



# Lost + & found

**critical voices in new British design**



Right: 'Alarm clock table', 1998. Photograph by David Spero. Below left: 'Mirror table', 1998. Below: 'Talking cups', 1995



Born in Greece and educated in Cyprus, Anastassiades did not move to London until after finishing his military service. His ideas nevertheless sit comfortably within a peculiarly British vein of slapstick humour, building on the theory that the little accidents that happen in life, like spillages and objects falling off tables, can be funny as well as pathetic.

Anastassiades' work includes the 'Alarm clock table' [right], which vibrates silently rather than sounding a traditional alarm bell. In order to function properly, the alarm is dependent on objects being placed on its table top, which will then rattle or fall over when the alarm 'rings'. Normally, of course, when we are woken by a traditional alarm clock, the chances are that we will lunge into and knock over one of the items which is resting by the clock. This witty subversion of the accepted notion of a common household object – an alarm which causes havoc before we have a chance to wreak it ourselves – also suggests a more serious comment about functionalism. By creating a machine which does not work unless we offer it a sacrificial object which it can rattle or knock over, Anastassiades renders his alarm clock impotent without some

planning by its user, and in doing so drives humanity between form and function. This human touch forces each table alarm clock to assume its own identity (depending on what is made available for it to rattle).

A sense of lost identity seems to have haunted Anastassiades throughout his life, and provides a useful clue to the reading of his design work. He studied Civil Engineering at London's Imperial College (he acknowledges the benefit it gave his design, but did not enjoy the experience), before moving straight to the Royal College of Art to take an MA in Industrial Design Engineering. Again, he was not happy, feeling that his ideas were not appreciated by the tutors. One such idea, the 'Talking cup' [below], almost resulted in Anastassiades failing the MA course. Drawing on his engineering skills, Anastassiades designed a plywood cup with a false bottom containing an electronic recording device which stored a spoken message when the cup was turned upside down, and replayed it to the cup's next user. "The external examiner was James Dyson," he says, "and he tore me apart when I presented it to him. He couldn't see why anyone would want to leave a message in a cup. He said 'it's not functional'." Cypriot culture, on the other hand, would make sense of the idea.

There, a saying has it that if you want to hear the gossip, you must listen to your tea cup.

The formal qualities of Anastassiades' products and furniture suggest a seriousness which is in contrast to their humour. A recent range of furniture contained mirrors set into the backs of chairs and into the centre of a table [above left], a tragic hint that the loneliness of dining without a companion can be mitigated, or intensified, by seeing oneself reflected in the table or empty chair opposite.



Michael Anastassiades



