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BEST OF NORDIC
ARCHITECTURE,
INTERIOR DESIGN,
PRODUCT DESIGN
AND STUDENT WORK

Dirk Wynants

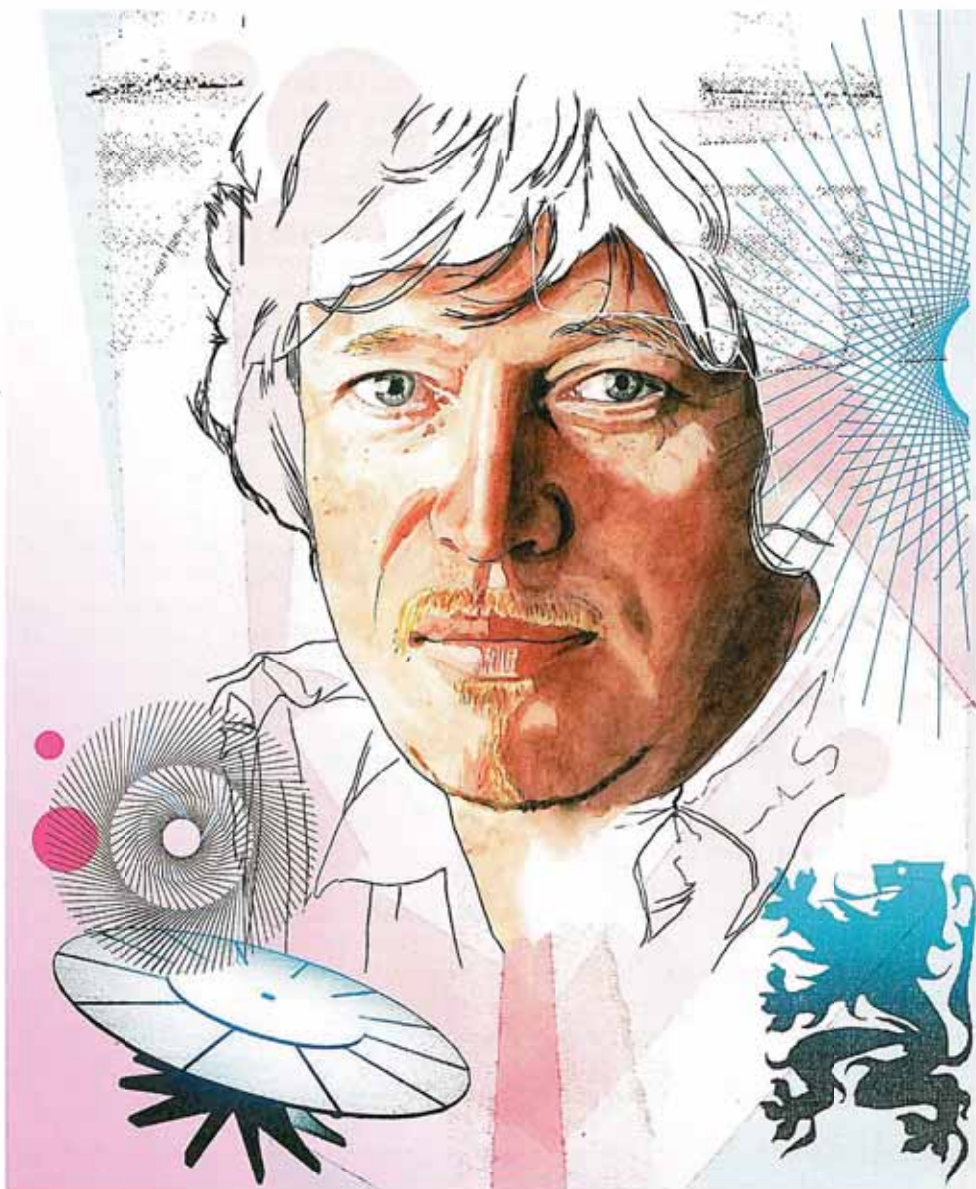
"It's important that people know who it is they're talking to," says Belgian designer Dirk Wynants. And his business card proves him right. Instead of titles like CEO or controller or something in a similar incomprehensible corporate lingo, this businessman's card simply says: "big boss".

The business cards have rendered Dirk Wynants some fame, but it is not for his straightforward attitude (or humour, depending on how you choose to see it) he has become a well-known figure on the Belgian design scene. It's for the furniture he has designed for his own company Extremis. Drawing on contemporary design ideas, he looks to a field that for too long has been dominated by cheap plastic chairs and steel furniture that hasn't evolved much since the turn of the last century.

But Dirk Wynants seem to be quite fed up with the talk about outdoor furniture. His products work equally well in the living room as in the shade of a tree in the garden. In fact he seems to be tired of talking about furniture period. He is not designing furniture; he is making "Tools for Togetherness". It might sound like a slogan conceived by the company's marketing director (his business card reads "little boss"), but tools for togetherness are quite simply what they are. Dirk Wynants has been working according to the idea of bringing people together since the start in 1994. This was when the then 30-year-old cabinetmaker's son decided to start his own business, with his garage in the village of Gijverinkhove in Western Belgium as a base. Dirk Wynants consequently calls Gijverinkhove a town despite admitting that it is the home of no more than 300 people. The first piece he designed was Gargantua, a round table with an outer ring of four adjustable benches. This is a feature that enables all family members, kids as well as grown ups, to sit at the same height, making it easier for them to talk to each other.

"The idea came to me when I read a survey that said that Americans don't spend more than 15 minutes a day in the company of their families. I wanted to improve that time by making a table where children can sit and be on the same level as their parents."

Gargantua can easily fit twelve people, and this is something Dirk Wynants is absolutely certain about. Every product that's in the



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Extremis catalogue has first been tested on and approved by friends and family. If they give it the thumbs up, it's ready to go on the market.

Does this sound like a different and unusual approach to business and design? Well, to most of us it might. But to the Big Boss of Extremis, it comes naturally. Doing things differently, Dirk Wynants tells me, is something of Belgian national trait.

Text: Daniel Golling

www.extremis.be