



OBJECTS OF ART

A NEW DESIGN JOURNEY FOR
STAFFAN TOLLGÅRD

Tucked away on the 4th floor of one of the world's finest design resources, the V&A museum, is the member's room. With huge windows, an endless supply of good coffee and a passionate group of members, it is a gateway to a collection of design objects amassed from around the world. It is also where in the last two years you would have found Swedish-born interior designer Staffan Tollgård taking a break from wandering the various halls, alternately hand sketching or modelling in sketch-up for his first steps on a new journey into product design.

Staffan Tollgård's first career in film-making brought him to London 17 years ago. A job on a low-budget feature film turned out to be serendipitous: he met his future wife and business partner Monique on set and decided to stay in London. One dilapidated Victorian terrace refurbishment later and Staffan enrolled at the Inchbald School of Design on their Post graduate diploma in Architectural Interior Design. A new course was charted, and, after six months with renowned designer Rabih Hage, Staffan set up on his own and Monique joined the business a couple of years later.

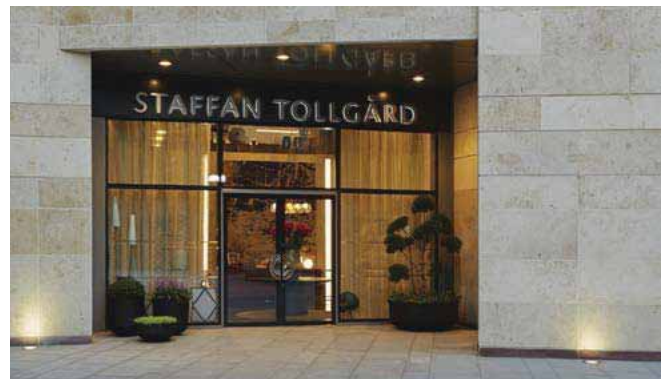
Now celebrating its ten year anniversary, Staffan Tollgård Design Group is proud to be on House & Garden's coveted 100 Leading Designers list, and most recently, Architectural Digest France included Staffan on a list of the world's best 100 designers. As interior designers they have worked on houses across London's most prestigious streets, as well as in Riyadh, Amman, Hong Kong, the Algarve and Switzerland. As well as international clients they have an international team: designers from around the world have swelled the Group's numbers. Their recent move into a beautiful retail space in Pimlico sees a team of 18 that includes dedicated retail interior designers and a curated collection of what they call 'the best and the bold of contemporary design'.

"INTERIOR DESIGN CREATES PRIVATE HOMES FOR PARTICULAR PEOPLE. PRODUCT DESIGN IS ABOUT CREATING PIECES THAT WILL BE AT HOME IN MANY PLACES."

BRIGHT OPPORTUNITIES

But back to the V&A. For despite the charms of the Design Store, with its floor-to-ceiling windows and views over the recently developed site at Grosvenor Waterside, this has been Staffan's office for much of the past two years as several commissions for leading international brands have taken his attention. "Designing homes for private clients has been incredibly fulfilling and has given me the opportunity to answer very particular questions about living. How do I make this space serve the needs of this person? How do the design objects I choose make their life more interesting and more functional? In looking for objects that were both beautiful and functional I started to see gaps – pieces that I wished existed. And so I started to sketch them, adding more bespoke items into my projects for clients. And when Contardi, one of our favourite lighting makers, came to me to talk about a few pieces for their latest collection, I saw the chance to design objects that could perhaps answer these same questions for other designers and their clients."

Opposite page: Staffan featured with the Splash rug for JAB Anstoetz. This page: Drop rug by JAB Anstoetz in London showroom; the Staffan Tollgård Design Store at Grosvenor Waterside; Entrance of design store featuring Red Thread rug on the floor and Scratched on the wall, both by JAB Anstoetz.



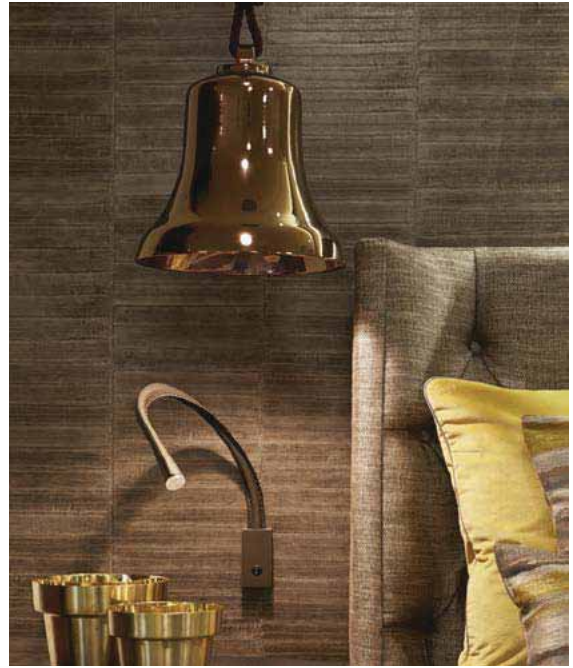
COUTURIERS OF LIGHT

Staffan's first piece for Contardi was born at the V&A. His search for a light that was a piece of 'functional sculpture' was a journey into the past for an object that would have relevance and resonance across time and culture. His answer was the Belle. An almost Platonic shape with iterations in Eastern and Western culture, the Belle's solemn curves are modelled in ceramic and then glossed in a muted palette of colours personally selected by Staffan during one of his visits to Contardi's headquarters in Desio, outside Milan. The silk rope, luxuriously plaited to conceal the electric cord, adds a subtle touch of glamour to this monastic piece. Launched at Maison et Objet in January 2014, the Belles were immediately appealing. Hanging down beside a bed, or layered over a staircase, the Belles evoke sacred spaces and only reveal their function on closer inspection. When a former colleague proudly sent him a picture of them hanging in another designer's store on the Brompton Road, it was the proof that his products had moved from a private space to a public one and that other designers and retailers could see that the Belle was a commercially viable piece.

ECHOES FROM THE PAST

At Euroluce, the lighting fair at Saloni, 2015 two more iterations of the Belle were launched: a half Belle becomes a wall light, and a 'School Belle' that evokes memories of a former age where a bell with a solid handle was hand rung to call children back from the playground.

A ceiling light, Recess, also takes inspiration from the past and from sacred spaces. And from a frustration with the ubiquitous downlights that pepper modern ceilings. Says Staffan, "somewhere along the way we lost the beauty of the ceiling. Like the 4th wall between the audience and the stage we all started pretending that the ceiling was invisible and just a place in which to position lights." Recess, born from the idea of stained-glass windows, helps to reclaim this plane and add some beauty to it in the form of strong geometrical metal detailing across back-lit LED glass panels. "It's a solution for letting light inside a room in a decorative manner that is centuries old, and it's one that I'm excited to see interior designers and architects make their own." This on-going collaboration with Contardi is one that Staffan is enormously proud of, and grateful for Sales Director Massimo Brigandi's belief that an interior designer would understand both the needs of the professional market as well as the long-established brand and values of this 'couturier of lighting'.



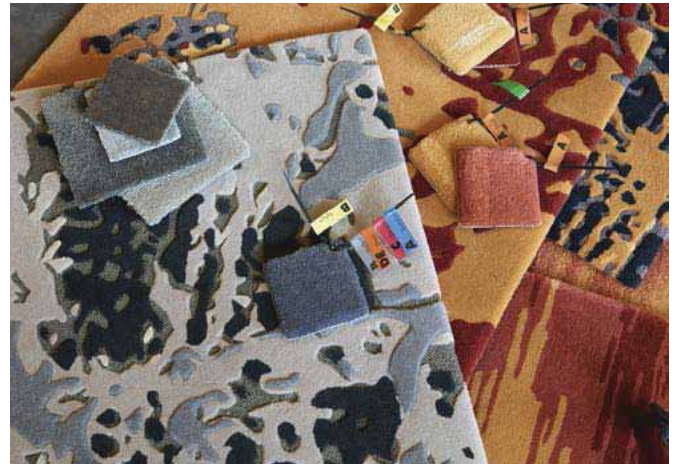
Above: Contardi Belle pendant in limited edition bronze on display in London showroom; Contardi Belle pendants in available finishes white and brown mud lacquer. Below clockwise: Conceptual design rendering of Belle reading light in bronze; Belle reading light displayed in Milan at Salone del Mobile 2015; Conceptual design rendering of Recess architectural lights; Prototype of square Recess lights; finish detail of Recess light; Recess lights on display in Milan at Salone del Mobile 2015.



BENEATH THE SURFACE

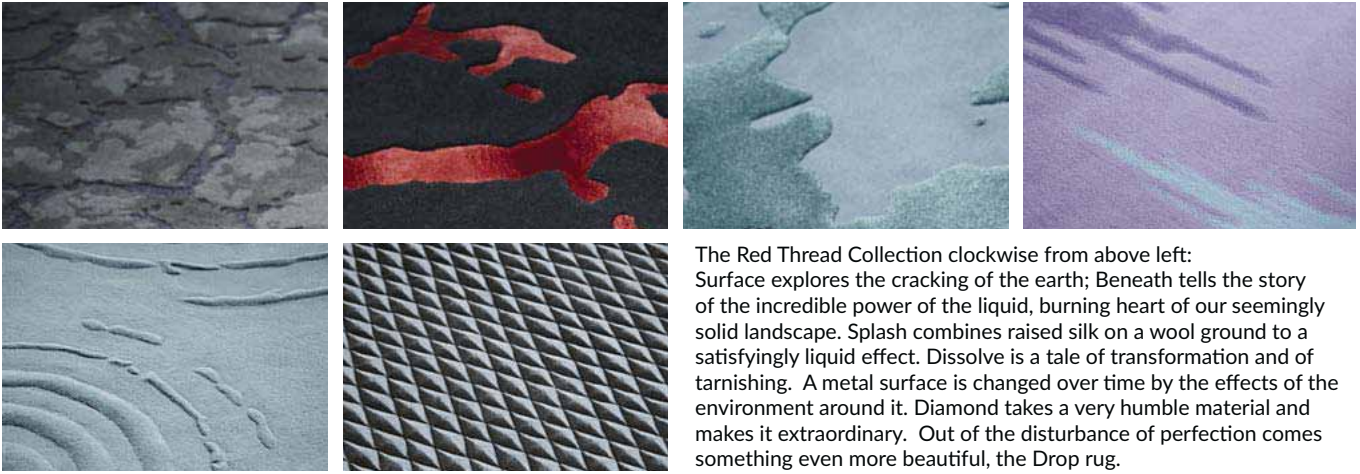
Staffan's next collaboration was a series of rugs for international fabric and flooring company JAB Anstoetz. Together with Senior Designer Keisha Hulsey, Staffan crystallised a concept that has underpinned his design work: the Scandinavian notion of the 'Red Thread'. "I have used it as a powerful metaphor to describe the journey towards the creative DNA of each project we have worked on – the heart of the matter that connects interior, architecture and environment; the visual or creative motif that tells our client's story using the language of design." The creative journey towards these eight rugs therefore began with a question. "We asked ourselves what our red thread was. What was it that we as designers found truly interesting and inspiring; what was it that we wanted to explore in this unique opportunity?"

They found the answer in the fundamental matter of each of their projects: story-telling and the truth of materials. A rug is an artwork in two dimensions. Yet beneath this flat finished sculpture is the story of the maker, the natural elements and the originating design process. Staffan explored how each rug could tell the story of the artistry of JAB Anstoetz's artisans, of the processes that make their rugs so creatively rich and valuable. At the same time they used the metaphor of change and of revelation as a vehicle for these techniques. The earth is ripped apart to allow a seam of volcanic silk to erupt to the surface; the flat wool sea is disturbed with concentric carved ripples; the alchemical effect of water on metal bleeds one colour into another, a story of time and transformation.



Above clockwise: Staffan approving the first samples at the JAB Anstoetz factory; colourway planning and sample selecting in the design studio; the Scratched rug being hand-finished in Thailand
Below: The Scratched rug complete; Intricate details and layers of the Scratched rug





The Red Thread Collection clockwise from above left: Surface explores the cracking of the earth; Beneath tells the story of the incredible power of the liquid, burning heart of our seemingly solid landscape. Splash combines raised silk on a wool ground to a satisfyingly liquid effect. Dissolve is a tale of transformation and of tarnishing. A metal surface is changed over time by the effects of the environment around it. Diamond takes a very humble material and makes it extraordinary. Out of the disturbance of perfection comes something even more beautiful, the Drop rug.

AWARD WINNING DESIGN

The final rug, the Red Thread, was JAB's idea. "When we described how each rug told the story of material change, of the reality of what lies beneath, of our desire to explore texture and truth in each rug as we do in each of our projects, Michael Constable, the originator of the project with JAB UK, asked if we could design a rug that captured our notion of the 'Red Thread' as we had described it to him." The Red Thread is the simplest rug of them all. A silk cut pile that runs through a neutral wool ground: it is an invitation to every client to find the rhythm of their own story and to map it out.

Says Staffan: "We ask for the point of departure and the end, and a clue as to whether their story has been straight to the point or a meandering tale that has made the most of the canvas afforded to it."

The collection was launched worldwide at the 2015 Cologne Furniture Fair to great acclaim. Two of the rugs were winners in the Interior Innovation award and the Diamond rug was awarded a coveted 'Best of the Best' award – one of just 15 products selected from the thousands at the Fair.



Above: Design imitating life - Staffan traces the rug thread through the rug. Right: The Red Thread materialized

GRAND DESIGNS

Back to Britain, glass statuette placed proudly in the entrance to the Design Store, Staffan and Keisha are finalising the latest collaboration with one of the country's oldest and best-known manufacturer of beds and mattresses, Vi-Spring. A new headboard will be launched in Decorex this year. There is talk of a range of marble basins with another British manufacturer and Staffan has his sights set on an eponymous range of furniture that he will design over the next few years and manufacture in Britain. So if you're trying to find Staffan and can't reach him at the office, head over to the V&A or perhaps Tate Britain. If you see a tall Swede wandering the halls with furrowed brow and a sketch book, chances are you've found him.

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Photography by JAB Anstoez,
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