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THE SHAPE OF SOUND

DESIGNER PHILIP MICHAEL WOLFSON USES THE SPLASH OF SCOTCH POURED INTO A CRYSTAL GLASS TO CREATE A SCULPTURAL BAR FOR LVMH

Words by Eric Newill



When Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy wanted a “showstopping object for the launch of Glenmorangie in China and Taiwan,” they contacted London-based designer Philip Michael Wolfson and asked him to create a functional sculpture to complement the company’s premium Scotch. His concept, SoundForm FLUID, derives its shape from a graph of soundwaves generated when whisky is poured into a crystal glass.

“It is a type of visual or concrete poetry,” says Wolfson, whose SoundForms series began in 2008 as a project for China’s Pearl Lam Galleries. The theme was “a Western interpretation of the historical Four Arts of the Scholar,” and Wolfson chose music: “My take is the examination of the visuals of sound.”

Although the Glenmorangie executives originally thought they were commissioning an abstracted chaise longue, the piece evolved into a concept “bar.” Wolfson adds, “This was how they saw it could be used in their publicity campaign. But at the Taiwan launch, it was presented as a sculpture on a plinth, at an art gallery. And, for me, that’s how it was designed—as a visual interpretation of a soundwave. It’s very much secondary that it is a bar.”

Born in Philadelphia, Wolfson studied architecture at Cornell and London’s Architectural Association before spending 10 years working with Zaha Hadid as her head of design. In 1991, he established his own practice, and now creates interiors and individual pieces for clients throughout the world. Particularly known for his Origami series, he has shown work at such venues as London’s Victoria and Albert Museum and Paris’ Fondation Cartier.

Regarding SoundForm FLUID, he says, “The paramount concern was with making an object to be perceived or felt, rather than easily read, as well as juxtaposing the realms of function and sculpture. Overall, the entire creation was quite an international experience, considering that the piece was commissioned in London, for a Scottish company, owned by a French conglomerate, and then fabricated in the States and shipped to Taiwan for the initial launch in December of 2011.”

Key to the object’s shape was the various sound elements involved. By contrast, Wolfson says, “A cat purring would not give any greater line variation than that of a slow, continuous wave. Unless-cat fans, please don’t read further—you kicked the cat, or stepped on its tail. Now that would give an enormous soundwave variation, no?”

