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Jasper Morrison's mobile ditches the smartphone's more complex capabilities – but does it simplify too much, or just enough?

"Design, which used to be almost unknown as a profession, has become a major source of pollution. Encouraged by glossy lifestyle magazines, and marketing departments, it's become a competition to

make things as noticeable as possible by means of colour, shape and surprise. Its historic and idealistic purpose, to serve industry and the happy consuming masses at the same time, of conceiving things easier to make and better to live with, seems to have been sidetracked," wrote Jasper Morrison in the publication accompanying *Super Normal: Sensations of the Ordinary*, the exhibition he curated with Naoto Fukasawa in 2006.

He makes a perfectly valid point, of course, but by the same token it does put his own practice under a degree of scrutiny. Are the products coming from his studio genuinely improving the lives of consumers or simply adding to the detritus? In short, does he practice what he preaches?

Occasionally you suspect that he has been undone by the very marketing departments he criticises: The Crate, a bedside table made in pine for Established & Sons, for instance, may have appeared to fit his criteria for *Super Normal* when it was designed in east London. However, launched in the context of an ostentatiously glitzy party at Milan's Salone del Mobile in 2006, it seemed ill-conceived, a throwaway joke aimed at design's in-crowd. [In subsequent interviews Morrison professed to be utterly confused by the criticism the product received.]

You sense he finds himself in the contradictory situation of being embedded in the design world –

working with companies such as Vitra, Cappellini and Flos – yet being deeply ill at ease with the role designers are increasingly forced to play in a crowded marketplace. Conversely, his reticence hasn't prevented him developing something approaching a cult following among the cognoscenti. His latest product for Swiss electronics manufacturer Punkt, the MP 01 mobile phone, was launched at the recent London Design Festival – that jamboree of dinners, exhibitions, installations, panel discussions, parties and free booze. However, the thought of him doing the rounds, glad-handing, and generally fronting the brand in such a situation is anathema. Instead, it seems, he is happy for the product itself to be the star.

Which in this case is a very reasonable decision. Certainly the premise behind the phone is intriguing. Convinced that people are fed up of having their lives overwhelmed by information, the MP 01 keeps it simple. Here is a product that is a throwback to a time when a mobile's prime propose was not to pick up emails, check the internet, take photos or hold

your music collection but simply to make calls. It has a handful of other functions. There's a calendar, for example, a contacts book, of course, and an alarm clock too. And you can send text messages – although it reminded me why I used to loathe texting before the advent of a digital keyboard – and there's a hands-free speaker. It also has a long battery life of 670 hours on standby (remember the days when you didn't have to charge your phone every night?), while a set of ringtones has been specially created by Norwegian sound artist Kjetil Røst Nilsen.

Aesthetically it looks a little like a calculator, with large, round buttons and a decent-sized 5cm-wide Gorilla Glass screen. And it's a pleasure to use. The sans serif font is strong but elegant; I liked the fact the USB port has a cover to prevent it getting filled with dirt (although I found it a little bit fiddly to open); and, once I'd worked out where the power button was located, it is largely intuitive to use. It has a sloping back with golfball-like pimples, meaning it sits proud on the table and is easy to pick up and grip. In common with pretty much everything Morrison designs, it seems to emit a quiet authority. It also feels weirdly nostalgic, which on the face of it is odd since the iPhone was only launched in 2007, but gives it an extra layer of narrative nevertheless.

How will people use it? The company sees it being a weekend phone, for when people want to step away from work, or as secondary device that sits alongside a work phone or tablet. At the

moment it comes in black but there are plans to launch two new colours in 2016. It's worth mentioning that this simplicity comes at a price though: at a cost of £229, it may be that many people looking for the good life choose to buy an old (dare one say, classic) Nokia from eBay instead. So while it may never quite reach the happy consuming masses, I fancy that this well-considered product will quickly find a niche market and very possibly make its owners' lives ever-so-slightly more enjoyable.



1 Calls, texts, an alarm, contacts and a calendar: that's it

2 A sloping base means it tips towards the user when flat

3 The finish is in the same high-specification paint used for cameras