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Power couple

STORY **MILANDA ROUT** PORTRAIT **NICK CUBBIN**

Light switches and power points. They're not the first things that come to mind when an architect draws up their next project or a homeowner dreams of a renovation. They're things that have to go in somewhere, but they're either an ugly, jarring addition or deliberately hidden – until now.

West Australian-born, Sydney-based electrician Garth Elliott has invented a new way of doing power outlets that means the units can be fitted into any surface – from marble to bronze to fabrics – and without an ugly white cover or trim. The product, called Zetr, was years in the making and has taken off since it was launched on the market three years ago.

“My background is high-end residential and architectural lighting installations, and I was working with some really amazing architects doing some incredible projects around

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PROFILE



Sydney and it was always a struggle to try and hide power switches and outlets,” he tells WISH. “I saw these beautiful light-fitting projects coming out of Europe and they were progressive in their designs, but there was nothing for switches and outlets.”

Elliott saw the gap and decided to have a go himself at designing a better version of an electrical fixture. It took him four years of working in his dilapidated garage in Bondi to perfect the product. His wife, Alyssa Sheldrake, who comes from a marketing background, runs the company with him. “I clearly remember being super pregnant and yelling off the balcony to Garth, who was tinkering about in our garage on these bloody designs,” she recalls, laughing.

Her husband’s experiments paid off. The two launched Zetr in the middle of 2017 and within eight months it had won a major Australian design award. “The main consideration of the product and the product design was to completely integrate it into the finished surface so it sits flush or level with the surroundings, as opposed to being on top of a surface,” Elliott explains. “So we designed two mounting assemblies that facilitate that installation. In theory the concept is quite simple but in reality there were a lot of design challenges to try to make that happen.”

The pair targeted interior designers and architects in their initial pitches and were surprised at the incredibly positive – and immediate – response. “I think people liked the design so much they wanted to make a feature out of it,” says Elliott. “So from that point on we went beyond the initial black and white range and started designing and

manufacturing custom metal-finish face plates from stainless steel and brass to bronzes – all different sorts of metal finishes.”

Interior architect Alexandra Donohoe Church, who was one of Zetr’s first customers, says her clients love the product and treat it as an investment as they would a Bang and Olufsen television or speaker. She says it makes designing kitchens and bathrooms easier.

“You would always have to try to conceal power points wherever you could. There was zero refinement and not much design about them,” Church, who runs Decus Interiors in Woollahra, explains. “And why would you want to interrupt an exquisite marble splashback with a bog-standard plastic white switch plate? It is almost sacrilege in a design sense to do that. Now you can basically laser-cut the stone into the switch and it is almost invisible. It is really about saying we are investing heavily in making sure these interiors are beautiful and using the highest materials and finishes.”

Elliott and Sheldrake have also had success with Zetr in commercial premises such as hotels and restaurants, which is something they did not expect. And the couple, who now live in the Northern Beaches with their two small children, Coco, 4, and Van, 2, still get a kick out of seeing their product in situ.

“We used to come into the city once a week [prior to COVID-19] and we would have breakfast at Bills a lot. We were sitting there on this one particular day and we noticed they had our products installed, and it was just one of those amazing moments,” recalls Sheldrake. “The waiter, however, did not seem as excited as we were,” laughs Elliott.



HE'S BACK

SHAWN STUSSY TEAMS UP WITH DIOR

Nothing says '90s fashion is well and truly back than the re-emergence of Shawn Stussy, founder of the Californian streetwear brand that was worn all over the world (including by this writer, who owned not one but three pairs of Stussy pants in high school). Shawn Stussy – who no longer owns the brand – has teamed up with Dior Men’s artistic director Kim Jones to design some pieces for the Dior Men’s Pre-Fall 2020 collection. This includes Stussy’s re-imagining of the Dior logo on shoes, bags and accessories. There is even a limited edition satchel (there are only 47) painted with superfine layers of aluminium to create a stunning metallic effect.

