

# French Revolution

*Demisch Danant shines new light on French postwar reconstruction design.*

BY LINDA LEE

**Leave it to the French to have** an entire farm team of talented mid-century designers who were, until recently, almost unknown. French superstars like Prouvé and Perriand were born at the turn of the 20th century. But this group came of age after World War II and, besides familiar names like Pierre Paulin and Serge Mouille, includes many less familiar ones: Rene-Jean Caillette, born in 1919; Alain Richard, Michel Mortier, Pierre Guariche, Joseph-André Motte, all born around 1925; and Genevieve Dangles, Antoine Philippon and Jacqueline Lecoq, all born around 1930.

"This generation of designers have been underestimated and underappreciated for some years, mostly because of a lack of knowledge," says Stephane Danant, of the Demisch Danant gallery. At Design Miami/Basel, the Demisch Danant booth is set up as a 1960s home, both interior and exterior, and is showing only Joseph-André Motte, including some very rare pieces. Demisch Danant has shown many standouts from this group and currently has a Philippon/Lecoq show in New York.

"I think it's a good time for Motte, Caillette, Guariche, Philippon and Lecoq," Danant says.

Recent interest was boosted by an exhibit of 250 works at Les Arts Decoratifs in Paris called "Mobi-Boom: The Explosion of Design in France from 1945 to 1975." *Women's Wear Daily* said, when Mobi-Boom opened in September, "Many of the creators featured... are bound to become newly collectible thanks to this showcase."

Dominique Forest, curator of the exhibit, wrote in the catalog that 1947 to 1975 was a period of profound change in France. "This included the emergence of smaller apartments, working women, the arrival of television, the expansion of leisure time." Post-war furniture designers responded with newer, more affordable materials like plastic, rattan, foam and Formica and with mass production.

They were also given a rare opportunity: the country was being rebuilt from the ground up. As Motte said, "After the war we found ourselves amidst a heap of ruins with nearly a million buildings destroyed." Suzanne Demisch says this generation of designers believed they were revitalizing a destitute economy. "They were young architects and it felt like they were on some kind of mission, about improving lives and people's conditions."



Credenza, 1958, made from Rio Palisander wood and brass.

*"I think it's a good time for  
Motte, Caillette, Guariche,  
Philippon and Lecoq."  
—Stephane Danant*



Motte's apartment, Paris, 1960  
including his canapé for Char-  
ron, 1960; Tripod chair for  
Rougier, 1948; J13 opaline  
lamp for Disderot, 1958.

*He created his iconic rattan Tripod chair in 1949, which won the silver medal at the Milan Triennial that year and is now represented in the collection at the Pompidou.*

Motte, sometimes referred to as J.A. Motte or André Motte, was the 1948 valedictorian of his class at the l'Ecole des Arts Appliqués à l'Industrie in Paris, and was hired right out of school to work at Bon Marche. He created his iconic rattan Tripod chair in 1949, which won the silver medal at the Milan Triennial that year and is now represented in the collection at the Pompidou.

By 1953 Motte, Michel Mortier and Pierre Guariche had formed a short-lived partnership called L'atelier de Recherche Plastique or ARP (the plastic research workshop). And when people weren't ready to buy so many modernist pieces for their homes, the government stepped in with public commissions for several members of this group.

Referring to Orly airport, completed in 1961, Demisch says, "A cultural minister said, 'We're greeting foreign visitors at an architecturally forward airport with furniture from two centuries ago.'" Thus Motte was hired to do interiors for airports not only at Orly but at Roissy and Lyon.

In fact, once you start looking, Motte seems to have been everywhere, as a member of Group 4, with Caillette, Richard and Dangles; working with Paul Andreu on a master plan for the Paris Metro (his plastic seats can still be found); and creating furniture for the Town Hall in Grenoble, including a knockout 1965 ebony table.

Still, Motte and the others are known to only a select few. "If you put these things at auction, no one would know what they were," Demisch says. "It looks like something you've seen a hundred times, but you haven't."

Danant, who has been collecting these pieces for a decade, has been selling them since 2008 to buyers in England, Russia, Israel, Switzerland and the US. He says, "We always had a good response and interest from collectors who knew nothing about it but instinctively understood the aesthetic and the concept."

Motte's work, in particular, has all the right ingredients for smart collectors, Demisch says. "It's functional. You can use it. Yet it's very smart about the proportions."



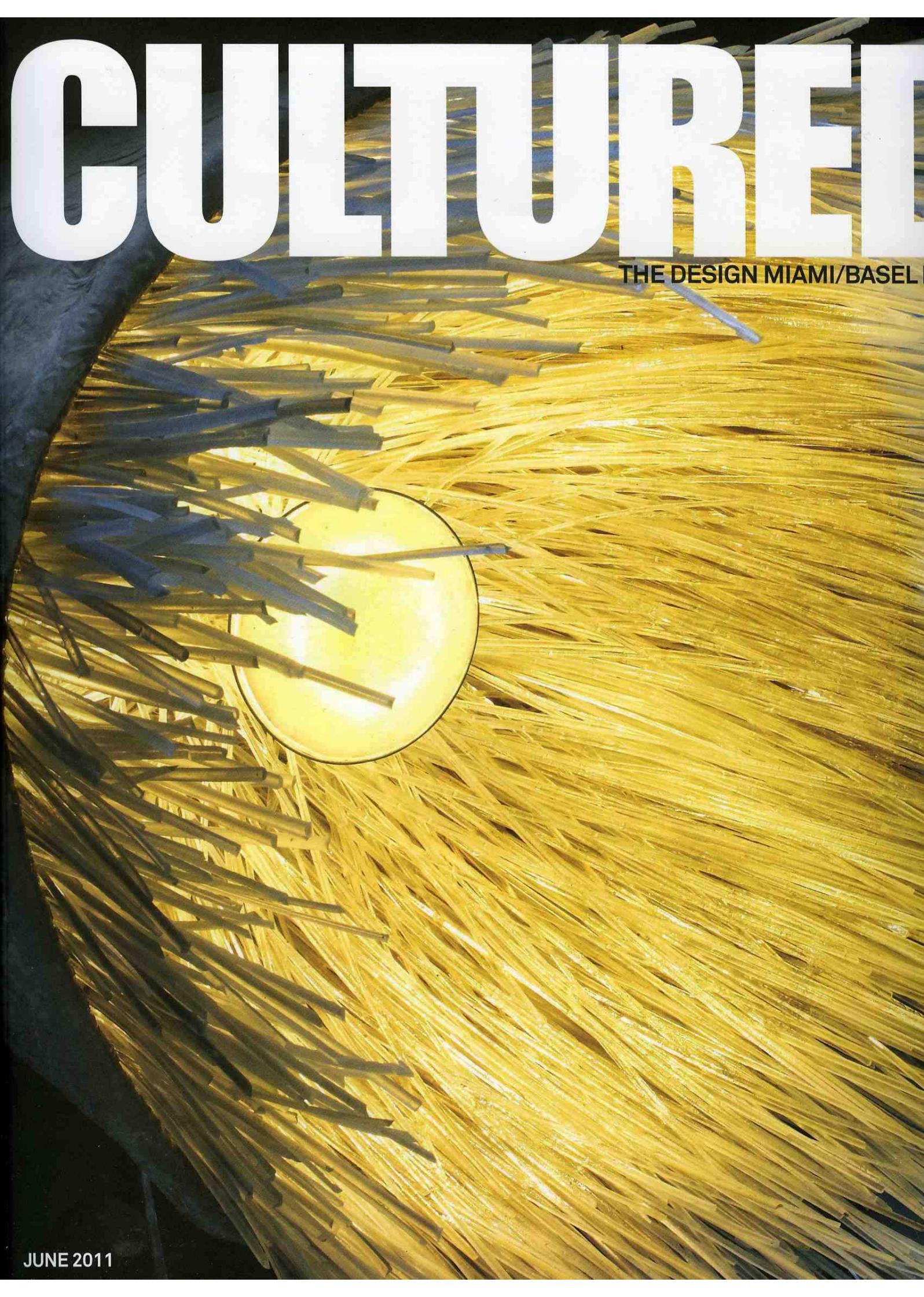
Top, a sketch for an interior project by Antoine Philippon and Jacqueline Lecoq, contemporary above, Motte's Dining Table, 1965, made from Formica and wood on an aluminum base.



The Tripod, 1949, also known as the Chistera, is considered one of Motte's masterpieces.

# CULTURE

THE DESIGN MIAMI/BASEL



JUNE 2011