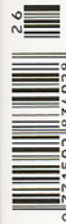


carl's cars

a magazine about people



89
6.95



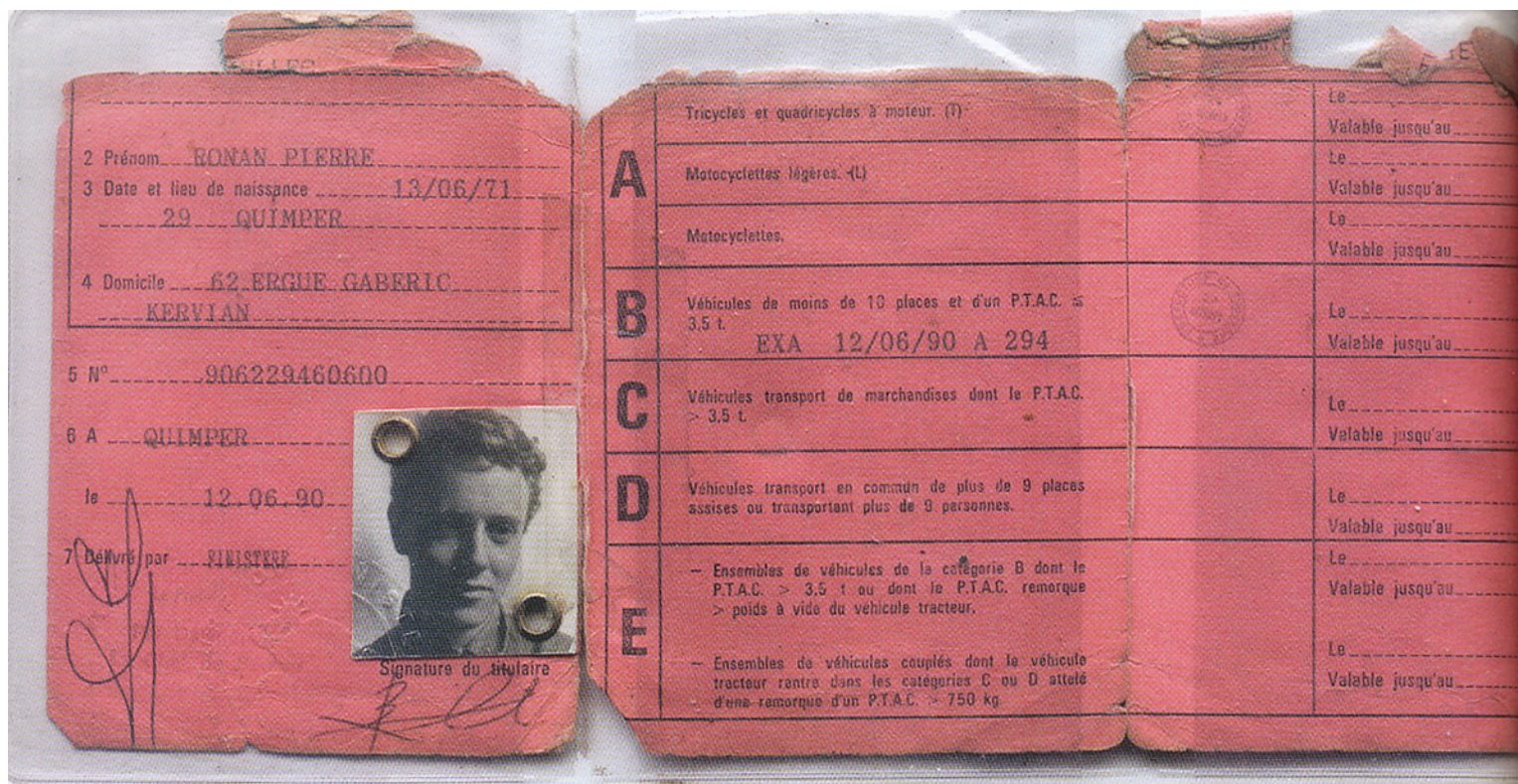


Ronan Bouroullec photographed in the Vitra shop in Oslo.

CHAIR AMI

Photo: Kimm Saatvedt Interview: Karl Eirik Haug





Usually brothers Erwan and Ronan Bouroullec design chairs and other furniture for companies like Vitra. Today Ronan just talks about his troublesome relationship to automobiles.

There are a lot of things that Ronan Bouroullec doesn't do. He doesn't light a cigarette, look at his watch or bite his nails, like most designers during interviews. He doesn't eat from the platter of olives, and the way he's sitting leaned crookedly forward in the Vitra sofa is all wrong.

— I grew up in the countryside in Bretagne in western France, far away from any design environment. I've always enjoyed drawing, except living objects. When I was 18 years old I started studying at the ENSAP school, in a class where car design was the main focus. The school's sponsor was France's largest producer of cars, Renault. So I was obligated to draw cars all day. I hated it, it made me want to drop out. I ended up dragging myself through exams so I could get my degree.

The bright side of things is that these mandatory exercises helped me find myself.

Ronan Bouroullec doesn't look out of the window. He gives an impression of having all the time in the world and does not seem distracted by the Vitra employees buzzing about, moving furniture, or this journalist's two year old son, who keeps threatening to tip the glass table and other valuable items.

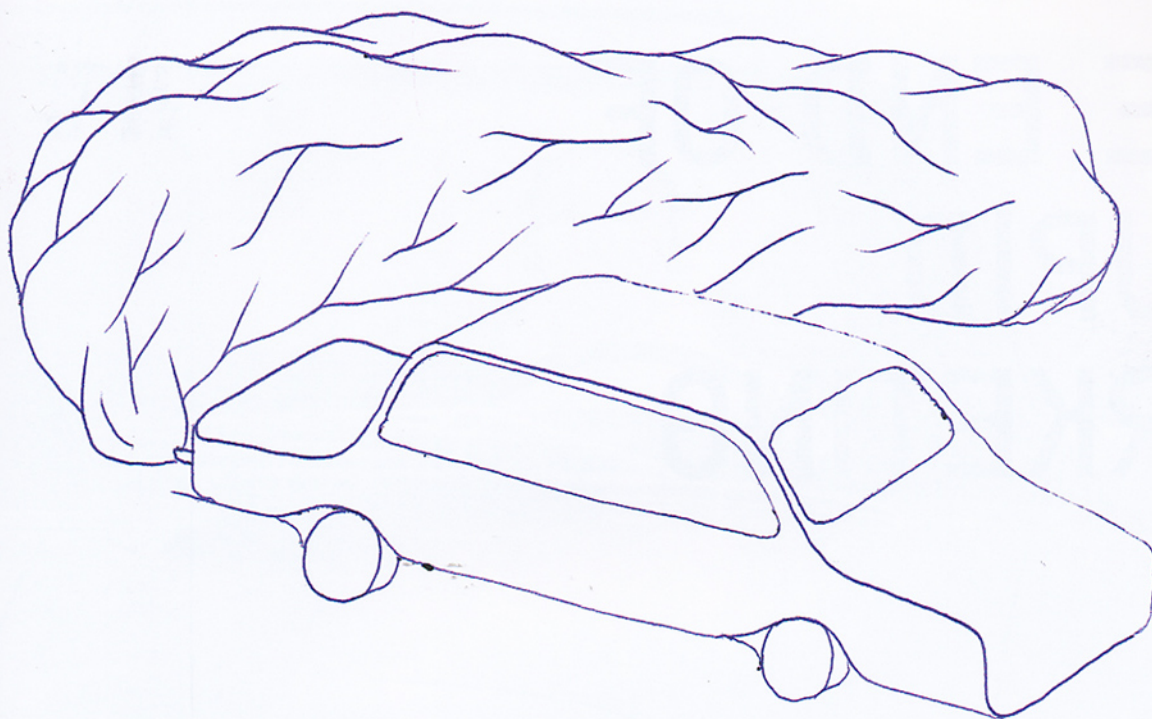
Bouroullec picks up a model of a 1961 Citroën Ami 6, which we've brought to probe him about his views on car design. He recalls that an old neighbor had the same one.

— We get some inquiries from car companies, but quite often we have to decline the offer because of time constraints. An interesting meeting, however, was with Ford's head of design at the time,

J. Mays. But that never resulted in anything more than a friendly conversation. It's also true that we have been contacted by Renault, among others. If I remember correctly there was talk about contributing to drawing a concept vehicle. But why not an actual car? In the car industry the evolution from idea to finished product is excruciatingly long. The likelihood of projects losing their essence along the way is quite large.

The Ami 6 model car is now parallel parked on the floor in-between some olives.

— This April I traveled with my wife who was invited to hold a presentation at a car meet in Villa d'Este by the Como sea in Italy. There I had an interesting talk with BMW's young, newly employed chief of design, Adrian van Hooydonk. He was



Ronan Bouroullec

surprisingly sympathetic and open to other fields of design. He has a keen sense of detail and is obsessed by proportion. I myself am critical to modern car design, but I understand the complexity, that things take time, and the field of cars requires involvement from a number of parties. I hope van Hooydonk is successful. He deserves it!

A smiling employee is making a lot of noise, spreading empty champagne glasses out on a table.

– My parents always bought used cars. I remember a Simca 1000 Automatic. After that we had a hopeless Austin Metro, which used at least 15 minutes each morning to warm up. We had to get up very early to make it to work and school.

When Bouroullec received his license, he inherited a Renault 18.

– I've otherwise never bought a car, before now. Until recently I had to ask my parents to lend me their car, everytime we needed to go somewhere.

Bouroullec used to get stopped by the cops, because he drove old cars. That is no more the case with the Audi, which actually belongs to his wife.

– There are very few modern cars that I like, because the proportions seem wrong to me. They're also filled with too many unnecessary gadgets. I miss the classic, French commercial vehicles, "les utilitaires". Contemporary interior, in particular, would benefit from toning it down a little. In my travels to Japan I have had the pleasure of studying the Japanese mini cars, Kei cars, on the street. They seem simple and robust. I especially like the Suzuki Wagon R, which is also available here in Europe.

Our model car is put on a shelf by someone who apparently believes it belongs to the Vitra collection.

– I suffer from claustrophobia, so obviously I prefer walking around Paris, instead of taking the metro. I live by Place de la République, which is close to my studio, so the distances are quite manageable.

Ronan Bouroullec is to sit with a panel in the Vitra store in Oslo. A French speaking woman from Vitra International tries to get his attention so they can prepare for an open interview. But Ronan remains calm and is more than happy to be placed in front of a slightly dirty curtain by Carl's Cars' photographer.

If he has ever designed any garages? No, but he is willing to spend some extra time drawing a car for Carl's Cars' readers. For your satisfaction. •