

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

## AD INNOVATOR: PAUL COCKSEGE

A young Londoner's attention-grabbing designs tease mystery from the everyday

Text by Eric Konigsberg

Visitors to London's Covent Garden over last year's winter holiday could imagine themselves triumphant in their own romantic comedy, courtesy of Paul Cocksedg The English designer created a public installation involving mistletoe and a giant Christmas tree that lit up with more than 50,000 red and white LED bulbs when a couple stood below it and kissed. "The sequence was activated by natural human conductivity, the flow of electricity through blood," Cocksedg says.

A perfectly scientific explanation, and yet to any passerby, Kiss looked like magic. "I've always been fascinated by magical things," the designer confirms. "Cartoons and fantasy, impossible things."



Photo: Dylan Thomas

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What makes Cocksedge so interesting is the way he trains that fascination on the natural world. To see one of his pieces is to be awed by the everyday—by light, conductivity, simple physics.

Even by lowly styrene. During his first trip to the Milan furniture fair, in 2003, Cocksedge presented a lampshade made of styrene-foam cups that had been evocatively reshaped by heat into organic forms. Another piece, named Watt?, was a lamp turned on by joining two pencil lines on a sheet of paper. Erasing a line switched the lamp off.

The buzz he received was thanks in part to German design legend Ingo Maurer, to whom Cocksedge had been introduced by Ron Arad, his mentor at the Royal College of Art; Maurer had been so impressed by the young designer's work that he handed over nearly half of his own Milan exhibition space to help launch his career.

A string of high-profile installations for Swarovski, Hermès, Sony, and others followed, as well as lighting designs for manufacturers Established & Sons and Flos. Sleights of hand feature everywhere in this body of work: in a curtain of crystals revealing a hidden image when viewed in a mirror, in a lamp made to resemble a giant length of fiber-optic cable, and in a lighting design called Life 01—perhaps his most magical creation of all, and one he's developing into a version for wide production. "It's a vase that you fill with water, and to turn it on you simply put a flower in," Cocksedge says. "When the flower dies, it breaks the circuit, but then you just put in a fresh one. The piece is quite romantic, the energy of it."

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