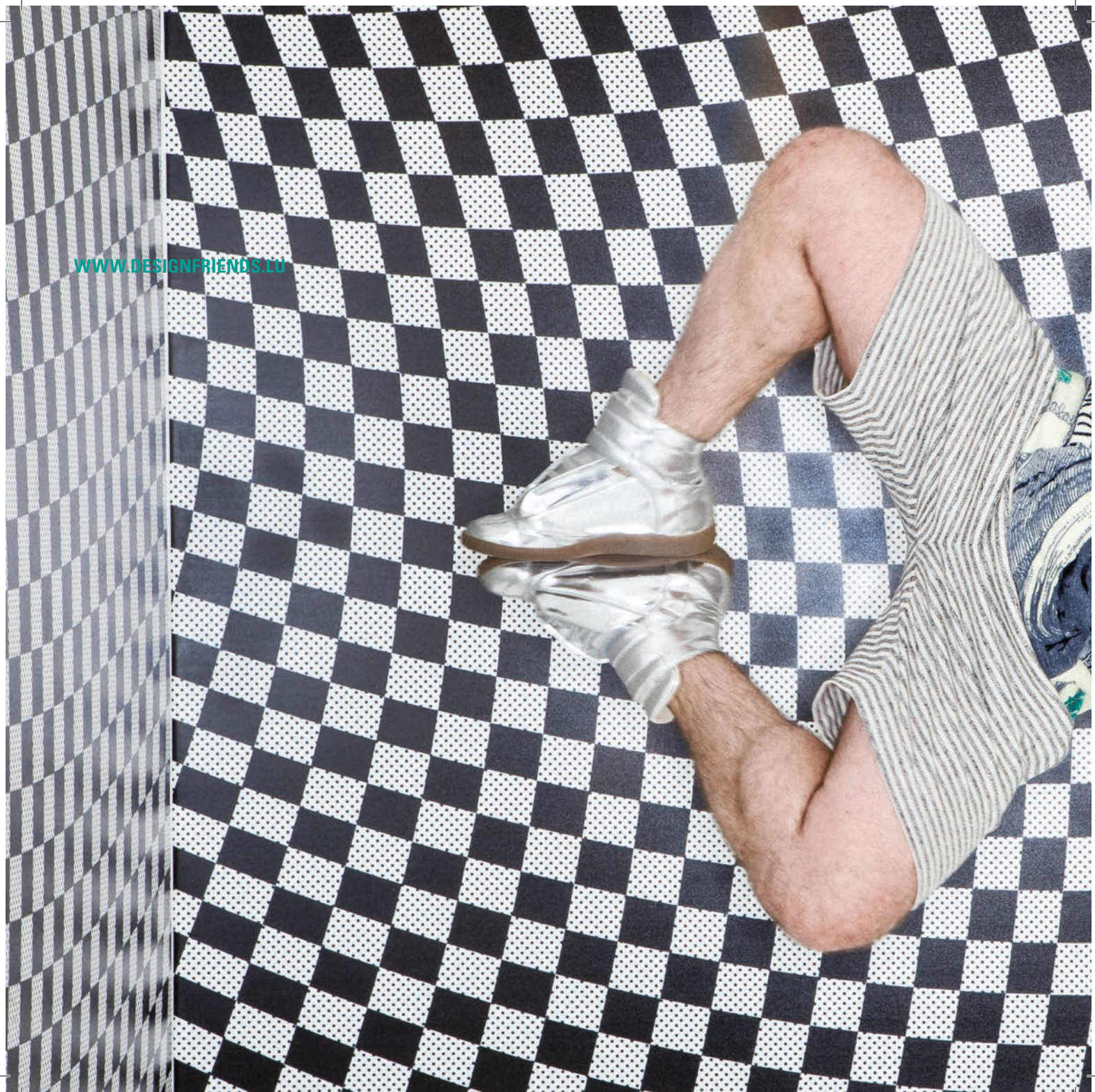


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JEAN-PAUL LESPAGNARD



“In my opinion fashion is defined much more by sharing rather than creating differences, however you don’t always see that reflected especially among luxury brands.”

JEAN-PAUL LESPAGNARD

DESIGN FRIENDS



COVER:
TILL WE DROP Collection (SS 2013)
© *Laetitia Bica*

“My dad was a truck driver, so what I would do was to cut the inner tires of his truck and I would make corsets for my sisters.”



CHEESE ON FLEEK Collection (FW 2015)

© René Habermacher

JEAN-PAUL LESPAIGNARD IS A TRAILBLAZER IN A LOT OF WAYS.

WHILE MANY FASHION HOUSES ARE STILL BUSY BEING ON THE DEFENSIVE ABOUT HOW THINGS ARE DONE WITHIN THE BUSINESS, HE HAS CARVED A WAY YEARS IN ADVANCE, WITH THINGS LIKE MODEL DIVERSITY AND THE IDEA OF DIRECTLY MAKING HIS PRODUCTS AVAILABLE TO HIS CUSTOMERS AT THE TIME OF HIS FASHION SHOWS.

HIS SHOWS ARE PART OF THE PARIS CALENDAR, BUT HE PREFERS TO KEEP HIS CREATIVE STUDIO IN BRUSSELS, A CITY HE CALLS UNPRETENTIOUS, AND WHERE CULTURAL IDENTITIES COLLUDE EASILY WITHOUT BARRIERS, A CONTINUOUS SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR SOMEONE WHO OBVIOUSLY HAS ALWAYS HAD DESIGN IN HIS BLOOD.

ANGELINA A. RAFII — *You always wanted to be a fashion designer. Do you remember why that was? As a child, what drew you to it and what did you feel for that particular world?*

JEAN-PAUL LESPAIGNARD — Well, I really wanted to become a fashion designer, but without really knowing why. My sisters told me that when I was ten, I asked for a sewing machine for St. Nicolas. But truthfully, I don't know where it came from; there was not one particular event or experience that triggered this interest in fashion. It was just always there.

AAR — *So it felt almost innate and natural to you.*

JPL — Yes, definitely. There was an enormous treasure trove of 70s clothing in our attic, because my mom kept absolutely everything and I have two

sisters. So I had access to all these shoes, clothes, communion clothes, etc.

I remember I was always looking to organize fashion shows. My father was a truck driver, so we had a huge garage that I used for that purpose by using my sisters' old clothing.

AAR — *How old were you then?*

JPL — I must have been 7 or 8 at the time. I would invite my girlfriends from our village, would dress them, and would make them walk in my fashion show, on a podium I had also masterminded.

The other thing I would do was for my sisters. As I mentioned my dad was a truck driver, so what I would do was to cut the inner tires of his truck and I would make corsets for my sisters.



LE SAVOIR FAIRE Collection (SS 2015)
© René Habermacher and Yann Morrison

AAR — *Your path took you from a brief stint in economics, to art and then design. How useful were the first two steps of your journey in where you are now and how has it shaped your vision as a designer?*

JPL — *It definitely did influence me. Especially my education in the arts, it really shaped my vision and was a true revelation of sorts. It's true that my aspiration had always been to become a fashion designer, but going through the arts first, was really important to me, and now in retrospect it seems like the logical path, especially because I came from a background*



where I had no prior exposure to that world. Later I was really drawn to movements like Arte Povera, Pop Art and Neo Pop. The idea of salvaging things, which was already present in my experimentation with truck tires, was truly interesting to me. The fact that Arte Povera was like the mirror image of Pop Art, and also the idea of commercializing art.

To be quite frank, the reason why I initially picked economics, was because it was the only option that allowed me to take drawing lessons at the time. So that was the trigger, but actually,

I ended up being really interested in my economics classes.

There was also some child psychology classes, which I wasn't really into – though group psychology and the idea of control of the masses is something that I find interesting.

AAR — *Well, psychology is an inherent part of fashion in a way, from the desires that are created to the language that is utilized in fashion advertising etc.*

JPL — For sure.



AAR — *A lot of creatives tend to struggle with the more commercial end of things, and are happy to delegate that to others, how do you feel about that? You seem to be pretty hands-on in all aspects of your creative studio. The commercial side does not seem to scare you off.*

JPL — No, it's not a scary concept to me. But I especially appreciate having a thorough exchange with a collaborator who is really good at this aspect of the business, because I feel that I can contribute ideas. So all the commercial facets of the creative studio, not just the brand, are under the responsibility of my commercial manager and he is a pivotal part of the studio.

AAR — *You also seamlessly embraced the idea of Show to Shop, a generalized concept that has hit the fashion world recently and which some design houses pioneered while others are still struggling. What are your thoughts on that?*

JPL — Well, to be honest, it was quite difficult because I actually was the first to embrace such a model. It was challenging because I am not Burberry (Burberry was one of the first big brands to announce that they would change their seasonal calendar and provide select models directly from catwalk to stores, Ed), I don't have their resources. I head a small entity. It's really two of us, but with each project that we launch at our creative studio, I hire a group of people.

This Show to Shop system, is a system that really needs a thorough follow-up and I did not have the appropriate structure around me to really bring this project to fruition in line with my ambitions.

AAR — *Is the production carried out in Belgium and is it possible for you to have such a quick turnaround?*

JPL — That's precisely it. It is quite possible to do it, but like I said, you need the right system in place, so that you can react to the orders in a timely fashion, that production is in place, and that the shipments are efficient. All of that requires a lot of money, and given the size of my company, I was not able to create an operation, which was in line with my desires. But it was definitely a learning experience.

AAR — *So is the idea still standing?*

JPL — Yes, it is but after this experience I have really decided to commit to my ambitions, which means not rushing into things, but taking the time to find the right collaborators who will allow me to do things the right way.

As a result, I have decided to skip the next two seasons, and present my next collection in 2018. But I have also just signed with a ready-to-wear clothing brand to serve as their creative director. I can't tell you which brand yet though.



TILL WE DROP Collection (SS 2013)
© Laetitia Bica



AAR — *You prefer staying in Brussels rather than making the move to Paris. Do you think having a Belgian identity defines part of the vision of how you approach your design work? Or is the use of design to you, precisely the fact that it transcends cultural identities?*

JPL — I think it's a bit of both really. I truly feel like a world citizen, completely. I always say that I am a world citizen, I am European, I am Belgian, I am Liègeois and I am from the Ardennes region. It's like I open my mind to the max to all of these influences but I don't deny my roots. So I am both a world citizen and from a small village in the Ardennes and it is clear that I look at the world through that lens. And there is no denying that the basis of my education is deeply Belgian.

“The very first thing is the project authenticity. I am not interested in working with someone who just wants to bank on my name.”



PETITS RIENS Project

AAR — *Would you say that there are specific characteristics that define the Belgian approach to design?*

JPL — I think there are a great number of Belgian creatives who can earnestly work on things that aren't very earnest. And we have the ability to look at our work from the outside, without taking ourselves too seriously.

What I really appreciate about Brussels, is that it doesn't have any pretences as a city. It doesn't pretend to be a fashion city or an art city or a music city, when in reality it has pretty important movements in all of these cultural facets. While as a creative you have the ability to move between all of these cultural circles quite freely. There are no barriers. That's the strength of Brussels and that's why I like keeping my creative studio there. It facilitates my collaborations with the dance and costume world also.

COSTUME FOR PIERRE DROULERS (Brussels, 2013)
Charleroi Danses





FROM B TO A Collection (SS 2013)
© Etienne Tordoir

ICH WILL 'NEN COWBOY ALS MANN Collection (2008)
Winner Public Prize and 1.2.3. Prize, Hyères Fashion and Photography Festival



AAR — *At heart you are a real storyteller. When you design you don't just create clothes, you create a whole universe. I was there when you won at the Hyères Fashion festival and the story you told there was so elaborate and fun, people really connected with that. How important is function to you when you design?*

JPL — The two aspects work hand in hand. The story allows me to create this world, where I illustrate specific silhouettes and movements, but at the end of the day it is also within the context of that story that I seek function. For example the collection I did which had a Mexican vacation theme, I went looking for fabrics in Mexico, which I incorporated in the collection because they were incredibly comfortable. And when you go on vacation you want to be as comfortable as possible. The collection I did on Motocross had clothes with ample room in the back of the clothes because when you ride a motorcycle you hold your arms in a way that requires freedom of movement.

In each of my stories, I really look for comfort. The story serves me both in terms of presentation and functionality.

AAR — *So essentially you want to find ways to improve the life of the female protagonists in your story lines.*

JPL — Yes, definitely.



SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN Collection (SS 2012)
© Etienne Tordoir

AAR — *In order to feed your inspiration, you travel a lot. Your collections are reminiscent of far-off places. You also mentioned that you appreciate the fact that you can seamlessly move between one cultural circle to the next in Brussels. What other things inspire you and feed your creative process?*

JPL — What really inspires me is popular and contemporary culture. That's where I find differences. What I am about to say may sound overly poetic, but in essence every time I travel I don't necessarily feel very different from the people I meet halfway across the world. What's evident is that we all have the same needs, we may experience it in different ways, but our basic and secondary needs are all the same. Eating, drinking, sleeping, making love. It's all the same. We are all the same. So it's really in digging into popular culture that our differences emerge, because that's where you realize that our roots are different and that each culture evolved in a different way into what's contemporary. It's this anchoring of contemporary culture that I am really interested in.

AAR — *In your research do you find yourself experimenting with fabrics? I know that you have used Guatemalan artisans for their craftsmanship as well as people in a nursery home who were excited to collaborate on creating embroideries for the collection you presented at the Hyères Festival. How important is the element of craftsmanship to you and what part does the social element play?*

JPL — It's simpler than that, as in my opinion fashion is defined much more by sharing rather than creating differences, however you don't always see that reflected especially among luxury brands. The way I approach the idea of craftsmanship is much more democratic, especially during the communication phase, where other brands seek to create this feeling of being unattainable.

I SEE 'EM Collection (FW 2012)
© Etienne Tordoir





top: **GALLER Chocolate Collaboration**

right: **Lamp NOMAD O'SUN** (Brussels, 2013)
Design by Alain Gilles

AAR — *How important is technology and innovation in your design work?*

JPL — It's something I am very interested and intrigued by. At the moment I am working on a dance project for which I am creating virtual costumes. I am totally excited by this project. I just spent a weekend in Geneva working with Google tilt brush, it's really great. It's a crazy sensation, I was there with goggles on, suspended on an elevated platform which is 100 m high, surrounded by mountains with a bust in front of me. And I was just painting on it like that. I had enormous fun and didn't really want to stop.

AAR — *How do you approach your collaborations? You have collaborated on things from scarves, to backpacks, cars (Jaguar) and chocolate. What draws you to a specific collaboration?*

JPL — The very first thing is the project authenticity. I am not interested in working with someone who just wants to bank on my name. So the project has to be in line with my ideals and my desires.

AAR — *What are the essential differences in creating for your own brand versus within the context of a collaboration?*

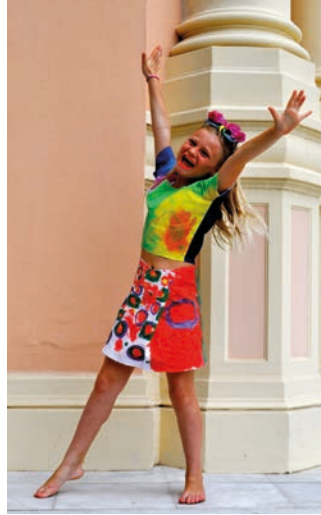
JPL — Well, the big difference is that it is not my story. So I try to find a common ground, something that connects my world to theirs. It's the same approach I have whether I work with another brand or a choreographer. I listen to their story and try to find elements from my own narrative that I can connect to theirs.

AAR — *What do you enjoy about the experience of designing costumes for performance artists and dancers?*

JPL — It's the performance aspect of it that I am most drawn to, the fact that it is a type of art that is alive.

That's something you can also retrace in my fashion shows, which are rarely staged as simple fashion shows but are more like performances.

I also like being confronted with different creative personalities because it feeds my own inspiration.



AAR — *You are also involved in teaching workshops that range from children to aspiring designers. What do you take from these efforts and what are you drawn to?*

JPL — It's about meeting people. I think providing children with a space to express themselves is fantastic. It really nurtures me, because kids are also the best people to steal ideas from. Again it's going back to the idea of sharing.

AAR — *What are some of the upcoming projects and aspirations you have cooking?*

JPL — As I mentioned there is my collaboration with the ready-to-wear brand as their creative director. There are several other collaborations I am preparing, in addition to some exciting trips.

It's also a year where I want to focus on building a strong foundation for my brand. A lot of people now know the Jean-Paul Lespagnard brand, but I had to run around like crazy and make due with very limited resources. Now I am 37 years old and I want to make sure that my brand lives on.

“I think there are a great number of Belgian creatives who can earnestly work on things that aren’t very earnest.

And we have the ability to look at our work from the outside, without taking ourselves too seriously.”



PUBLICATIONS

01	CHRISTOPH NIEMANN	Illustration	2009
02	MICHEL MALLARD	Creative Direction	2009
03	FUN FACTORY	Product Design	2009
04	ANDREAS UEBELE	Signage Design	2010
05	HARRI PECCINOTTI	Photography	2010
06	KUSTAA SAKSI	Illustration	2010
07	5.5 DESIGNERS	Product Design	2011
08	NIKLAUS TROXLER	Graphic Design	2011
09	JOACHIM SAUTER	Media Design	2011
10	MICHAEL JOHNSON	Graphic Design	2011
11	ELVIS POMPILIO	Fashion Design	2011
12	STEFAN DIEZ	Industrial Design	2012
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14	MARIO LOMBARDO	Editorial Design	2012
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30	PLEIX	Video & Installation Design	2016
31	LA FILLE D'O	Fashion Design	2016
32	RUEDI BAUR	Graphic Design	2016
33	ROMAIN URHAUSEN	Product design	2016
34	MR BINGO	Illustration design	2016
35	KIKI VAN EIJK	Product Design	2016
36	JEAN-PAUL LESPAIGNARD	Fashion Design	2016
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