

Rational and reasoned: the work of Francesc Rifé



HE'S ONE OF SPAIN'S STAR DESIGNERS WHO BELIEVES THE RIGHT ORDER WHEN IT COMES TO INDUSTRIAL DESIGN IS FUNCTION, FORM, AESTHETICS.

You'll be hard pressed to find a ribbon or bow on any of Francesc Rifé's designs, as he's a designer who has a distaste for extraneous decoration. So there is understandable curiosity about what the hotel Diagonal 414 in Barcelona will look like when it opens, because the designer has revealed that it will be something 'more decorated' than his usual work.

The hotel is next door to the Casa de les Punxes (House of Spikes), an iconic Art Nouveau building by modernist architect Puig I Cadafach. And being so close to such extraordinary architecture has inspired Rifé to develop 'a different concept' – albeit not one that strays from his studio's guiding principle of rationalism. He's not



revealing much, but does say you won't find many hotels like this in a city that does, let's face it, have a plethora of hotels.

Rifé is a designer who's always been in demand from manufacturing companies since he launched his studio in Barcelona back in the mid-90s. His long client list includes Capdell, Now Carpets, Koo International, Joquer, Inbani, L'Antic Colonial, Kendo, Estiluz, Roca, Point, Vibia, Cosmic and Zirú.

As well as contract and residential furniture and lighting design, the multidisciplinary studio undertakes large interior design projects - recent work includes the living quarters at football team Real Madrid's training base.



2/4 Button by Francesc Rifé for Estiluz

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As well as contract and residential furniture and lighting design, the multidisciplinary studio undertakes large interior design projects - recent work includes a new showroom for sanitaryware and tile giant Roca in Tehran and the living quarters at football team Real Madrid's training base outside the capital. The studio undertakes graphic design work, photography, art direction and stand design, while Rifé – who has won many awards during his long career - also finds time to lecture.

Though known for his rigour and precision, Rifé's work is far from austere. The recent Button lamp for Estiluz,

for example, has a jaunty playfulness while the Hamp outdoor furniture collection for Point is curvaceously comfortable with a sophisticated yet easy demeanour.

The word he comes back to when asked to talk about his design work is 'rational'. By which he means he doesn't take flights of fancy, he doesn't take a punt on something, he's not wild and wacky, nor an experimental designer. 'The designer has a obligation to create products that do the job, that are functional, as well as - hopefully - beautiful,' he says.

Rifé is also relaxed about how he is perceived; he isn't driven by the need to be seen as a relentless innovator, someone who's constantly fizzing with crazy ideas. Of course he is a man of ideas, ideas are the designer's stock in trade, but he doesn't pretend to reinvent the wheel. 'I think design has evolved a lot in recent years, but I think that evolution in product design is perhaps more due to development in manufacturing technologies.



1/7 Coll by Francesc Rifé for Capdell

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'For me, for our studio, our philosophy is that in the past things were experimental; today they're more about maturity'. Maturity tends to produce elegance and Rifé's work is always that. Products have clean lines, they are restrained yet interesting – you see this in his Step table and Mir mirror for Kendo, or the Gus table and Coll chair for Capdell.

The designer is passionate about working with natural materials, particularly wood, and while he's not an

ecowarrior, he is interested in sustainability and says the team have used recycled materials in projects over recent years.

Rifé explains that the real challenge when designing very different products is to put all of the wisdom and learning you've acquired into them. 'And for that reason the product we love working on the most is the chair, which is always the most complicated.'

When it comes to a product's lifespan, Rifé says longevity is crucial and so looks and choice of material influence the design. This may well explain his restrained approach, because what may well be his funky charm this year may well drive you nuts in a couple of years' time. 'In all of our projects we think about developing a form that will grow old elegantly,' explains Rifé.



6/6 Step by Francesc Rifé for Kendo Mobiliario