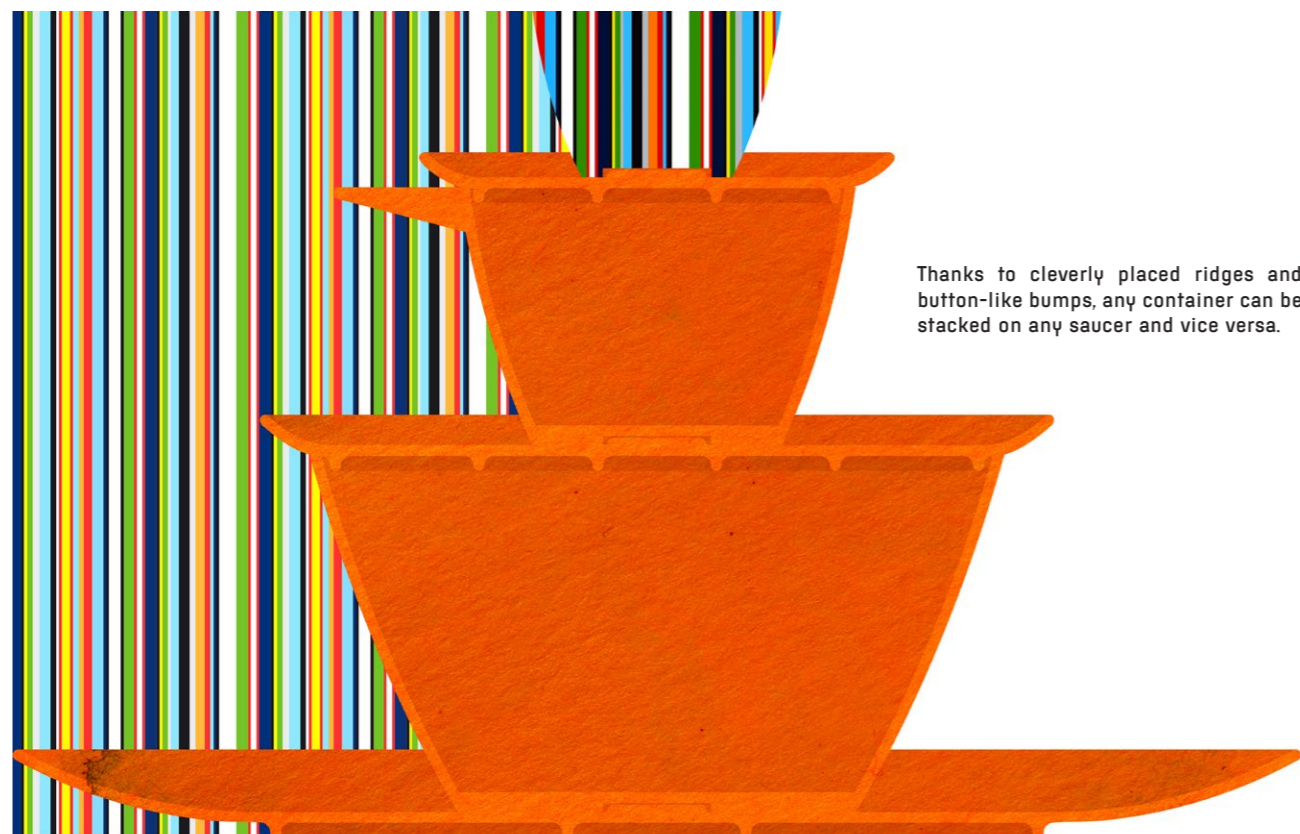


MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE

ALFREDO HÄBERLI

17.03.2021 —



Thanks to cleverly placed ridges and button-like bumps, any container can be stacked on any saucer and vice versa.

ORIGO, 1999
RANGE OF TABLEWARE

“Our eating habits are changing continuously – just like our day-to-day lives. The Origo idea was to create easy, everyday tableware with a variety of applications. The stacking rings on the bottom of the plates, the facility for fixing cups and bowls to saucers and plates and the decorative elements are real discoveries. Details like these help determine the range of applications for everyday life.”

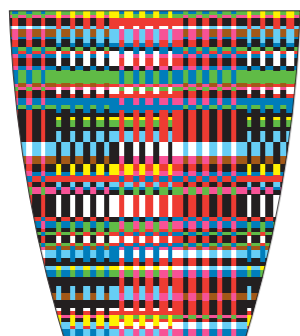
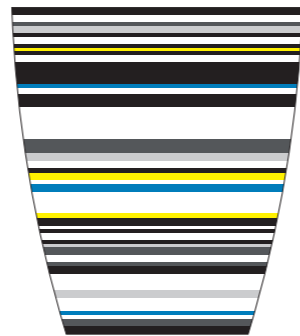
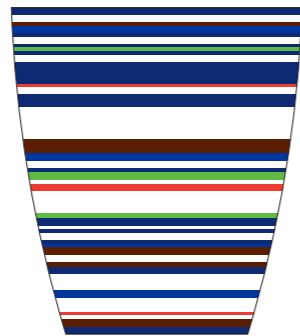
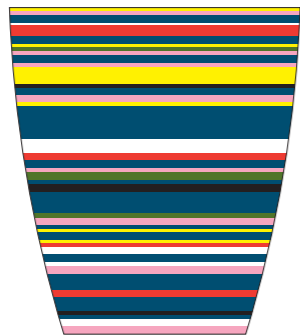
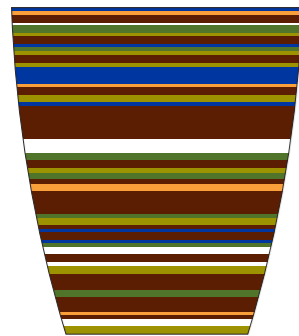
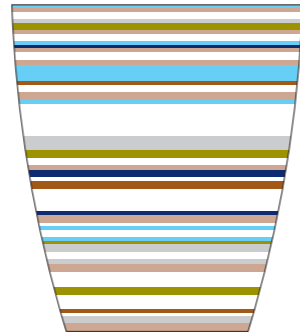
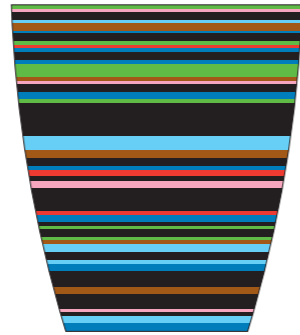
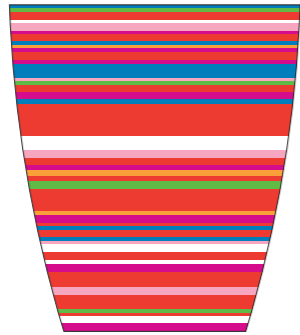
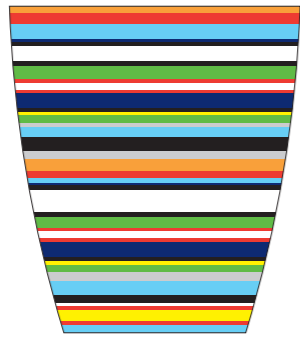
“Immediately after I first presented the collection, which was supposed to be much smaller than a typical dinner set of 12 or more pieces, I was asked what the patterned version would look like? As a very young designer, you feel somehow under attack by questions of this kind. For me, the white ceramic pieces were beautiful enough in themselves and I could not conceive of a floral pattern. On the flight back to Zurich, I was somewhat irked by the question about decoration and I thought about doing a rainbow with all the colours in it. The subject is abstract and would certainly match the colour scheme of any table decoration. I designed coloured stripes of irregular widths and applied them only to the smallest cup. On the inside bottom of the little cup I placed an other orange spot; viewed from above, this is reminiscent of a soft-boiled egg with the top removed.

We sold the entire year’s production in the first few weeks. Origo became a best-seller and made me very famous in Scandinavia. So famous that I became known as the Paul Smith of the design scene, or the stripe designer.

Made originally for Rörstrand, Origo was included in Iittala’s International Catalogue in 2003. Because of its success, the striped design was put on all the cups - and I realised for the first time in my life what it meant to receive royalties. We changed the colours from time to time and the product became a “Collectible Item”.

The pure white version of the tableware was superseded by the success of the decoration and the actual invention – the central button as a relief accent in the middle of all the plates – disappeared. However, many design museums recognised the importance of this innovation and Origo now forms part of their collections. Commercial success and design history do not always coincide.”





“For the tenth anniversary, acting out of contrariness, I decided not to design a new striped pattern, but mixed a pixel design from the existing patterns. These pieces divided opinions and are now highly sought-after.

A few years later, when products from Kaj Frank, Tapio Wirkkala and Alvar Aalto were brought together with my Origo tableware on the lunch tray on a Finnair business flight, it was like receiving an “Oscar”: this was an incredible honour and hugely satisfying for a designer.

I would now very much like to make a new colour scheme and produce the white pieces again.”

At the production start, a new colour scheme was launched practically every year. The widths and rhythm of the stripes always kept the same, only the chromatics changed.





ESSENCE, 2001
RANGE OF GLASSES

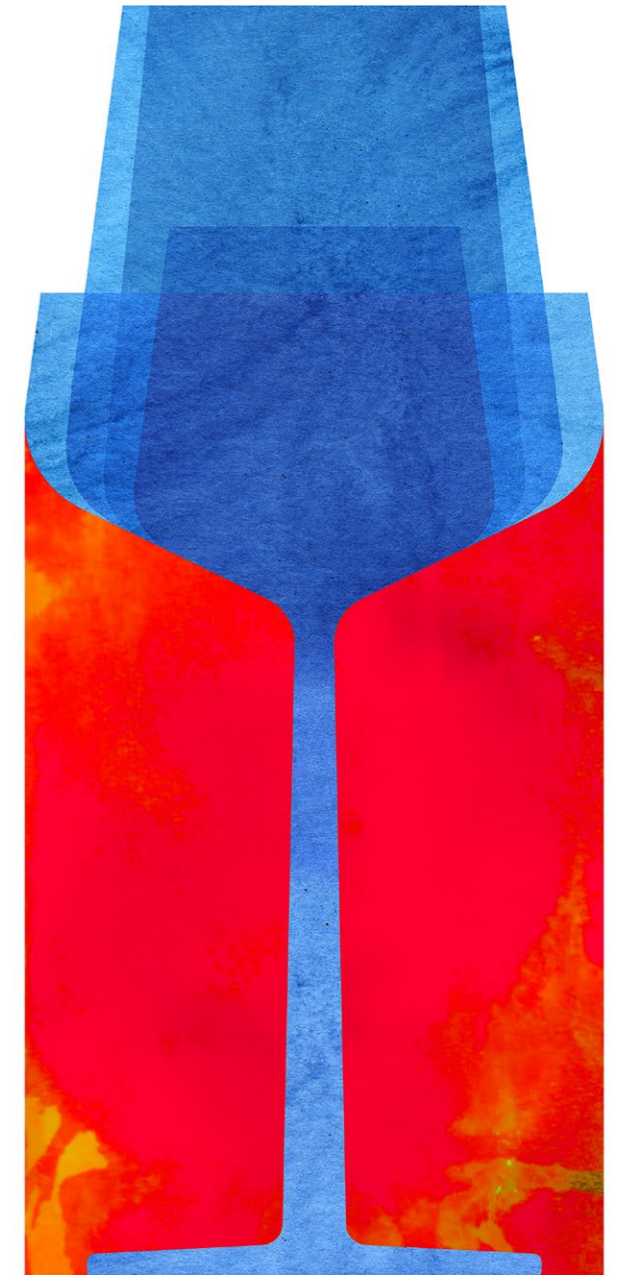


"My personal heritage was essential for this project. Knowing the gastronomic business well (restaurant & hotel in my family), my aim was to integrate this knowledge in a modern shape. Not losing the scientific functionality of a shape in relation to the liquid. The idea for the glass range was to create a balance between tradition and modernity, between celebration and daily use, a balance with one and different uses. In a way, I tried to find the essence in-between. The shape was a challenge for production. The most difficult detail was the stem going into the completely flat bottom plate. This detail with the trapeze shape of the bowl gives the unusual character of the glasses. The water glass is without a stem and can be used as a shot glass or table wine glass in a daily function. The carafe has a pinky colour inspired by having some wine drops in a glass that reflects in the whole body. Sometimes drops on a table line leave the same pinky colour."

"The design process caused me a great deal of suffering, because I really wanted to invent something new. I always have this ambition, but somehow I got lost in the search for a modern contemporary form. In the end, Essence emerged with three very strong features: The flat base, the slightly conical and extra thin stem (with a diameter of only 5 mm at the transition to the bowl), and the different bowls, with their rhomboid, masculine shape.

During the initial presentation things turned funny when I was asked if this was my first glass design. Proudly and cluelessly I answered in the affirmative, which was received with plenty of eye rolling. I was told that the design would be impossible to produce! That was a real downer. However the technicians and engineers accepted the challenge and first developed a new type of glass. And there you had it: an invisible invention.

Almost two years later, I was required to approve the glass moulds for production. Three days were allotted for this task, so I flew to Finland. For the first glass, the largest one that was presented to me, I wanted to raise the base by 5 millimetres. There was loud muttering once more, because here was this young designer yet again, with his impossible ideas. After a separate discussion among the technicians, they agreed to give it a try. The consequence, however, was that as many as twenty moulds had to be changed overnight, just on my say-so. That night I didn't sleep a wink, but to my surprise everyone was in a good mood the next day. It turned out that many problems were surmounted thanks to the change. I approved the other glasses almost as a matter of course. Essence has become the most inspirational glass of the last 20 years and an icon for design."



By overlaying the silhouettes of the glasses, it becomes clear that the stem, made of pressed glass, is the same for all typologies.



Almost every material that is suitable for the table setting was used for the set, always matching the function best: ceramics, glass, wood, stainless steel and plastic.



KIDS' STUFF, 2003
TABLEWARE, GLASSES & CUTLERY

"Kids' Stuff was one of my favourite projects of the last few years. It allowed me to look back at my own childhood and develop more awareness. Children are smarter than we think and I have always looked at them as small adults. Designing for children is not about making a piece of cutlery 20% smaller or gluing a cartoon figure on the handle. It is also not about applying childish fantasies. For me, it is finding the playful element in each component, subliminally integrating a function, asking a question through the use of relief, offering some security with the silhouette or making it simple to cut up food with a knife whose teeth are carefully designed to do the job. To give a second chance by consciously planning the edge of the plate, or to easily dispose of something unexplainable from the body. I hope that one day an adult comes to me and says: "Your Kids' Stuff Set is one of my favourite childhood memories". But that only shows how important this project was to me."

“When I received the commission for this project, our son Luc was just two years old and I was able to observe exactly what everyone experienced in everyday life and at the table – I discovered amazing things. So much was obvious, clear and visible that this project became one of my favourites of the last 30 years.

Children are highly intelligent little creatures. They want to be grown up like the adults and to be treated as such. Natural feeding from mother’s breast is followed by the baby bottle and then the glass. However, the market produces conical plastic cups with a diameter that is far too large, but in every conceivable colour. Children’s cutlery is rounded, clumsy and the knife does not cut – but it is also colourful and decorated with lots of cute little figures. This is how we think we are catering to children, but actually everything just looks childish. Children want to use glasses and plates just like ours. This need starts at the age of 3-5.



The glass, in real glass, has a waist, creating a small diameter and offering good grip. In my own home, the real children’s glass NEVER broke over the years and is now used as an aperitif glass.

The bowl, like the plate, has a double rim made of a double curve, giving the child a second chance, if the food does not immediately gather on the spoon when pushed together. There are relief-like traces of a bird in the plate. The bird motif was a tip of the hat to the Iittala Birds by Toikka. There are various bird motifs: lasered on the glass base, as a relief in the plate and bowl. All have a reference to water – whether a swim ring, surfboard, bathing cap or diving goggles. The cutlery has a long handle that stands out from the surface of the table and ends in a curve that acts as a stop, preventing it from sliding into the plate. The knife has a hole in the blade and so its shape instantly becomes a bird – or is it a fish?”



“I completed the set with a wooden chopping board in the shape of a whale and a butter knife in cedar. I also added a tray with irregular depressions as feet to encourage play with a marble.

The shape of the individual packaging for the drinking glasses is reminiscent of binoculars and the overall packaging for the whole set has a handle and can later be used as a carry case. I wanted to add a wordless instruction manual, but unfortunately the budget was not enough for this. However, I am proud of my designer portrait, which shows me as a five-year-old, bringing everything full circle.

At the beginning of the launch, I received postcards from children. To this day, the press

conference is the most emotional event of its kind I ever experienced. At Iittala’s headquarters, a kindergarten class was asked to use Kids’ Stuff as inspiration for a wide variety of creative activities. This resulted in decorative pieces, performances, poems and, most beautifully of all, a song on a traditional Finnish instrument. The media people had tears in their eyes. They must have been young parents, just like me.

Kids’ Stuff was probably the most successful first contact for many children with the Iittala brand. Even today I hear stories and meet people who had the set as a child or bought it for their own children. It should definitely be produced again – but my children may already have children of their own before that happens.”



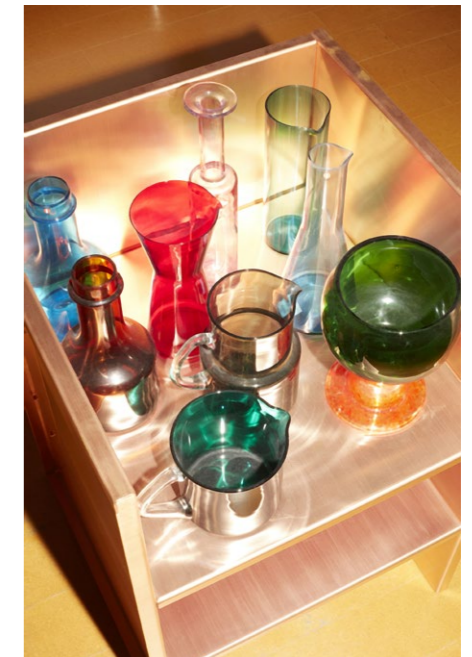
In this design, the glass stem combines several product features. The facet on the underside of the base creates a floating effect and the taper below the goblet gently caresses the fingertips.



SENTA, 2003
RANGE OF GLASSES

“In designing these glasses, I became aware of how much more I could do compared to my first series (Essence, 2001). Senta was three times harder, but because of my experience and research, it went ten times faster. The details are practically invisible: the gentle curve of the goblet connects to the wafer-thin, conical stem, which then flows parallel into a flat base. The underside of the base has a faceted edge that catches the light and allows the glass to hover millimetres above the table.

The iconic nature of the Essence shape was difficult to beat. I wanted to design a smaller, shorter glass. I wanted it to be more feminine and I was looking for details that would clearly distinguish the new design from the previous one. I found this detail in the base, which has a facet on the underside. This creates an offset shadow that makes the glass appear to float. Furthermore, the glass has a cylindrical stem that tapers at the top just before the transition to the bowl. This detail is very subtle, but clearly noticeable when you hold the glass. The bowl is soft, harmonious and very round. Very basic.”





TRIS, 2005
TEALIGHT CANDLEHOLDERS

Tris is a tealight in the form of a soft triangle. To me, this kind of circle seemed a logical form that did not dictate any particular direction. The faceting not only serves as decoration and provides an additional reflective surface; it also allows the pieces to be stacked more easily. The colours are a further decorative element. Certain colours have two different shades and, depending upon the angle you look at it from, one colour or the other becomes visible. The many reflections make Tris remind you of a small source of fire.

“My reputation as a good designer preceded me in Scandinavia. My characterful, innovative and highly commercial products were followed by new requests for classic objects, such as a candlestick (motif). Up to this point, my designs tended to be “new typologies”. Now I found my-

self confronted with the Kivi tea light, designed by Heikki Orvola in 1988, and I received a copy as a kind of briefing.

I had about five dozen Kivi tea lights at home and if I had any criticism, it was the problem of putting them away: I couldn't stack them, and they fell down in the cupboard. That's when I identified something that is typical for Iittala: stacking. I wanted something decorative to emerge when not in use, created by different colours. In addition, the towers stacked at different heights create a kind of landscape that can be left on the sideboard, windowsill or table. I wanted a shape as close as possible to a cylinder without direction and found something suitable in the “soft triangle”. The thick pressed glass allowed a facet to be created for stacking. As chance would have it, this facet



The facet not only breaks the candle flame into countless copies, but also lets the lights be stacked. The soft triangle shape is balanced and dynamic at the same time.

and the triangular shape created multiple reflections of the flame. That is why I call Tris a little fire.

Unfortunately, no attractive photographs were taken of the stacked Tris. As the product was not given any space in the sales outlets either, it was not a success. I remain convinced by this product. I believe that in order to make something successful, the design, production, advertising and marketing have to be all of a piece. If something doesn't work as expected, I always like to take a closer look to see, what can be improved.

I think I have about 80 pieces of Tris at home and in the studio, and I'm always re-stacking them. Kaj Franck would have a lot of fun with that, I'm sure.”

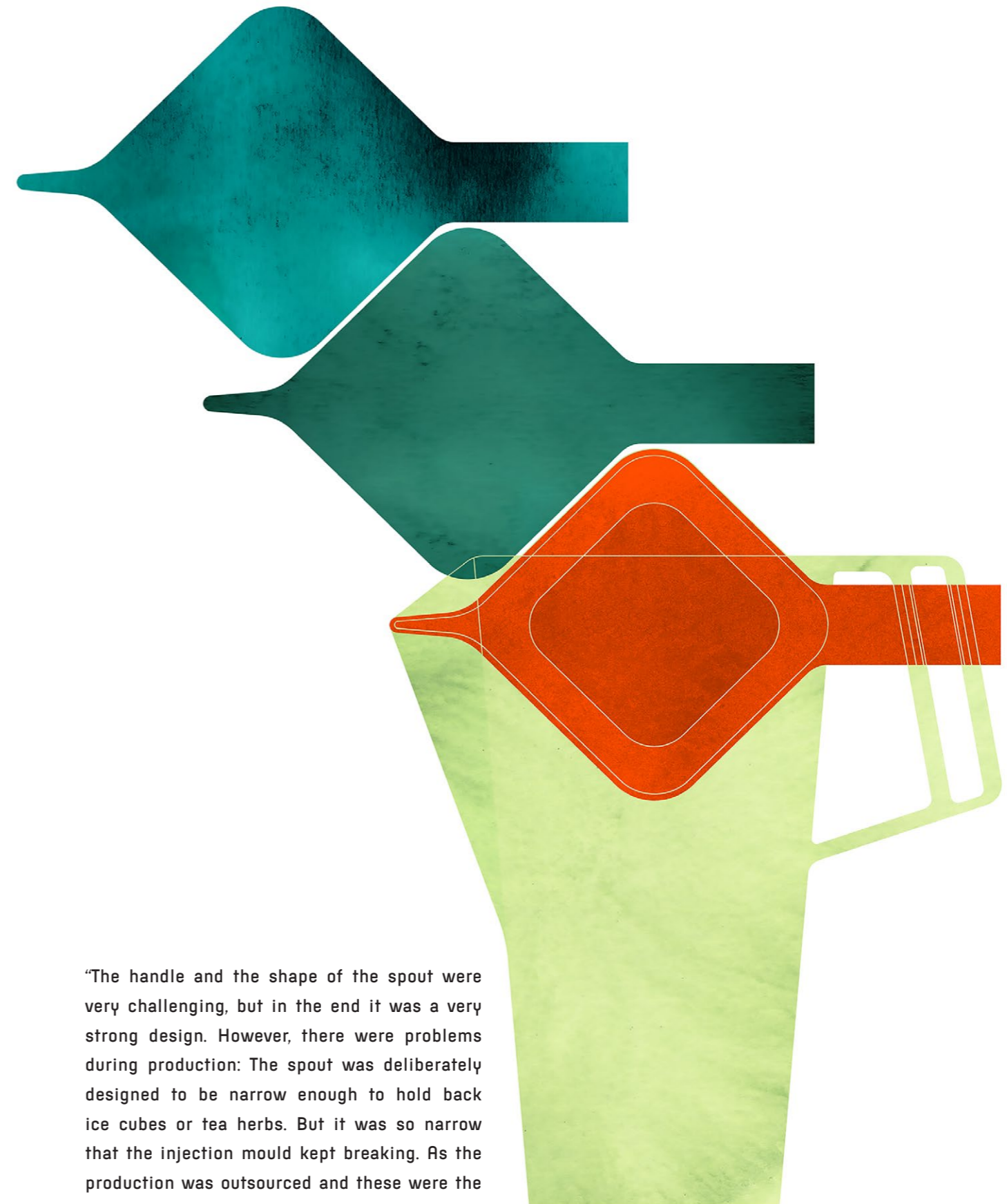


QUATER, 2006
PITCHER

Iittala wanted to evolve and several attempts were made over the years. It takes a lot of research to find the right products and to identify trends in the market. To do this, I bought a lot of pieces from the archives in the museum and there was a small shop in the Iittala village with surplus stock and unique pieces. I was attracted by the colours and the shapes and subsequently began to learn the history of the individual products. In the meantime, countless carafes by Kaj Frank have accumulated in my household, including very old ones in the colours red, grey and blue, which I bought in Iittala's museum shop as recently as 2000. Each time I visited Iittala village or Hämeentie headquarters in Helsinki, I received a gift from Hilikka Hiltunen (product manager) or Päivi Jantunen (communications): four tumblers by Tapio Wirkkala for use on a sailboat, three small purple bowls by Sarpaneva, shot glasses... I still have them all, and I use them in everyday life.

"About the Quater. I needed a carafe that could hold more than 1 litre. I wanted to be able to keep it in the fridge and use it outdoors, for iced tea, juice or squash. That was the idea. The space in the fridge was the biggest challenge, so there were two main directions in the search for a suitable volume: flat and wide or tall and slim. The initial proportions were revolutionary, the second design corresponded more to the familiar image of a carafe.

We decided on synthetic material and an interplay of colours. The lid could be produced in a different colour from the main body – and also in opaque or translucent plastic."



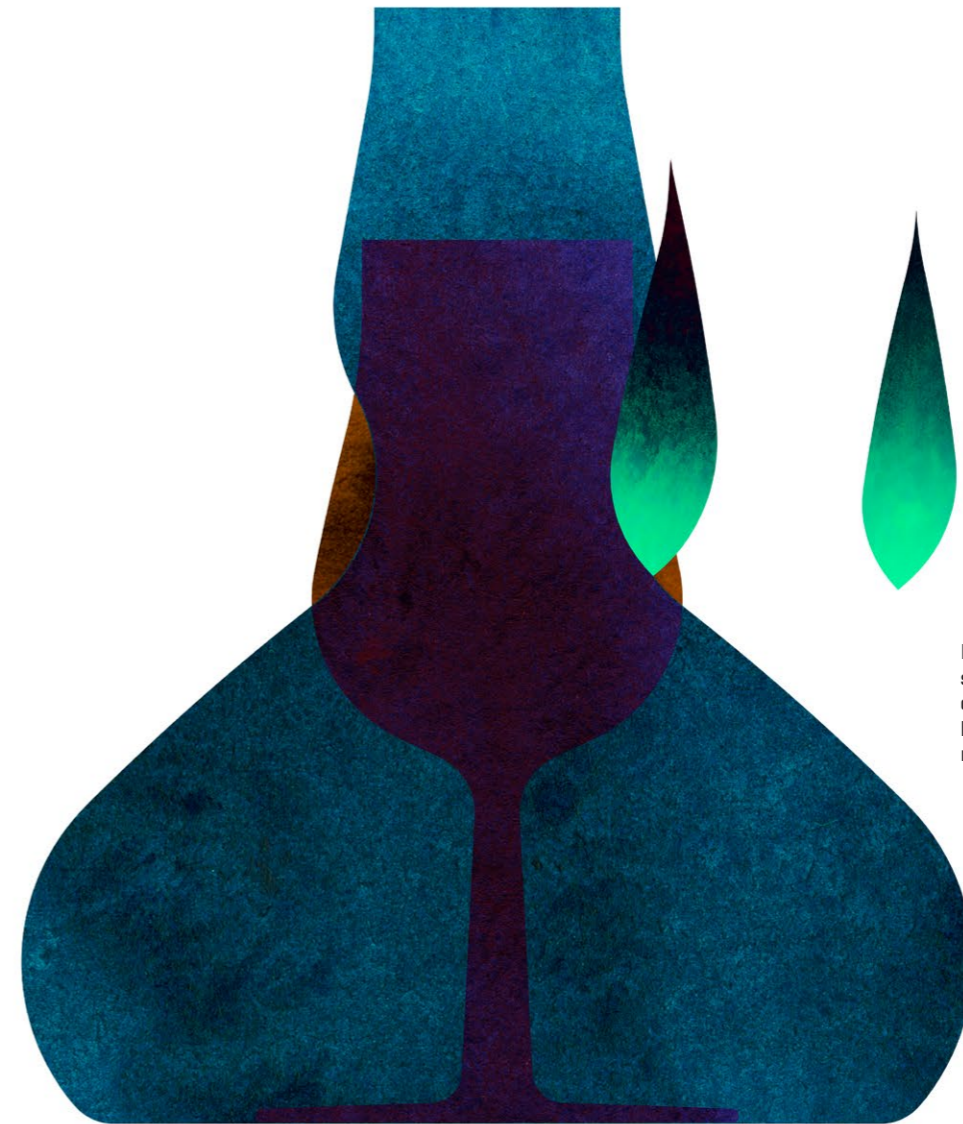
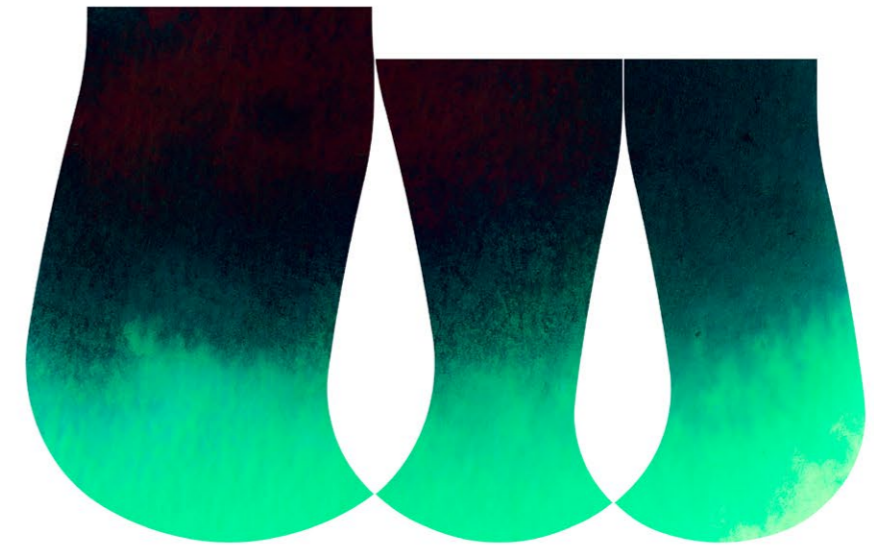
"The handle and the shape of the spout were very challenging, but in the end it was a very strong design. However, there were problems during production: The spout was deliberately designed to be narrow enough to hold back ice cubes or tea herbs. But it was so narrow that the injection mould kept breaking. As the production was outsourced and these were the first plastic parts to be produced externally, there was a lack of experience. Since then I have one Quater jug in daily use at home and three more in the archive. To this day, I still don't know if the few copies produced sold successfully – Finnish silence reigns."

The shape of the carafe is optimised for storage in the fridge door. It is sized in such a way that a whole row can be placed next to each other to save space and yet the handle remains within easy reach.



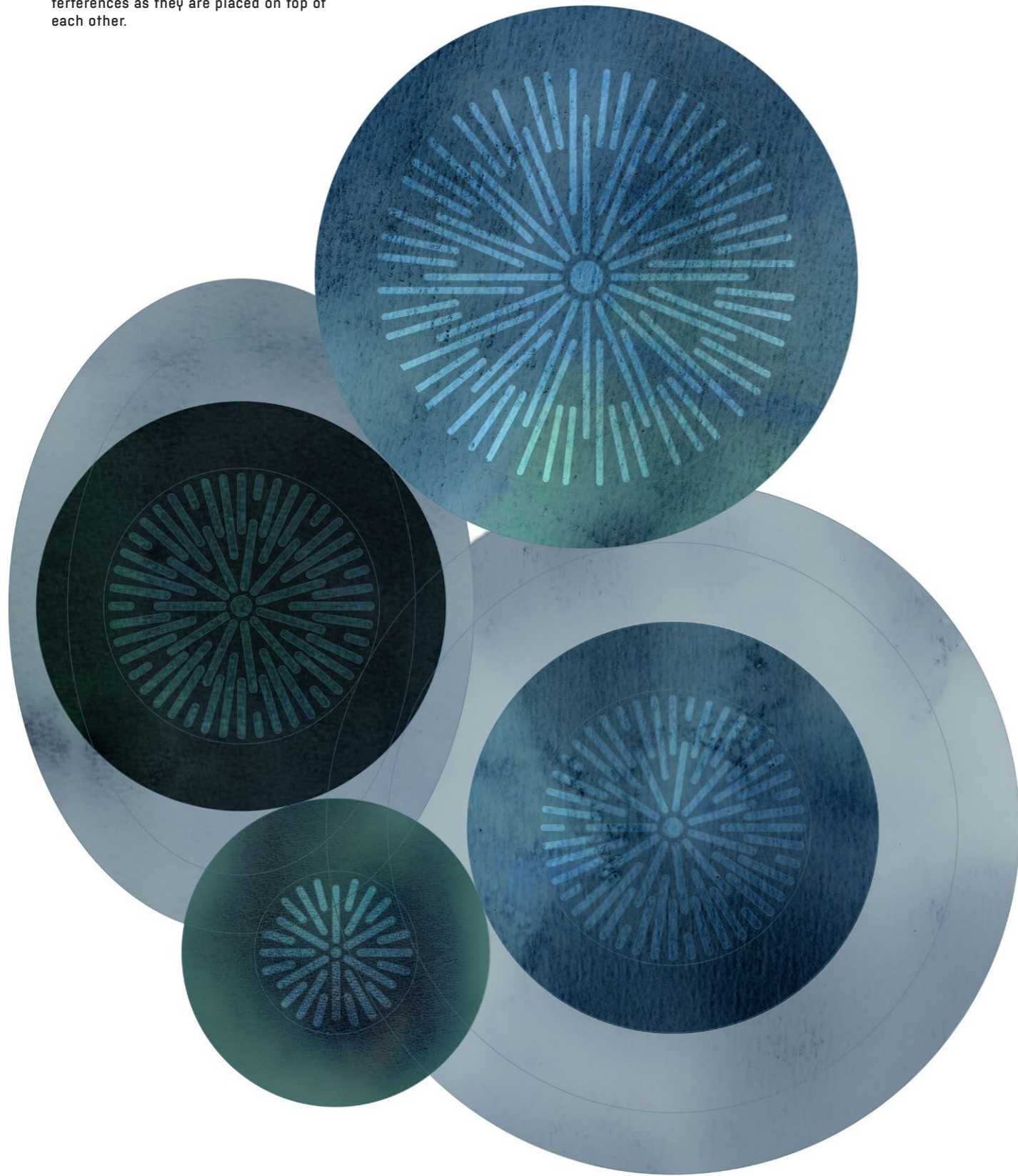
ESSENCE PLUS, 2013
RANGE OF GLASSES

“In the original Essence, the stem and the base, also called the plate, are pressed and the bowl is blown. With Essence Plus, the same base as the Essence was used again, but the bowl was deliberately made even larger and softer. The aim was to make this drinking glass collection even more sublime. The design polarised opinions and there were the fans of the “original” and of the “new” design. However, the 12 years of Essence could not be erased and the 2001 design remained iconic. My designs were never intended to move with the times, in other words to be fashionable. When and if a product becomes an icon, can only develop over time. In the end, customers found the actual alternative of Essence in Senta – which is fine with me.”



For this reinterpretation, the exact same stem was used as for the previous one from 2001. The goblet, on the other hand, was given a slightly more feminine appearance.

The ornaments in the bottoms of the glass bowls reveal their magic when placed on top of each other. The different patterns of rays create various interferences as they are placed on top of each other.



ESSENCE, 2021
RANGE OF SERVING ITEMS, BOWLS
AND PLATES

“Twenty years after the launch of Essence and a few small additions in between, the idea was conceived to build on the ongoing success of the drinking glass series, complementing it and developing a matching tableware set. From my constant observation of the entire Iittala catalogue, it occurred to me that an elegant serving set could fill a gap. However, our habits and needs have changed in the 20 years since the original Essence line was launched. My idea of elegance has also changed. With this in mind, I wanted to start with a combination of pressed glass pieces and porcelain. Together with the Essence glasses, with the colours of the tumbler and the carafe and the new pieces in grey glass, the aim was to achieve an elegance that is both modern and contemporary.

The additions comprise a small number of pieces that have different functions and can be combined with each other. The radial motifs of the pressed glass pieces are deliberately different and form a different pattern depending on their size. They look beautiful when placed on top

of each other on the set table with minimal decoration. In my design work, it is important to me to always look for something new. I wanted to create a new pattern that differs from those of Aino Aalto and Tapio Wirkkala. During the brainstorming phase, I went to the Swiss mountains and there you can see relief decorations in the form of rosettes, sun discs and stars in the old houses – this inspired the ornamentation used in this product.

The functions of serving pieces today are not as rigid or precisely defined as they were when the original Essence glasses were launched. Sizes have changed and there are no longer such narrow ideas about the intended use. This ambiguity can be a problem in marketing, but over time it adds incredible value. When a product becomes an icon, is only determined over time. My designs were never intended to be fashionable, but are made today and intended for tomorrow.”

