

John Lewis

FREE

# edition

ISSUE SEVEN

SHOPPING INTELLIGENCE

## PARTY PIECES

*Rise to the occasion  
in sophisticated  
sparkles & ladylike  
eveningwear*

### LET THE FEAST BEGIN

Inspired table  
settings for  
Christmas

### LET IT SNOW

Ski resorts, from  
undiscovered  
Russia to the Alps

### INTERVIEW

Jamie Cullum  
& Toby Young  
talk music &  
married life

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Thoughtful gift  
ideas to show loved  
ones you care

# True to form and function

Sebastian Conran has designed everything from baby equipment to car interiors. But he's best known for his clever cookware – his exclusive range for John Lewis artfully blends both the visual and the practical

As a child, I wanted to be an inventor, and dreamed of having a big workshop like Thomas Edison,' says Sebastian Conran. Now well known for his design innovations and with his own design studio, Sebastian has clearly succeeded in making those childhood dreams a reality.

The eldest son of Sir Terence and Shirley Conran, Sebastian has worked with and for his famous father over many years and reckons that, with a name like his, a career in design was inevitable. 'My parents always encouraged me to make things,' he says. 'My father – quite rightly, as it turned out – suggested that life as a designer might be an interesting one.'

His first step on the career ladder was studying industrial design engineering at London's Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, and he has enjoyed everything the world of product design, architecture and interiors has thrown at him ever since. Projects have included

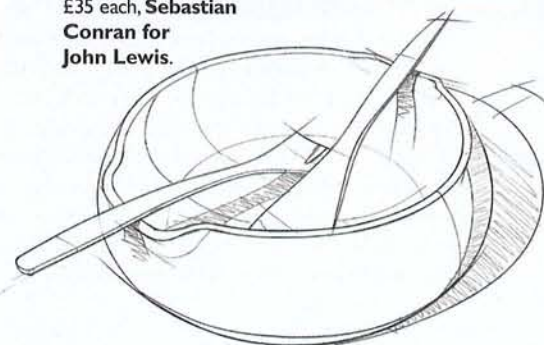
transforming baby equipment for Mothercare and dreaming up brand identities for major corporations. These days, he's best known for the creations that emerge from his design studio, Sebastian Conran Associates, such as luxury car interiors, designer bathrooms and modern kitchenware.

Sebastian is one of those energy-fuelled people who is seemingly always looking for new and interesting challenges. As a designer, he is constantly searching for ways of making things as good as they can possibly be, from both a functional and an aesthetic perspective.

His innovative thinking is evident in the new cookware range he has designed for John Lewis. 'I like to take a lateral approach and bring an ingenuity and elegance to my designs that makes them work better,' he says. 'I get a tremendous amount of satisfaction from designing useful, beautiful and easy-to-use things that are simple and not that expensive to produce.'



Sebastian in his West London home, which features classic designs, punk posters and eclectic finds. **BELOW:** Sketches at the planning stage of the range. **RIGHT:** Innovative rubber-handled mugs, £35 each, **Sebastian Conran for John Lewis.**





#### STARTING POINT

The eldest son of Shirley and Sir Terence Conran, Sebastian studied industrial design engineering at London's Central Saint Martins College.

#### INFLUENCES

As a student, Sebastian was into punk and designed record sleeves, T-shirts and flyers for The Clash. Later, the designs of Indian sculptor Anish Kapoor (below) and Italian furniture designer Achille Castiglioni became firm favourites.

#### APPROACH

Sebastian says he favours a lateral approach and



brings an ingenuity and elegance to his designs 'to make them work better'.

The Sebastian Conran for John Lewis range epitomises his form-and-function ethic. It includes chopping boards made from sustainable bamboo, non-stick saucepans designed with flat glass lids so they can be stacked easily, a stockpot with integrated steamer/colander, a large oven-to-table risotto pan, a non-stick frying pan with a splatter screen and a nest of good-looking trivets. He uses the large mixing bowl himself at home – in a creative way, naturally: ‘I fill it with a couple of inches of water and keep fresh basil, coriander and thyme in it – a little herb garden in the corner of the kitchen.’

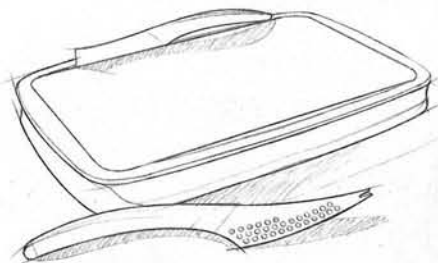
But as a young man in the Seventies, it wasn't practical concerns that drove him – it was punk. ‘I was at art school when the punk movement began. I thought of it as an art/design/music movement, not as a political thing,’ he says. ‘People were still talking about the Swinging Sixties but, to me, as a 19-year-old, there seemed to be an energy in doing something innovative myself – even if this did, in hindsight, reflect New York Pop Art and other, earlier cultural movements. It was a fundamental rethink of the predictable monotony of design.’ The posters, record sleeves, T-shirts and flyers that Sebastian went on to design for bands such as The Clash reflected that youthful zeal.

Growing up in a family such as his, it comes as no surprise that Sebastian's design heroes include family members. His brothers Jasper, Tom and Ned and his sister Sophie are all successful creatives, straddling the worlds of fashion, art, food and design. ‘It's difficult not to be inspired by them!’ he says. ‘But, of course, they are not the only people to inspire me – my influences range from Patti Smith to Paul Smith, Charles Eames to Dieter Rams. The Italian furniture designer Achille Castiglioni has always been a particular favourite of mine. He doesn't have an obvious or overbearing signature style and I like his playful “out of the box” approach.’

‘And there is so much inspiring stuff coming from the London design scene,’ he adds. ‘Everything from just-graduating students to established designers, such as Tom Dixon. Our great contemporary galleries, like Tate Modern, the Science



*“Our contemporary galleries, like Tate Modern, are a source of great inspiration for me”*



Museum and the Design Museum, are all a source of inspiration for me.’

Sebastian lives in Bayswater in west London with his actress wife, Gertrude Thoma, and their two sons, Sam, 20, and Max, 14. It would be easy to imagine his home as a miniature version of The Conran Shop and, while there are a few classic designs courtesy of dad dotted about, Sebastian has his own, very individual style going on, echoing his life, interests and the creative environment he was brought up in.

He reflects that his personal style, such as it is, has evolved organically over time into an eclectic collection of objects arranged in a well-proportioned, simple space. ‘There are probably just as many



**FROM LEFT:** Lazy Susan utensil pot, £17.50. Utensil set, £18. Knife block, £125. Pepper mill, £20. Salt mill, £20. All Sebastian Conran for John Lewis.

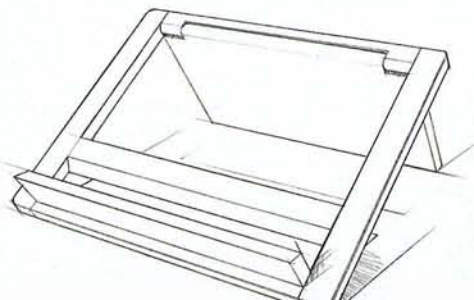
*“From a poster to a pressure cooker, there are endless opportunities to create products that give people pleasure”*

things in my home from John Lewis as there are from Conran,’ he laughs. ‘But mostly, my house is full of things I have collected from all sorts of places – street markets and junk shops are a favourite place to find stuff.’

Many of Sebastian’s most treasured items were given to him by various members of his large family. One of these much-loved pieces is a Georgian drafting table that was given to him by his father. ‘It takes the role of a work station, with my iMac perched on top of it – a good example of mixing the old with the new.’

And how is he applying his design inspiration right now? Sebastian’s main focus is on using technology to create objects that provide solutions to the problems of modern life. ‘Whether it’s a poster, a pushchair or a pressure cooker,’ he says, ‘there are endless opportunities to create products that will give people pleasure to use and own.’

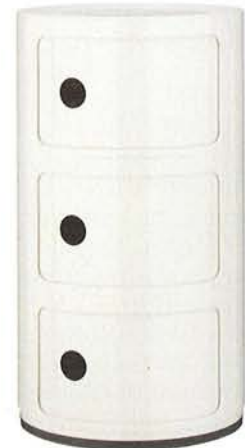
**Selected items from the Sebastian Conran for John Lewis kitchenware collection are in store now.**



## 3 more designer heroes



Cobra candlesticks, £85, Georg Jensen



Componibili 3 tier unit, £83, Anna Castelli Ferrieri for Kartell



K Tribe bronze table lamp, £555, Flos by Philippe Starck