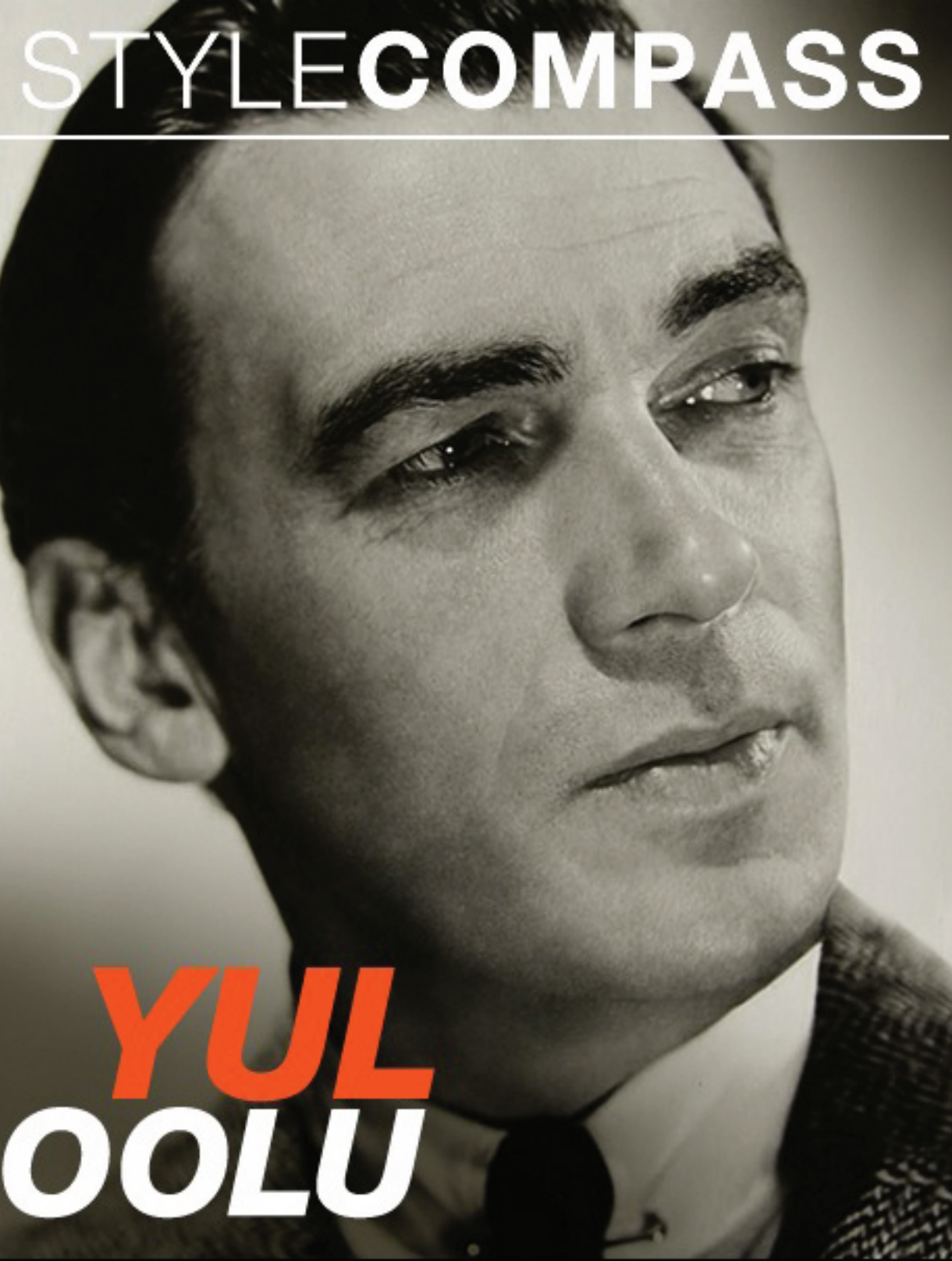




STYLECOMPASS

YUL
KOOLU

Oolu chatting up Prince Henrik of Glücksborg, lounging on floating canapes from the designer's failed economically priced "Brown" hydraulic line.



“WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW ABOUT OOLU IS HE IS NOT MERELY A CREATOR

— an architect, designer and engineer in the tradition of Imhotep, Iktinos and Apollodorus. No,” says Danish design behemoth Yul Oolu, speaking about himself in slightly Scandinavian-accented English as he puts down his fork over a lunch of specially prepared *Frikadeller*, or meatballs, at Le Caprice in New York City’s Pierre Hotel in order to fix me with a masterful gaze from his animal eye (the other eye having been lost 10 years ago in a tragic glue-gun accident in Caracas during a millennial New Year’s Eve party planning discussion).

"No! What's important about Oolu is he is a mystery. Oolu is wrapped in the enigma of Art Nouveau and sealed in the conundrum of the Bauhaus, all of which is likely buried in *your* house, in the form of a shellacked, bedazzled or garnished coffee maker or cat litter box tray.

"DESIGN IS GOD AND OOLU IS HIS GAUFFRAGED EARTH-TONED PROPHET!"

He punctuates this profession in his signature style, hurling a plate of herring that happens to hit a neighboring table occupied by Bill Clinton, Debbie Harry, Ed Ruscha, Scarlett Johansson and Michael Bruno. "Pardon my pep," Oolu mutters, snatching an éclair off a passing dessert trolley then starting to doze.

The 86-year-old Copenhagen-based design legend is tired. He's en route to Los Angeles where he will oversee the installation of a major Oolu retrospective at the J. Paul Getty Museum, "If Not Now, When?," the first exhibition the reclusive, famously media-shy designer has allowed since his infamous 1971 "Flowers — I'll Give You Flowers!" installation at the Venice Biennale.

During the first three hours of a five-hour lunch, Oolu works his way through six courses and as many neo-classicist icons — Palladio, Le Brun, Mansart, Wren, Quarenghi,



"The world, like my designs, has turned upside down. Everyone is now on Oolu time."

Schinkel — masticating them all to gruel. "Where's the innovation?!" he accuses, spittle flying. Nor do other giants of Danish mid-century design, such as Arne Jacobsen, Kaare Klint, and Pouls Henningsen and Kjaerholm, escape castigation. "Thieves! I was the first! The best! Artichoke lamps? Egg and swan chairs? These juveniles needed psychoanalysis. And don't even get me started on Finns like Alvar Aalto!" Oolu's sneer is fast followed by a menthol-like shot of Danish vodka called The Original Fisk — Fisherman's Original. "Mamma, too, loved it so, so much," he avers. "It's Mother's milk to me, really."



Oolu's "Hows Dit Aeg" chair, 1956.



Florence "Goody" Goodstalker, Oolu's nanny whom he lovingly refers as "My very own chim-chiminey charoo."

Whether Sonya Ewald Oolu, Oolu's mother, did or did not have a fondness for "The Fisk" is a matter of conjecture. What is known is Oolu was largely abandoned by his parents at an early age: first by his mother, who left for Helsinki on a pack boat in search of love when Oolu was four; then by his father, Hendrick-Krock, the most famous Scandinavian bear-and-animal baiter of his day, known throughout Northern Europe as "The Great Bore." Instead, Oolu was left in the calloused but capable hands of his English nanny, Mrs. Florence Goodstalker. "She was my Mary Poppins, my chim-chiminey charoo, and of course later my first wife," says Oolu, whose number of marriages (to women) remains inexact. "No matter, as a boy I named her Goody. She taught me about life from the back of her hand." Inadvertently, Goodstalker also introduced Oolu to the world of design.

"SHE WAS MY
MARY POPPINS,
MY CHIM-CHIMINEY
CHAROO,
AND OF COURSE LATER,
MY FIRST WIFE.



Hydraulic living room suite for client Mame Dennis-Burnside.



Although he would like to say his parents were his first design clients — allowing him at age three and a half “to organize the family’s weekend yurt in Roskilde according to my own instinctive taste” — it was Goody who first encouraged him to rearrange the furniture in their Copenhagen home. That encouragement, however, came at a high personal cost to her. Resulting from a passion for skijoring — a winter sport in which a person on skis is pulled by a horse, often on ice (Goodstalker was, according to *The Times of London*, “a spirited competitor between the world wars”) — as well as cranial injuries precipitated by mysterious falls down staircases, Goody was self-diagnosed with what she liked to call “Spatial Cognitive Disorder.”

The disorienting effects of her condition were compounded by attempts to self-medicate using, in her words, “the Lord’s salubrious ménage of the grain, hops and fermentation,” combined with a host of over-the-counter anodynes. “She fell down,” Oolu remembers, “especially when I moved things.”

DROPSY, THAT’S WHAT I’D CALLED HER THEN.

But she was spry and vigorous, and she always leapt right back up, dusting herself off and creaking forward. That’s who the old goat was. At least until she wasn’t; at least until the final ‘accident’ [death in shark-infested waters off the coast of Mozambique].”

A family portrait of Oolu with his third wife Lone (now Sister Lone-Lotta), daughter Jael (a founding back-up vocalist of the Swedish pop group Abba), and sons Poul and Nyrup (the former in service to the Danish royal family, the latter serving five to ten for armed robbery in upstate New York).



Olu practicing diaphragm control exercises with Dame Joan Sutherland.

The affliction proved a boon to Olu's creativity. To accommodate Goody's love of change coupled with his own burgeoning creative talent, the young designer began to draw — and before his 12th birthday, to make — the early prototypes of what would become his revolutionary line of hydraulic furniture. "Olu's materials were rudimentary: long stretches of chain thick enough to restrain a wolf, piano and razor wire, pulleys and a blow torch," Olu explains, "Generally exactly what you would expect in the home of a caregiver and little boy."

Rudimentary or not, the designs, which included his now-famous "kitchen guillotine" for vegetables, as well as the Medieval Murphy Bed (a redefinition of the portcullis) and groundbreaking Bamboo Bicycle established a new design vocabulary that Olu would expand further during the war years. "Goody simply blackened the windows, loaded up on canned discontinued foods in 1940, and told me it was raining for the next five years. I never knew the difference!"

THE RESULTING BODY OF WORK INCLUDED finished drawings and maquettes (made from matchsticks and matchboxes) of his Elevating Sofa for Canapes, his organic room divider in bone, his astral lighting collection, and several *gesamtkunstwerk* designs for one-off environments created in the early and mid 1950s in New York, London, Paris and Beverly Hills. "Nobody deserved this stuff — nobody!" He continues on this line for five minutes with nary a breath, returning refreshed from a ten-minute "lie down" in the restaurant's men's room ("I do it all the time," he says nonchalantly), and ready to answer my query of just how he is able to deliver such lengthy uninterrupted streams of info and invective. "I learned diaphragm control from Joan Sutherland!" he reports with pride. "Invaluable for outlasting unruly clients, shouting down imbecilic colleagues and," he pauses to move closer, "smart-ass know-nothing decorative-arts 'writers.'"



Olu's Astral lighting collection from 1962 (still in production) was inspired, he says, "by the colors of my happy childhood."

Oolu-designed subterranean karaoke/home-theatre room for client Akio Toyoda, Tokyo, 2009.



The interview ended shortly thereafter. Not, however, before Oolu commented on his unique 1958 commission for Mrs. Mame Dennis-Jackson-Pickett-Burnside, perhaps his best-known complete environment in the United States.

“SHE WAS *IN LOVE* WITH OOLU OF COURSE, BUT WEREN'T THEY ALL?”

he asks rhetorically, “Still, if Oolu had not sensed the same aura of creative vitality in her that Oolu knew resided within himself, Oolu would have said, *Farvel* [long-term farewell in Danish].” He does, however, bear a grudge. Describing his interiors for Dennis-Burnside as a masterpiece, “the only one of its kind in the universe,” he had expected it to be kept unchanged, and ultimately turned into a house museum. “Nothing grand,” he says, “something perhaps akin to the John Soane’s Museum in London. Oolu does not ask for the moon!” As for his work of the last 40 years, which Oolu says is as “copious, revolutionary, heart-wrenchingly beautiful” as it is undocumented, he says simply, “Mind your own business. The world, like my designs, has turned upside down. Everyone is now on Oolu time. And Oolu, *c’est moi!*”

Mame Dennis-Burnside in her Beekman Place duplex.
The interior precedes the Oolu commission by several
iterations. 23 Beekman Place, New York.



A vignette from Oolu's "Cold, Hard, Joyless Materials" series from 1966, a sneak preview of the Oolu retrospective at the J. Paul Getty Museum, "If Not Now, When?"



"I'm the largest European holder of non-figurative feline territorial installations, or as the idiots say, 'cat scratches.'" Yul Oolu.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

After three months at the Getty, "If Not Now, When?" will travel in the fall to New York's Museum of Modern Art, and then to Berlin's new Museum for Non-Human Primate Art. "I was very firm on the final destination," says Oolu. "I have the second-largest collection of non-human primate art in Denmark: 128 prime examples of what the ignorant call 'monkey paintings.' I'm also the largest European holder of non-figurative feline territorial installations, or as the idiots say, 'cat scratches.'" His collection is in fact second only to that of Queen Margrethe II, who keeps a personal gallery in the Amalienborg Palace (available to visit only by appointment).

WHAT DIRECTIONS IS YOUR *Style Compass* POINTED TO?

HOW GREEN ARE YOU?

I take Green to the extreme. My organic Great-Dane Settee is vegan, lactose and gluten-free, soy-based, and naturally harvested. I do no animal testing, *EVER!* The Great Danes are involved only in the design development phase, not in manufacturing or delivery. This I guarantee.

ART

Walter Keane, or is it Margaret? Even Oolu could never be sure.

FABRIC

Poncho Heaven for the softest fleece you will ever wrap around your body.



COLOR

My favorite color matches a carp I caught as a child in the lakes of Copenhagen — it's not a mud brown exactly but can have glimmers of peacock blue and an undertone of Coca-Cola amber. Really quite versatile. I use it on everything, especially plaster moldings in a high gloss finish. Wow!

MUSIC

Victor Borge for the piano and Korla Pandit for his hypnotic organ. Paul Anka (his "The Painter" album is without peer) and Sondheim performed by the nubile Bernadette Peters.

GIFT

Listerine and Lavoris make great stocking stuffers. Trudeau Lazy Susan Fondue Set, aka Cheese Lazy Susan.

SHOP

I am a regular at the Scotch Tape Store in Aberdeen.



WHAT DIRECTIONS IS YOUR *Style Compass* POINTED TO?



FLORAL

"I Never Promised You A Rose Garden" — Lynn Anderson's signature hit from 1973. "You don't find roses growin' on stalks of clover." Is this what you mean? I am fond of ice plant, especially nice are those growing on the freeway meridians in California.

HOTEL

Rabu Hoteru in Tokyo for short stays; Autohotel in Guatemala; Albergues Transitorios in Argentina. And anything in Fort Lauderdale (I could stay and never leave).

MUSEUM

Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles (a spot dedicated to the muses — "a place where man's mind could attain a mood of aloofness above everyday affairs"). The Asmundur Sveinsson Sculpture Museum in Reykjavik (the building is the former home of the artist, mostly designed by himself).

FASHION

The Swedish chain KappAhl for basics. Clogs are a must for everyday — love Olaf Daughters in black patent leather.



BOOK

How to Win Friends & Influence People by Dale Carnegie; *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding. I am currently re-reading the complete Nancy Drew series. Enchanting girl; I used to date the mother.

RESTAURANT

I am a fixture at IKEA's Swedish Food Market and Restaurant. Never miss the Tuesday Night \$2.49 15-piece meatball plate with mashed potatoes, lingonberries and cream sauce. (Reg. \$4.99. Store times and participation may vary.) Rose Selavy in Paris — the jambon en croustade is to die for.

ENTERTAINING

The key party in *The Ice Storm*; the dinner scene with Elizabeth Taylor in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. These are moments I try to replicate with my guests and then treasure.

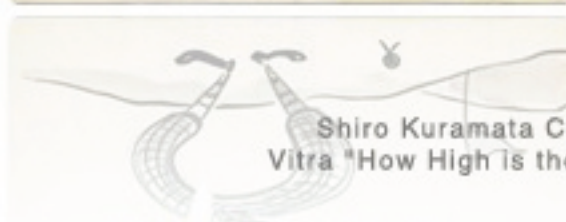
TRAVEL

Les Porquerolles — vous connaissez? And Easter Island, but not for Spring Break.



Framed Pen and
Ink Giclees

Hanging Swing
Chair aux Deux



Shiro Kuramata Chair for
Vitra "How High is the Moon"



Limited Edition Chairs by
Paco Rabanne for Aitali France



Frederick Weinberg
Lighted Wall Sculpture

YUL OOLU'S *Quick Picks* FROM *1stdibs*



Large set of Towle flatware

