



A TROPHY CASE

Like an Olympic superstar, this prolific Spaniard has become his country's go-to designer, consistently scoring goal after goal

WORDS TACHY MORA



Perhaps fate willed it so. If the young Francesc Rifé hadn't lost some teeth during a roller hockey match, Spain would've lost one of its greatest emerging designers. It was during his painful recovery that Rifé focused on his design studies at the Barcelona School of Design La Llotja. "I started to concentrate hard on my work," he recalls. "If I got an A, I got really angry because I wanted an A+."

Immediately following graduation, Rifé introduced himself quickly into the national design circuit by launching his studio in Barcelona in 1994 at the age of 25. His quiet interiors gained instant acclaim, as did his furniture pieces for Artquitect, Gandia Blasco and Viccarbe. With a 14-person team, the prolific Spaniard now orchestrates 35 projects a year, while also teaching at the Elisava School of Design.

And since 2006, Rifé has added another title to his list: creative director for Spanish brands Samoa and Zirú. "Until recently, the creative director has been an unknown figure here, but it's quite common in Italy, such as Piero Lissoni and Antonio Citterio, whose work I admire greatly," he explains. Did we mention he also designs for Martínez Otero, Joquer and Seiak?

His elegantly restrained designs—from the oak Ema table for Zirú to the lacquered trapezoidal Tab Desk for Martínez Otero—exude an almost Scandinavian appeal. Meanwhile, his interiors display similar qualities. To wit, he topped the dining room of last year's Gastromium restaurant in Seville with an astonishing group of 286 tubular halogen lamps that resemble stalactites. And for the recent cake shop Pomme Sucre in Oviedo, Rifé used splashes of color in a quiet nod to baking ingredients. Clearly, his recipe for success is foolproof. rife-design.com

SPANISH GOLD: (Clockwise from top left) Francesc Rifé's KU desk system for Bordonabe (2008); His duo-toned, upholstered Mod collection of modular seating for Zirú (2009); The interior of Pomme Sucre in Oviedo, Spain (2009); A piece from Rifé's Nord collection of seating and tables for Zirú, available in untreated, varnished or lacquered oak (2008)