

AXEL ENTHOVEN

DIPLOMACY THROUGH ICONS

In this field, product designer Axel Enthoven has become a steadfast icon with a global appeal. The co-founder of the Yellow Window design agency not only devises garden sprinklers, furniture, sanitary facilities, telephones, buses, trams or trains, but also "designs" social tools for a better and more mobile life. Meet a man for all seasons.

Usually he is on the road or at a customer, far or near. He does not shy away from any continent or ocean, loves good food and fine wine. Axel Enthoven is a sociable Burgundian. By day he inspires Yellow Window, a strong and diverse design agency headquartered in a large, creative space in the heart of Antwerp with additional offices in Paris and Lyon and a commercial base in Bangkok. The word 'stop' is not in his dictionary.

BOEING BOEING ...

For decades, Enthoven and his team has been able to please the world with icons such as the city tram in Rio de Janeiro, Rotterdam, The Hague, Rennes, Breme, Brussels... He's left his impression on more than 25 cities worldwide, as the trams, metros and trains with his influence continue to service populations worldwide. One iconic example is the Thalys, for which Enthoven's agency was responsible for the complete refurbishment. And the acclaimed campus tram in Doha, Qatar? Enthoven's award-winning designs are everywhere. Even in the air. Years ago, Air France was at the front door with the request to give the Airbus 380's first class seats a newer look. Then, as part of the delivery of its new Boeing B777-9X and the renovation of the Boeing B777-300ER, Cathay Pacific launched an international competition with a number of design firms, in which Yellow Window was asked to participate.

ASIA

Axel Enthoven started his career as a freelance designer in the 1970s. He had previously studied at the Academy for Industrial Development in Eindhoven. After that he obtained a degree from the Salesian Technical College in Tokyo, Japan, and then went on to pursue engineering studies in Ohio, USA. The big leap forward came through a dream contract with Ideal Standard and its sister company American Standard, internationally renowned for its sanitary ware. A lucky shot that got the ball rolling. Today this ball continues to gain momentum towards new markets and far

corners of the world. For example, Asia has become the largest market in the field of public transport for Yellow Window. But more and more Asian manufacturers of lifestyle products are also relying on the renowned expertise of the design agency. The significance of the Asian market is obvious. "The home market is saturated, you have to push your boundaries," says entrepreneur Axel Enthoven with sober conviction.

A SUIT AND TIE

The product designer with Dutch roots and blood enjoys his international fame and status. Although product designers often do not come into the picture themselves because of their role behind the scenes, it is impossible to say this about Enthoven. He is not necessarily the man of the grand and wild gesture, but is rather the subtle diplomat and entrepreneur who knows what he is doing and also subtly points out: "there are two types of designers: those who have their own nature and style and therefore create exciting, innovative signatures, and those who develop a unique style for each client. I have decided to dedicate my life to the latter. When I began studying, most of my peers were artists. I instead constantly had my eye on the developments in trade and marketing. Exposed from an early age to the world of business, my feet planted firmly on the ground and a good understanding of the language of the industry. I traded my long hair for a suit and tie." Axel Enthoven has grown into a true ambassador, a source of Belgian national pride: a citizen of the world. A role that was made for him. His talent and dedication to well-founded designs has not escaped the attention of King Philippe, who appointed him Grand Officer of the Order of the Crown in 2014.



Jan Engels, Axel Enthoven, Barbara Dietrich and Kristina Engels



YELLOW WINDOW

Since Enthoven founded the then Enthoven Associates in 1990, the agency has gained considerable experience and acclaim with the support of Jean-Pierre Geelen and Alain Denis. The agency was able to score big from the outset, especially with design for the public transport sector. This was by no means a coincidence. At the time, Professor Axel Enthoven was head of the People and Mobility department at the Eindhoven Design Academy. It's no wonder mobility kept him so busy.

Everyone has encountered Enthoven's work, and everyone is aware of it. Anyone who takes to the street will undoubtedly come across the famous low-floor trams, which were followed to the great pleasure of the commuters by the famous double-decker trains.

While the designs provide daily delight to commuters with fresh colors and intricacies, these details do not arise from aesthetic considerations. By design, everything is functional. No flourish is added, no detail is accidental.

A TRAM OF 30

Where are emotion and reason in Enthoven's creations? According to the designer, "each product is essentially rational, but the emotion plays more with furniture than with a truck. Just look at the Big Oma rocking chair. I think rationality is an achievement. I mean: if you think a little logically, you end up with the same form. What makes the difference between one product and another? It is precisely that emotional dimension that triggers the consumer." Designers furnish the world. There is something tragic about this, because everything is aging, everything is passing, becoming worn and old-fashioned. Will the magic of his designs ever disappear? For the time being, Axel Enthoven has little trouble with that. "A lot has to do with the sector you are in. A ship has a lifespan of fifty to sixty years, a tram of at least 30. I always think ahead, so that I do not have to hide from shame when I come across my not so young creations decades later in a completely renewed world. I also said that they don't look youthful and spicy."

SOCIALLY SUPPORTIVE

Yet Axel Enthoven's mission is far from complete. His international team at Yellow Window, with its CEO Philip De Wulf, not only profiles itself in all corners of the world with material products, but it also realizes that this world is subject to rapid social changes. What is special is Yellow Window's new course of explicitly 'designing' social support resources and deploying studies to initiate social actions with regard to health, gender equality and social innovations.

The Paris division of Yellow Window achieved great successes in Marseille, Brittany and the Limousin. The fact that Axel Enthoven is still going through fire after all these years is, in our eyes, very special. Talk about a man for all seasons.

Philip Willaert
Art historian + publicist



NEW BUS FOR YANGTSE - CHINA



BIG OMA - ROCKING CHAIR



NEW TRAM FOR BRUSSELS - BELGIUM



NEW TRAM FOR DOHA - QATAR



NEW TRAM FOR RIO DE JANEIRO - BRAZIL



NEW THALYS INTERIOR