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NEW

Tomás Alonso

The north London-based furniture designer creates items that are playful, deceptively simple and sometimes come with the risk of breakages

"If I can arrive at a solution without screws, it's better," Tomás Alonso says. "Things should work in a simple way, so I start with less and then add if necessary. Although sometimes I push this too much and things are ... precarious."

We're sitting outside the designer's studio in Stoke Newington, London. He's flicking through images on his laptop, and stops at Bottle Light – a sidelight for Milanese gallery Rossana Orlandi. It comprises a ceramic, bottle-shaped shade with two holes through the neck, and a vertical stand. To set it up, you slot the shade over the pole and let go: the shade cantilevers out, held up by friction. It's a simple concept, and one several gallery visitors took home. "There have been a few breakages," Alonso confesses.

While Bottle Light is most safely viewed as a "gallery exercise", it demonstrates his approach well. "I design simple structures, but they give you something new in the way they come together," he says. Alonso likes to play around with materials, and find new ways of creating structures and joins. One of his favourite techniques involves rotating parts around a pole. His Mushiki storage system comprises drawers that swivel around a pillar; the A Frame three-legged table has two wooden legs rotated around a metal pole, with a tabletop slotted over it.

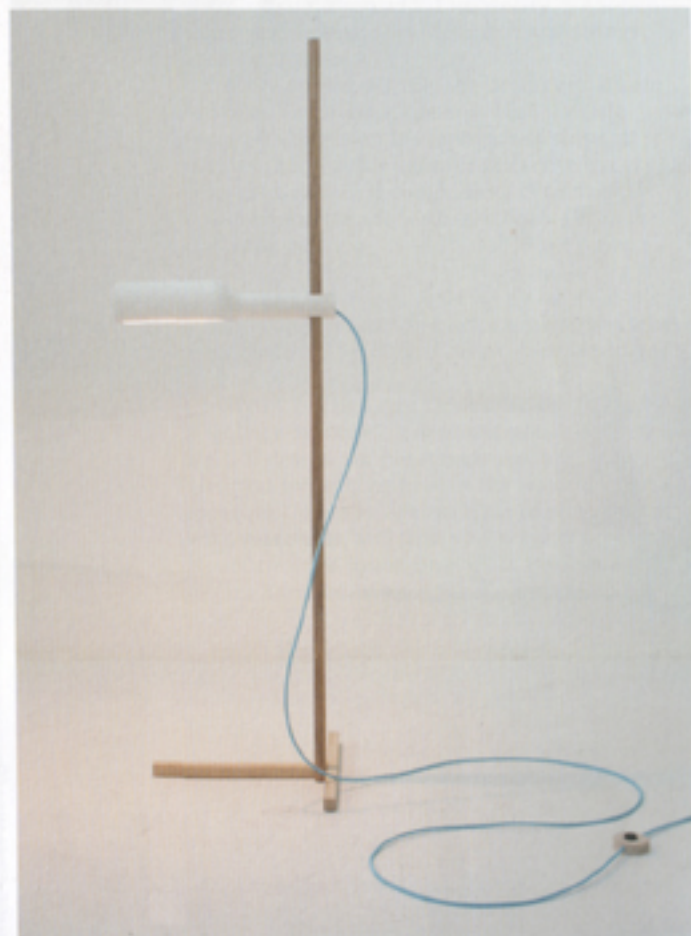
There's an honesty to Alonso's furniture, a child-like simplicity that makes you want to interact with it. These traits have charmed several design companies, including Germany's Nils Holger Moormann and Japan's Karimoku New Standard. Spanish footwear brand Camper commissioned him to design the interior of a series of stores. ▮



Below
Bottle Light
for Rossana
Orlandi,
2010

Right
Offset Table
System for
Maxdesign,
2012

Below Right
A Frame Table
for Karimoku
New Standard,
2012



But this simplicity is deceptive: "It takes a lot of work," Alonso says. His most recent project, an office table for Italian design company Maxdesign, was two years in the making. The desk comprises simple units: an arch, a tabletop in two parts and a tube running along the length. Each element comes in a variety of finishes and sizes, and additional elements – lamps, dividers, storage boxes – can clip on to the tube and peep through the gap in the tabletop.

The main structural component is the arch. "I'm asking a lot of this arch," he says. "It acts as one leg, it has to connect the tube, hold the tops down and I wanted to have the option of having the other half of the leg in metal, aluminium or wood. [The engineers] didn't think it was possible, so I had to engineer an extrusion myself to prove it would work. It worked extremely well."

For Alonso, these details are where the fun lies, but ultimately, he says: "My goal is to make practical things, that are helpful in our lives." Nearly all his work folds down with no need for tools, and can be reconfigured to meet your needs. "The people I have around me are travelling all the time," he says. "So I make furniture that adjusts to personal situations." ■