







Air — a wardrobe and sideboard for the centre of the room.

“There are things that just die in the room and then there are things that stand out”, Design House Stockholm’s managing director Anders Färdig maintains.

What he is getting at is the indefinable ‘it’ quality which most items have to manage without, but which some things just have. It is difficult, if not impossible, to put a finger on what this ‘it’ factor actually is. Perhaps it is the poetry that happens on those rare occasions when the sum is more than the total of the parts. This is a way of describing the immeasurable qualities that unite *Air* with many other Design House Stockholm products. This is an argument that, according to Anders Färdig, could be regarded as tendentiously vague or woolly. But, as he points out, this is the best possible area to work in, provided that it is controlled. And this particular product really reflects this.

If we ignore the whole for a moment and look at the parts, *Air* consists of cane and solid wood. Cane panels stretched between solid wooden frames keep the furniture well ventilated and barely hide what is inside. But if the parts that make up the item are hardly remarkable in themselves — people have been stretching cane or rattan on frames for hundreds of years and they have a given place in

furniture design as we recognise it from the golden age of Scandinavian design as well as from handbags — then what is it that makes the *Air* wardrobe and sideboard so special?

Mathieu Gustafsson, the designer, believes that it is precisely the aspect of surprise created by shifting a material from a specific context where it is familiar to a context where we do not expect it; as well as creating furniture that does not need to be pushed up against the wall or placed in a corner. With its transparency, *Air* plays an unusual role for a wardrobe as a freestanding room divider. With his half French (or half Swedish, if you like) background, Mathieu Gustafsson was induced to couple together the Swedish and French approaches to furniture design.

Irrational and luxurious

“My Swedish relatives furnished their dwellings in a typically Swedish style; pared down and practical. People in France are not as uniform”, he maintains. “They can readily mix Empire with Ikea.”

“From a Swedish perspective it is a bit irrational as a wardrobe and is therefore somewhat luxurious,” Mathieu Gustafsson maintains. “From a French point of view the pattern attributable to the strict design is extremely Scandinavian.” And the fact of *Air* being blond and airy is also linked to the Scandinavian tradition of furniture.

Cane is a material that can only be worked when it is wet. When it dries it tends to twist. The force is so great that it could split the cupboard. It should really be impossible to combine the intractable material with the delicate framework using rational methods of furniture manufacture. Design House Stockholm’s greatest challenge has been to master the use of cane and to translate Mathieu Gustafsson’s idea into an item that is affordable without losing the poetry in the design.

Daniel Golling

