



Red-gold Horizon watch, with Newson's freshly honed 'perfect ellipse' monocoque case (£14,250). For the new collection, Ikepod only employs inspection-grade platinum, red gold and titanium. The bands are all moulded from soft vanilla-scented rubber.

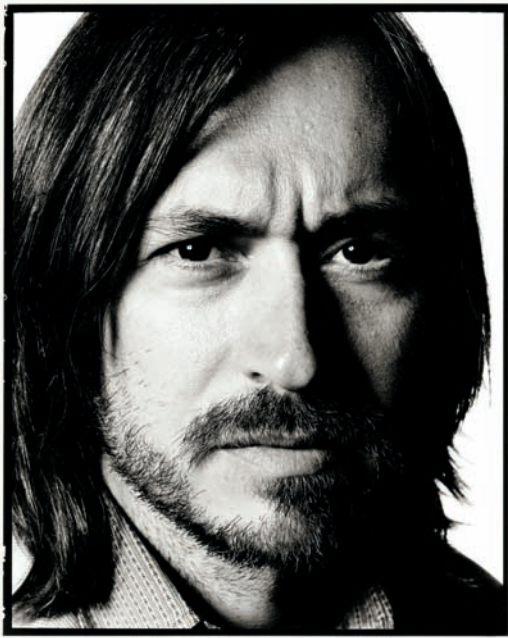
# v2.0

Ikepod has landed..again...



It's easy to think that Marc Newson has something of the Midas touch about him. Only last summer, Sotheby's sold an example of his shiny 'Lockheed Lounge' chaise longue for \$1m - the most ever paid for a piece of furniture by a living designer. The scruffy Australian's globular, multicoloured concepts have echoed throughout contemporary design for over 20 years now, with comparable clout to design heavyweight Philippe Starck. One project in particular that failed to turn to gold, however, was Newson's watch brand, Ikepod, which went bankrupt in 2004 after just 10 years. Its revival this year, at the hands of New York art dealer Adam Lindemann, could well be cause to rejoice, therefore. If nothing else, the designs are tighter, more focused and ultimately as ice-cool as they ever were. But *QP* wonders just how well the revitalised Ikepod watches will wear their 'revitalised' price tags. Even in red gold, can an ETA-fitted time-only watch really justify £14,250, or will it go the way of the other Lockheed Lounge that failed to sell at Design Miami for its preposterous \$2.5m asking price? Could Lindemann really be cashing-in on cachet alone? Is Newson's touch enough to get over so trifling an issue as cost? Make your own mind up, as Pierre Halimi Lacharlotte, one of Ikepod's new custodians, talks **Mitch Greenblatt** through the new collection.





(Above) Born in Sydney, Australia 43 years ago, Newson studied jewellery and sculpture at Sydney College of the Arts. He began experimenting with furniture design as a student and was awarded a grant from the Australian Crafts Council in 1984. He now divides his time between London (where he employs about 15 people) and Paris (where he opened a smaller studio to be closer to the Airbus factory).

(Above right) Adam Lindemann, one of the biggest contemporary art collectors in America and author of *Collecting Contemporary* (Taschen, 2006), who has just bought the Ikepod brand. Lindemann asked its designer Marc Newson to rethink the whole collection.

(Below) Best-selling model during Ikepod's first, decade-long incarnation was the Hemipode dual-time chronograph - one of the three models now given a second lease of life by new brand owner, Lindemann (red-gold model pictured; £16,700). One of many changes includes the logo placement, which doesn't 'interfere' with the dial anymore, engraved on the sapphire crystal.



*"If you don't like it, it's okay, we'll find another customer."*

It seemed fitting to be seated in one of Marc Newson's 'embryo' chairs when meeting with New York entrepreneur Adam Lindemann to discuss the rebirth of hitherto hibernating watch company, Ikepod. Lindemann, an exuberant art collector with a fine-tuned knack for identifying visual artists at the sweet spots of their careers, has waved his divining rod at the world of watchmaking, and sensed a distant tapping egg tooth, calling out amid the current din of ingenuity in form and function. Together with designer Marc Newson and stateside industry veteran Pierre Halimi Lacharlotte, formerly of Technomarine, De Witt, De Bethune, and now FP Journe, Lindemann is at last able to reveal the next stage in Ikepod's evolution.

Ikepod's heritage is marked by the footprints of exotic creatures that live in the curiosity cabinet of Newson's imagination. Recall the Manatee, named after the doughy mammal thought to have spawned the myth of mermaids; or the Isopode, referencing a mega-scaled insect of the deep sea. Even the more earthly namesakes, such as the Seaslug - a soft-bodied crustacean of repugnant beauty - and the Platypus, nature's attempt at humour, express Newson's taste for proto-organic forms.

**The menagerie**

But let's take a closer look at this latest branch of the Ikepod family tree, where we'll find two reanimations and two entirely new time-benders.

Topping the shelf at £24,100 is the Hemipode dual-time chronograph with La Joux-Perret's 8206-1 movement. A perfected edition of Ikepod's now classic chronograph, the Hemipode (rather prosaically a small, drab ground bird otherwise known as the button quail) is also the icon for the brand. Its availability only in red gold and platinum positions Ikepod keenly at the high end.

With a name evoking a Godzillian foe, the Megapode (let's forget about name derivations here) returns as a technical behemoth that streamlines a complex collection of functions - chronograph, slide rule and dual time - all powered by a La Joux-Perret 8301 movement (£5,900 in titanium). The Megapode is also Newson's watch of choice, designed with the help of a helicopter pilot he met at an Australian surf contest.

The minimalist Horizon debuts as an embodiment of elegant simplicity, reducing the timekeeping to just its essentials:

*The perforated dial creates a convex optical illusion suggesting volume.*

hours and minutes. The perforated dial creates a convex optical illusion that suggests volume, in tune with Ikepod's trademark bulbous form. The end result is a scaled-down variation of the 2000 tourbillon, but now with an ETA 2892 'Finition Soignée' movement and priced optimistically from £14,250 in red gold.

The Black Hole remains shrouded in mystery. All that is known is the watch, a 'stealth Horizon' of sorts, will be black-on-black with a PVD-coated titanium monocoque case. Ikepod is offering the Black Hole in a limited edition of 66, so getting one will involve, according to Lindemann, "knowing the right person." (*QP* thought it knew the right people, but we couldn't even source an image. Interested parties are directed to Ikepod's homepage, where an enticing silhouette asks more questions that it answers.) The Black Hole also represents a dramatic shift in the pricing scale for Ikepod's watches, with its £7,150 price tag inhabiting the low end of the new spectrum. It is also, of course, a reversal of convention to establish one of their least expensive

items as the most rare. Needless to say, the more exclusive pricing has the potential to build a new audience while alienating old friends.

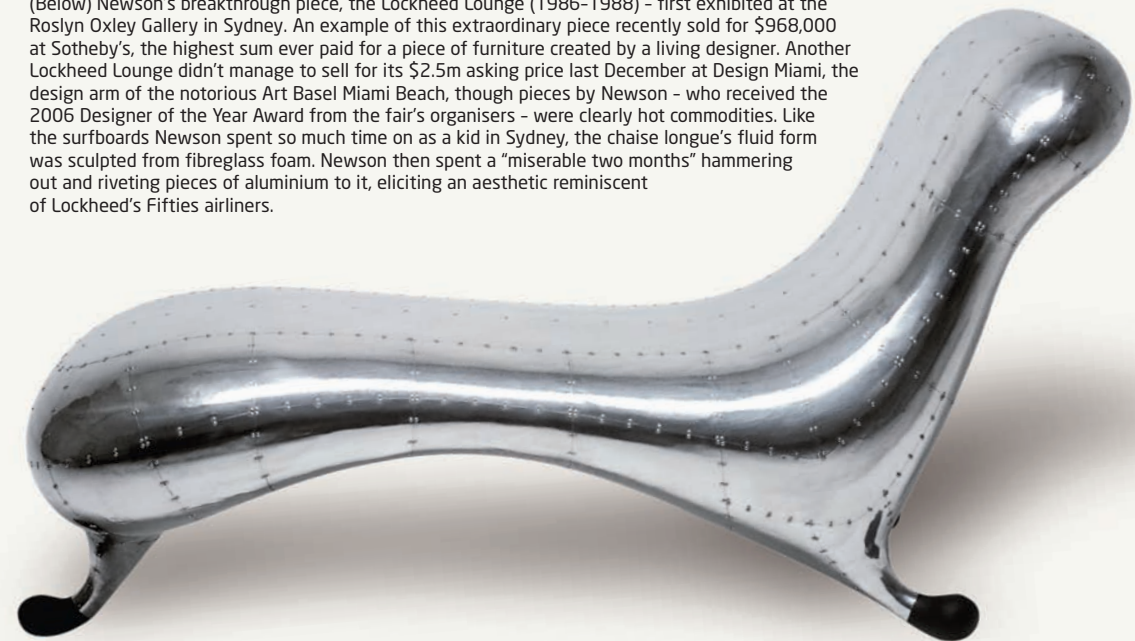
I asked Lacharlotte about the dramatic rise in costs. He contested that there actually was no price increase at all. His opinion that a weak dollar combined with the increasing value of gold multiplied by the previous cost of a solid-gold Ikepod (\$20,000) add up to the new price tags. But the fact remains: you will not be able to buy a new Ikepod for much under £6,000. The price of fame is a bitch.

**The brand and the man**

All four pieces in this new collection share a subtle but significant adjustment to their fundamental design, with Newson's reconfiguration of the signature 'UFO' shape to a perfect ellipse, as originally intended. A full-body adaptation was necessary to effect Newson's ethos of 'Total Design', whereby everything is considered as a whole, with all sides of the watch created with equal attention.

(Right) The Horizon wristwatch (platinum with grey-gold dial; £22,100) makes reference to the 'event horizon' in astrophysics, literally meaning the edge of a black hole - the moment when gravity becomes infinite. 'Event Horizon' was also the name of a desk designed by Marc Newson in his early years.

(Below) Newson's breakthrough piece, the Lockheed Lounge (1986-1988) - first exhibited at the Roslyn Oxley Gallery in Sydney. An example of this extraordinary piece recently sold for \$968,000 at Sotheby's, the highest sum ever paid for a piece of furniture created by a living designer. Another Lockheed Lounge didn't manage to sell for its \$2.5m asking price last December at Design Miami, the design arm of the notorious Art Basel Miami Beach, though pieces by Newson - who received the 2006 Designer of the Year Award from the fair's organisers - were clearly hot commodities. Like the surfboards Newson spent so much time on as a kid in Sydney, the chaise longue's fluid form was sculpted from fibreglass foam. Newson then spent a "miserable two months" hammering out and riveting pieces of aluminium to it, eliciting an aesthetic reminiscent of Lockheed's Fifties airliners.





The group, which, in Newson's words, was not originally "the correct collection" for an Ikepod relaunch is now ready for the world. As a testament to this, his signature is engraved upon each case. The leather strap, an option previously considered a concession, is no longer available, giving way to the original buckle-free rubber strap, which penetrates the case. Lacharlotte admits that some of the new improvements may disappoint a traditionally minded portion of the market, but, as Lacharlotte knows of today's buyer appetite, "If you don't like it, it's okay, we'll find another customer."

Getting Ikepod to this new point has not always been the most natural process of selection. Early on, Lacharlotte gave Lindemann good reason to hesitate before purchasing an enterprise with a history of mechanical and legal issues and a recent bankruptcy. But Lindemann had a vision for the future of this brand. At the heart of this was Lindemann's investment in Newson, who now commands dead-artist prices for his limited-edition furniture as well as continuing respect for industrial designs that range from bottle openers to jet planes.

Newson has always loved all things mechanical and has been designing watches since his childhood. In 1986, fresh out of art college, he produced his first model, the Pod Watch. Featuring a mystery dial of spinning disks instead of hands, it is a design that still looks ultra modern today. Its counterpart, the Pod Clock had a very special feature: small metallic balls that rolled through grooves as hour, minute and second markers, all driven by moving magnets hidden below the dial.

Currently, Sydney-born Newson is serving as Creative Director for Qantas Airlines, designing interiors involving the dramatic Skybed, and designer for a plethora of other dream projects like the O21c concept car for Ford (with of course, Ikepod-style dashboard instruments). And most recently, the Foundation Cartier awarded him a million dollars to create the object of his choice.

He decided upon the Kelvin 40, a flightless concept jet prototype. He was also named one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in 2005 and most recently Designer of the Year by Design Miami - the design arm of Art Basel Miami Beach.

### Form of the moon

The original Ikepod watch collection was created in 1994, when Newson teamed-up with brand namesake, Oliver Ike, a Swiss entrepreneur who was already distributing some of Newson's Pod furniture. The collaboration lasted over 10 years and established an early trend for radical design; a path now followed by some very unique watchmakers taking the leap from unconventional case designs to even more unique mechanical inventions.

Once its custodian, Ike is now no longer involved with Ikepod. In order to direct Newson's cachet towards the reanimation of the brand, Lacharlotte wanted to return to production as soon as the company pulled itself from bankruptcy. But Newson held steadfast that a careful redesign of the existing specimens was a necessary prerequisite for success. Now, this is the first company for which he is a partner and is directly involved with every aspect of visual representation including the packaging, advertising, and photography. In effect, Total Design.

If the new collection provides any glimpse of where Ikepod will land, it's in a space of increasing collectibility. Newson generates the complex DNA that codes for the modern simplicity inherent to each design, then stamps his mark with an engraved signature on the back of each case. While mechanical innovation has not been the priority, Newson has kept Ikepod evolving with his vision of perfection in form. "It's not coming from the fact that we went to the moon," says Lindemann gnomically. "It's about the form of the moon."

In fact, no plans are being made for the higher complications that characterised, for example, 2000's Hemipode Tourbillon.

(Far left) At the most affordable end of Ikepod's new collection is Newson's favourite, the Megapode in titanium (£5,900). The most technical of the collection, Megapode provides time, day, chronograph, as well as a slide rule, operated by a second crown. (Left) Caseback of a Megapode, engraved and numbered, with an intriguing glimpse of La Joux-Perret's calibre 8301 movement.



(Above) Guiding Lindemann and Newson's rejuvenated brand back into the global watch market are industry veterans Alex Rodriguez (left) and Pierre H Lacharlotte (right). (Right) Hemipode dual-time chronograph in red gold and an alluring metallic blue dial (£16,700).



Although Lindemann appreciates the current revolution of complicated watches by Richard Mille, Urwerk and the styles of Gérald Genta, he holds that Ikepod isn't about bells and whistles or ornamentation, but rather the "opposite of that".

In addition to a vague tease about a "radical departure" for future Ikepods, Lacharlotte also discussed the surprising possibility of a future quartz-based Ikepod. He went on to detail a debate within the horological community: "If Brequet were alive today, what type of watch would he make?" Pause... "Quartz - it is the most accurate thing you can imagine." (QP is not aware of any such debate, nor indeed anyone else holding the same opinion.)

As for materials, an emphasis on precious metals - red gold, titanium and platinum - is paving Ikepod's way towards a new identity as an independent luxury brand. The journey will no doubt require continued captainship from the visionary Newson, whose personal trajectory has shown that commitment to a pure vision maintains integrity and identity.

Ikepod was always ahead of its time - probably too much so. But it's possible that this second landing will be in a world ready for such futuristic watches.

They are still beautifully designed, but, frankly, with such high expectations from Newson, I secretly wished to see him pushing the envelope of modern tastes again. As the incubation period for Ikepod's golden egg nears its end, one can only hope that Ikepod's new hatchlings find as robust a following as their predecessors. Here's hoping Newson's persistence in logging the brand after flightless birds nearing extinction doesn't tempt fate too far... ○

(Right) The top end of the new range: Hemipode dual-time chronograph in platinum (£24,100).

