

Watch this space

Samsung's LCD TV gives pause to two inspired designers

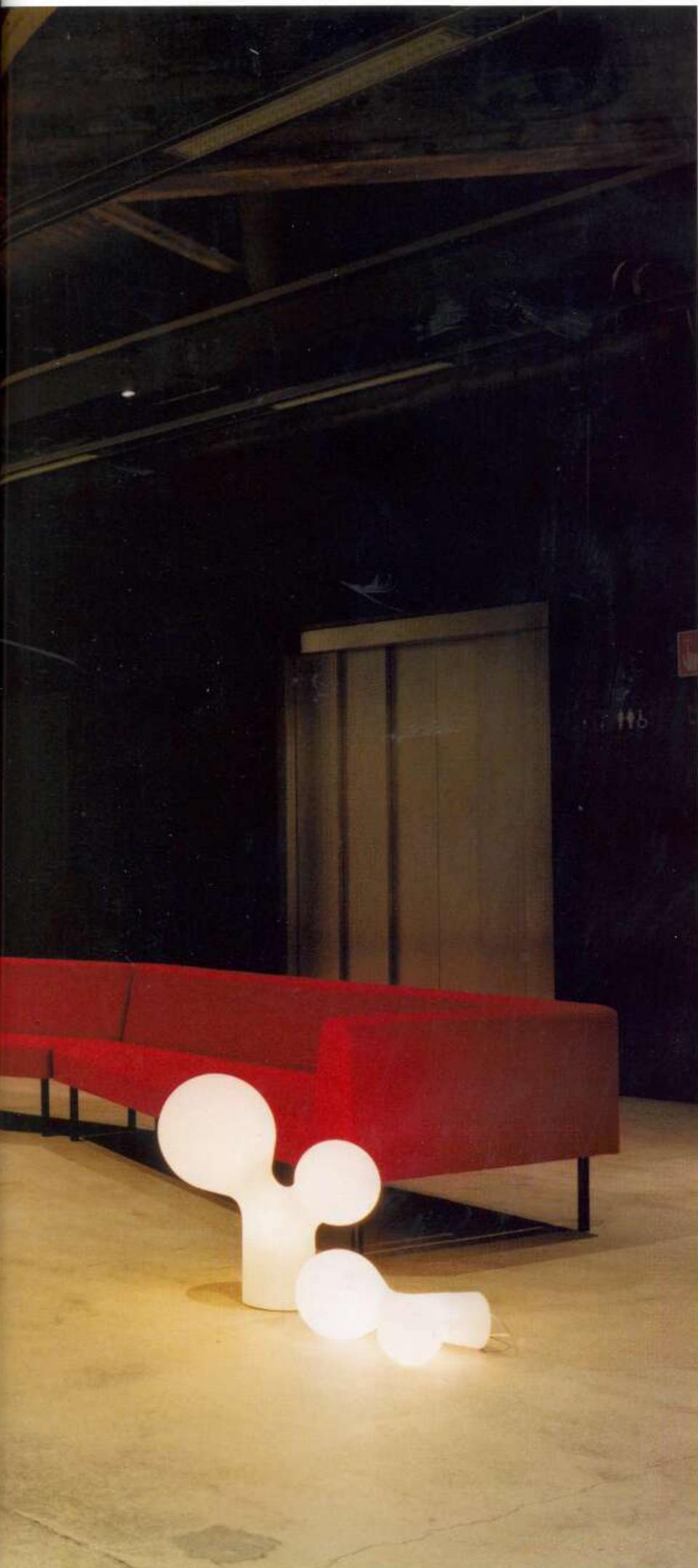
They might have come at design from very different places: Tom Dixon, a motorcycle-mad London musician with a taste for creative welding, and Yves Behar, out of the technocampuses of Palo Alto, California. But both now have reputations - big reputations - for work that pairs radical innovation in manufacturing and function with utterly contemporary form. Little wonder, then, that we thought they would appreciate the match of form, function, charm and innovation in Samsung's LCD TV. And charm is not a word we very often apply to TVs.

Asked to choose the ideal setting for his Samsung LCD TV, each designer has selected an art space: Dixon a new contemporary art gallery, Behar an artist's studio. For both, this is an effort to explore the link between art, design and technology and to prove that design is a process that must draw from art's formal experimentation and technology's fluid, often ungraspable possibilities. It is from this collision of forces that some of the greatest designs are born. We would like to include the Samsung LCD TV on that list - a list Behar and Dixon are very busy adding to.»

PHOTOGRAPHER: PHILIP SINDEN
WRITER: NICK COMPTON

WALLPAPER* BESPOKE PROMOTION





Tom Dixon

The LCD TV is part of the show in Dixon's gallery setting

Artek was formed in 1935 in Helsinki, when Finland was a new country still trying to define itself. Two years ago Tom Dixon became part owner and creative director of what he calls 'the last of the modernist design companies that exists in its original form'. This truth he understood. What he had less of a grip on - at least until spending time in Finland - was how much Artek is held dear by Finns. All Finns. It is design as part of national identity and totally unique.

The Artek challenge then was about more than taking charge of its cherished back catalogue; luckily, Artek's five founders had left a lot to go on. 'The Artek founders devised this amazing manifesto in 1935,' says Dixon. 'It is truly radical but sounds totally contemporary. They talk about global communications and networks; about branding, but also poetry, music and art.' Here was a company that saw design as part of a wider cultural and commercial world. 'It is the perfect business model for a contemporary company,' he insists. In its early days Artek exhibited Alexander Calder in its store, but, before Dixon's arrival, it hadn't done any new product development in 50 years. In many ways, Dixon sees his job as reactivating the Artek manifesto for the modern world: reconnecting art and technology and introducing contemporary concerns such as sustainability.

One of Dixon's first projects at Artek was the development of a new line of bamboo furniture, including the table he took to the new Espoo Museum of Modern Art, located in Helsinki's sister city. The bringing together of contemporary art, design, natural materials and the latest technology in this room 'symbolises the way Artek should go', says Dixon.

The Samsung LCD TV is the perfect example of modern technology, he says. 'You can use it at home, in the office, or put it in a gallery to play video art. I'm interested in how technology can integrate all these different contexts, and the Samsung TV does that.' »

FINNISH LINES

Samsung's 40in LCD TV in black,
www.samsung.com/lcd

Photographed at the Espoo Museum of Modern Art in Espoo, Finland, with the 'Bamboo' table by Tom Dixon, 'Clothes Tree 160' by Anna-Maija Jaatinen and 'Double Bubble' lights by Eero Aarnio, all for Artek

Yves Behar

An artist's studio provides just the canvas for the LCD TV

'The design process is not often made visible and I really wanted to show it, to demonstrate it,' says San Francisco-based designer Yves Behar. 'All around the FuseProject offices' - where he keeps a team of 30 multidisciplinary designers very busy - 'are monstrous sketchbooks and sketches.'

Behar, 40, has the hair and air of a Californian surf dude - which is kind of what he has become. For this shoot he decamped to the San Francisco studio of artist friend Nellie King Solomon, taking a Samsung 40in LCD TV with him. King Solomon's studio is an untidy - if eloquent - stand-in and metaphor for Behar's own studio. 'I guess that, in an artist's studio, the evidence of the creative process is more obvious,' he says.

Trained in architecture, King Solomon paints on large, translucent acrylic surfaces with brilliantly coloured paints, which create oily abstractions: pools and swirling seepages of carefully controlled colour. 'The slick paint both attracts and repels, like oil spills or hot, toxic colour fields,' says King Solomon. The translucent surface allows the edges to disappear into the wall. 'The wall misbehaves to reveal a painting, allowing the painting to become subversive architecture.' You can see why such a radical but simple creative process would appeal to a designer like Behar.

The one piece of his own that Behar brought along to the studio was his **leaf** light for Herman Miller, the American company responsible for bringing the designs of Charles and Ray Eames, George Nelson, Eero Saarinen and Alvar Aalto to the US market - but which nevertheless remained dormant on the domestic front for years. Until now. The idea behind the 'Leaf' was to create a piece that could do both soft, ambient lighting and hard, task lighting. It took Behar and his team four years to design and engineer. Behar developed his own set of LEDs and controls versatile enough for the job, plus a unique cooling system, which means the light can be pushed and pulled any which way without the fear of minor burns. Beautiful form meets innovative, elegant, logical function. This is why Behar has a reputation as a designer's designer.

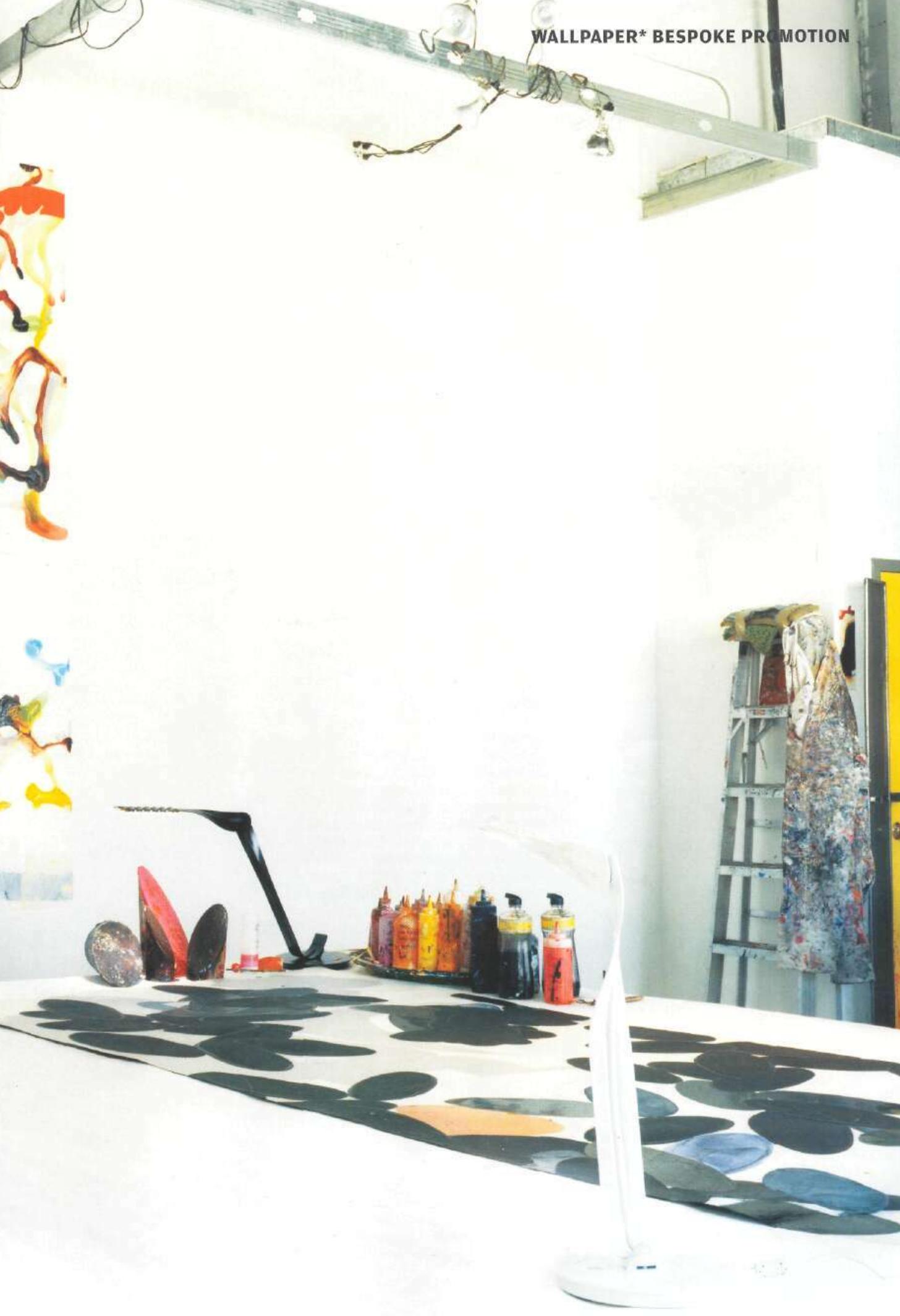
If anyone is in a position to judge the success or otherwise of a contemporary product design, it is Behar. And he insists that Samsung's 40in LCD TV is a success in every way. 'I've really taken note of these TVs,' he says. 'They are such difficult things to design, a very constrained form. And the market is very stale, which means that this one really stands out. It's a very elegant solution.'»

STUDIO AUDIENCE

Samsung 40in LCD TV in black,
www.samsung.com/lcd

Photographed at Nellie King Solomon's studio in San Francisco, alongside Behar's 'Leaf' lights for Herman Miller, in black and white





The designers

Why we knew that Samsung's LCD TV would team up perfectly with the sharp, contemporary designs of Tom Dixon and Yves Behar



Tom Dixon was born in Tunisia in 1959 to a French-Latvian mother and an English father. The family moved to England when Dixon was four, and he went on to become an art-school drop-out, musician and accident-prone motorcyclist. While recovering from one particularly nasty motorcycle spill, he began to use bits of scrap metal and his existing welding skills to creative ends. 'It suited my impatience perfectly,' he says of the pastime, 'giving me the opportunity to build, destroy, adjust and remake structures instantly.'

Soon enough, Dixon's work was spotted by Giulio Cappellini and he was asked to produce what became the iconic 'S' chair for the Italian furniture manufacturer. In 1994 he founded Eurolounge to manufacture plastic lighting - including his 'Jack' light, a seat-cuin-light and still a shorthand statement of design-consciousness worldwide. In 1998 he was appointed head of design at the British furniture manufacturer and retailer Habitat, swiftly helping to revive the moribund brand. He was appointed head of international design in 1999 and then creative director in 2001.

Tom Dixon, the company, was launched in 2002, along with a range of lighting and furniture, including the 'Mirror Ball'. In 2004 Swedish investors Proventus took a stake in Tom Dixon the company and also purchased Artek, the Finnish design company established by, among others, Alvar Aalto. The deal means that Dixon is now part-owner of Artek as well as its creative director.

www.artek.fi

Yves Behar is not afraid of the B-word. Since founding FuseProject in San Francisco in 1999 - motto: 'Dedicated to the emotional experience of brands through storytelling' - his client list has included brands like Toshiba, Sony, Nike, Birkenstock and BMW/Mini.

Born in Switzerland to a Turkish father and a German mother, Behar trained on the West Coast and sharpened his pencil at Palo Alto giants Apple and Hewlett Packard before going his own way as a multidisciplinary designer. He believes that good design is the best possible message for a brand, and has a taste for picking up technology and running with it until he has taken it just where he needs it to go. He also has a need to tackle as many different design problems as possible: perfume bottles for Hussein Chalayan (though his design never made it past the gatekeepers of the perfume industry); giant mechanised chandeliers for Swarovski, one of which now hangs in Terminal 4 at JFK airport; water-resistant cashmere hoodies for Lutz & Patmos; and the latest issue of *All-Story*, the literary magazine published by Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope.

Currently being courted by the Italian design giants, Behar is making the move into furniture, but the project perhaps closest to his heart is the development of the '\$100 laptop' with MIT's Media Lab. Close to completion (minimum orders of a million units per government will soon start trickling in), the design will bring networked computer technology to schoolchildren around the developed world. 4r
www.fuseproject.com

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Above far left, Tom Dixon's table from his recent 'Bamboo' range for Artek

Above left, Yves Behar's 'Leaf' lights for Herman Miller in silver, white and black

