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# LIGHT MOTIF

focus on Bombay Sapphire  
prize-winner Paul Cockledge

Manuelli, Sara. "Light Heavyweight," *Design Week*. October 30, 2003.

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# Light heavyweight

The winner of the Bombay Sapphire 2003 prize is a master in deception and intrigue. Sara Manuelli profiles lighting designer Paul Cockledge

AN interview with the winner of The Bombay Sapphire prize 2003, arranged through the PR, had all the potential of becoming a surreal, Kafkaesque affair.

Not only was the identity of the interviewee hidden from me until the very last minute, but I was also sworn to secrecy that I would not tell him that he had won. However, I needn't have worried, since Paul Cockledge is such a force in his own right that any conversation with him assumes enthusiastic and slightly hilarious tones. He is young and incredibly bright, with a level of assurance justified by a creative curiosity that allows him to combine the apparently complex scientific working of electrical conductivity with experimental forms and shapes.

Since graduating in 2002 from the Royal College of Art, Cockledge has been busy making his sculptural lights for a crowd of collectors in the know. Most of his fame as a modern master of deceptively simple-looking lights comes from an exhibition he held at the Milan Furniture Fair with light supremo Ingo Maurer. There Cockledge showed NeOn, the installation that has also earned him the first prize in the Bombay Sapphire competition. A set of hanging glass vessels filled with gas, which glows as the electric current passes through, NeOn plays with the effects of high voltage, but also with the idea of keeping the workings of technology mysterious.



Main picture: Projection from the Bulb light, pictured bottom and far right. Above: NeOn hanging lights and Styrene shade, made from polystyrene cups that have been 'melted' together. Below: Paul Cockledge and the Watt light

a theme dear to Cockledge's own heart.

You sense that not only did Maurer provide Cockledge with an international platform at the right time, but also that he holds the Italian light designer in high regard. Like Maurer, Cockledge says he aims to straddle the worlds of art and design, but professes a sound commercial attitude. Most of his lights are produced by British manufacturers and sell like hot cakes either as limited edition pieces or as bespoke commissions.

Ron Arad, his teacher at the RCA and a judge on the Bombay Sapphire prize panel, is also a mentor. Via Arad, Cockledge displayed his Watt light at the Issey Miyake gallery in Tokyo. Watt is a cleverly conceived light that has a drawing pad attached to it via a clip. The switch is based on the conductive properties of the graphite found in pencils. Connecting two points with the pencil line

completes the circuit, switching the light on. When the line is rubbed out, the light switches off.

As Arad defines it, "Watt gives a whole new meaning to the simple action of turning a switch on and off. The concept [...] is charming and artistic."



Way before Cockledge won the prize, Bombay Sapphire commissioned him to design a 'Sapphire and Tonic' light for the Bombay Sapphire Blue Room exhibition at the Gellrye Museum in London, a selection of works by 30 international architects, designers and artists, from which the winner of the Bombay Sapphire prize has been selected.

For Cockledge, "it was important that the object possessed a subtle element of intrigue." Cockledge shows me his simple, starting idea. He drums out a bottle of Bombay Sapphire Gin, pours some in a plastic tonic bottle, shakes it into a rudimentary gin and tonic and places a UV bulb next to his concoction. The effect is mesmerising as the liquid glows blue and the translucent container becomes opaque. "A Sapphorean cocktail," Cockledge defines it with irony.

At the moment, the Sapphire and Tonic light is not on show since Cockledge is tweaking its glass shape. It will be, however, part of his first independent London exhibition, Snow White. By then, Cockledge will have the additional kudos of being the winner of the Bombay Sapphire competition, so expect punters to be queuing at the door. □

The Bombay Sapphire Blue Room exhibition is at the Gellrye Museum, Kingsland Road, London E2 until 11 January 2004. E-mail [info@paulcockledge.co.uk](mailto:info@paulcockledge.co.uk) to receive an invitation to Snow White

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