

Curiosity to explore unknown domains is essential in today's fluid creative scene, according to the duo behind **STUDIO BRIAND BERTHEREAU**.

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Portraits  
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‘Designers  
must be  
omnivores’

Joran Briand (right) started his studio in 2011. Five years later he was joined by his indispensable intern, Arnaud Berthereau.







Takui Shimamura and Studio Briand Berthereau

# JORAN & ARNAUD



For the redevelopment of the Renault Design Center, Studio Joran Briand designed the chromatic graphic system that now appears on indoor glazing, indicating different departments and functions.

**‘PERFECTION IS ACHIEVED**, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.’ After looking at the work of Studio Briand Berthereau, I’m not surprised that the duo behind the Paris design practice puts stock in this quotation from a book by French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery. Reminded of Apple’s minimalist design style, I note that founder Joran Briand and former-intern-turned-partner Arnaud Berthereau live and work by the leitmotif ‘doing the maximum with the minimum’ and, in describing their resource-saving designs, often use the word ‘frugal’. Their approach is not just a matter of aesthetics. ‘Projects last much longer when they do not feed on fashionable trends but are instead an ad hoc reflection,’ says Briand.

When expressing my observation about the contrast between their minimalist work and the eclectic and exuberant aesthetic I associate with French design, Berthereau corrects me. ‘If you look at French design history, it’s not exceptional at all. Under Louis XIV the French style was known for its classicism, and in the 1950s furniture designers like Joseph-André Motte took a very functional approach in terms of materials. Today, too, you can see a more purified style in the work of people like Martin Szekely and Pierre Charpin.’

The purity of Studio Briand Berthereau’s work lies in the balance between form and function. The designers let materials speak for themselves by stripping them down to their essentials. ‘We try to avoid the use of gratuitous additions,’ says Briand. Simultaneously, materials that might be superfluous elsewhere often find a second life in their projects, as exemplified by the VIP salon for sail-making company Spindrift. The space is housed in a building refurbished by Studio 02 Architectes and located in Morbihan, Brittany. When part of a carbon mast from a MOD 70 yacht broke during a race and couldn’t be repaired easily, they transformed the piece into a sleek bar counter and topped it with oak and Corian. A beehive-inspired panel made out of old mast-making materials diffuses light from the ceiling lamps above the bar. Contrary to what my description might imply, the interior has anything but a recycled look. The use of alternative materials is something the partners are passionate about. ‘For ethical and ecological reasons, we are interested in discovering the materials of tomorrow, as replacements for those of yesterday and today,’ says Berthereau. ‘We think the ability to identify and propose uses of such materials is essential for contemporary designers – and their clients.’

Although Studio Briand Berthereau may employ a minimalist design language, these guys are maximalists when it comes to the number of disciplines they’re willing to tackle. From architectural interventions and interior design to scenography and graphics, the practice operates across a range of projects as diverse as building façades, restaurant chairs and T-shirt motifs, often all on one and the same day.

Trained as product designers, Briand and Berthereau are churning out a series of projects that contribute to the organic growth of their multidisciplinary efforts. Early on in his career, Briand worked on large-scale architecture projects, but it didn’t stop there. ‘We designed furniture for such projects, which led to work on interiors that eventually included graphics,’ he says. ‘Over the years we acquired the right skills – or people with the right skills – allowing us to build bridges between different experts and sources of know-how.’ The collaborative character of the studio can be traced to Briand’s time at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. ‘Collaboration between workshops was supported at school. In line with the Bauhaus movement, we were used to assembling multidisciplinary teams. Doing so generated interesting creative confrontations, and we wanted to reproduce the same dynamic, the same bubbly feel, in our studio.’ Depending on the commission, the pair teams up with »



Optimal use of L'Optimiste's 60-m<sup>2</sup> interior involves the integration of transparent sliding walls and acoustic curtains that allow for several configurations.



various collaborators, from graphic experts to industrial designers. Although the work entrusted to external professionals is based on their specific areas of expertise, Studio Briand Berthereau encourages interaction among them. 'What they come up with doesn't matter as much as the cooperative links that got them there,' says Briand. 'The quality of a designer lies in his ability to adapt, not in his speciality.'

Theirs is a way of working that's happily welcomed by an industry receptive to designers now in their 30s. 'To an increasing degree, we're getting the chance to be part of an ecosystem that combines various skills,' says Briand. 'In architecture competitions, for instance, we're seeing more and more proposals by multidisciplinary teams. The

old and simple recipe — a couple of architects — is becoming less and less popular.' His partner agrees. 'Designers today aspire to "touch" new fields of research. It's a necessity, too: curiosity to explore unknown domains brings reflection and innovation. Designers must be omnivores, because our societies are built on creativity.'

Briand says another necessity is to understand how the end user thinks, especially in a world where the usage of space is subject to so much change. Taking the hotel industry as an example, Berthereau points out that it's 'reinventing itself by adopting co-living and co-working concepts, while borrowing inspiration from services such as Airbnb'. The convergence of various functions in spatial design translates into

an increased need for fluidity and exchange, according to Briand, who refers to the studio's contribution to the redevelopment of the Renault Design Center close to Paris. Responsible for the project's architectural interventions is Chartier Dalix, an outfit with whom they collaborate more often. Studio Briand Berthereau provided the signage, as well as purpose-made furniture. After Chartier Dalix opened up the 27,000-m<sup>2</sup> space and made room for physical connections, it was up to Briand and Berthereau to generate different levels of exchange, which correspond to the use of the space and comply with Renault's confidentiality constraints, as everything that goes on in the design centre is top secret. To satisfy this part of the brief, the studio created

a system of colourful graphics. Patterns screen-printed on glazing function not only as navigation but also as an aid to privacy, depending on their opacity. Eliminating the need for big signs, the designers used colour as an intuitive wayfinding tool.

For Studio Briand Berthereau, keeping a close eye on the user is not a passive activity. 'I think our responsibility has to include empathy,' says Berthereau. 'Without putting ourselves in the shoes of the users, we can't understand their needs. Empathy has to be active *and* reactive, however, if we want them to cultivate their tastes and to change their way of using spaces and products.' ●

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Samuel Lehuédé

In the VIP salon above the studio of sail-making company Spindrift, old mast-making materials are featured in the lighting, and part of a broken carbon mast serves as the counter.

## 'We're interested in discovering the materials of tomorrow'



Briand (right) and Berthereau are both trained as product designers.