

Crystal vision

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The Transmutation 1 chandelier by designer Thierry Jeannot recently caught the eye of the public at the Enlightened Waste exhibition, which took place in the Marion Friedmann Gallery in London. It aimed to showcase how designers are using plastic waste packaging to create enchanting light objects. Although Transmutation 1 may look like a traditional Baroque-style chandelier, on closer inspection it becomes clear that it is, in fact, constructed from polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles.

"The piece captivates the huge passion the designer has put into the research of the PET plastic bottle. This obsession and passion for a rather hated material is fully visible in the meticulous construction, craftsmanship and treatment of the material," says gallery curator Marion Friedmann.

Jeannot is a French-born product designer who has lived in Mexico for the past 16 years. His interest in traditional techniques and materials led him to move to Mexico from Paris in 1996 where he started working on designing objects with local craftsmen. In 2006 he began to experiment with recycled materials and particularly PET bottles, which are extremely common in Mexico City.

"The experimentation with PET was slow and very difficult," explains Jeannot. "I liked the transparencies and the shapes of the material but didn't know how I could join the pieces together and what kind of design I would be able to make from it."

However, he persevered and over the past six years has created a range of lighting objects and jewellery using PET bottles. "I kept working on my own designs with PET, obtaining results and finally understanding and dominating the material. I think we all have pre-conceptions about materials when we start working with them," he says.

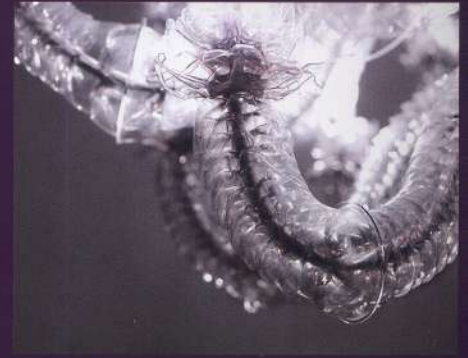
In order to acquire the amount of PET bottles needed in his work, Jeannot employed local residents who not only sourced the bottles but who he also trained to clean, cut and paint the bottles in order to prepare them for use.

In the construction of the chandelier he used over 1000 PET bottles. "During the making of the chandelier I wanted to work with PET as if it were crystal; I always see transparent plastic as crystal," says Jeannot. "Some of the results were predictable and some were not. When I started to assemble the pieces, reflections and transparencies appeared – that is why I called it transmutation."

Having worked on his design for five years, Jeannot eventually completed his chandelier, which does indeed look more like crystal than plastic. "You will have to have a much closer look to be able to identify the techniques and material used. What you see is not what you think," explains Jeannot.

It is this beautiful use of waste material that struck Marion Friedmann. "The chandelier tells many stories and is for me a very emotional object," she comments. "It shifts our preconceptions about the value of materials. This creates an intricate power within the piece that makes it truly loveable and a real luxury piece." ■

Tanya Weaver



opposite and this page
the Transmutation 1 chandelier
by Thierry Jeannot

left
forming the PET components

