we never think about creating a red thread between what we've been designing.

The modular *Clouds* screen for *Kvadrat* and the weblike *Algues* for *Vitra* are standouts in the show. Have you been surprised by the success of these products?

EB: There's something very particular about *Algues*: I wouldn't do this project today because it's probably one of the worst uses of plastic one could conceive. Plastic becoming fake algae? There's a lot of controversial meaning inside it today, which at the time wasn't the same. A big part of our work is designing things that need to be designed, but in which the typology is well identified. But another part of our job has been to dig into conceptual behavior. *Algues* and *Clouds* were a part of that.

What do you want visitors to understand about your work?

EB: Something I especially like about our work is that, on the one hand, there's a certain fantasy, a vision about spaces that you can live in. But I call nearly all our projects "transparent," since most of the time you



built. We were looking to bring a part of the *Kvadrat* culture to L.A., rather than trying to mimic something that's considered local. Key to creating a space that's right for the brand was about showing the textiles well, so that visitors can experience them. To me, that's an important task. It's not incredibly fancy if you compare it to a restaurant or something like that. It's a raw space that connects to the idea that the textiles are inherently an unfinished product.

Has the pandemic altered the way you work?

EB: It's changed a lot of things, some for the good. Everyone has been thinking a little more about how we consume, what things are made of. It makes me think of our *Truss* collection for Emeco, which is very raw—there's that word again—and a sign of where I would like to get to in the end. —Dan Rubinstein

can clearly identify the materials they're made from and how they've been assembled. I love the fact that some of them are very dreamy while being incredibly raw and hardcore on the making end.

You've created spaces for *Kvadrat* before. What makes the L.A. one unique?

EB: We had a big white cubic volume; inside it we built a kind of house made with timber sourced from Canada and assembled on-site. Something I like is that the neighborhood it's in, the Arts District, has these very old brick buildings, with spaces that have been transformed multiple times since they were first

