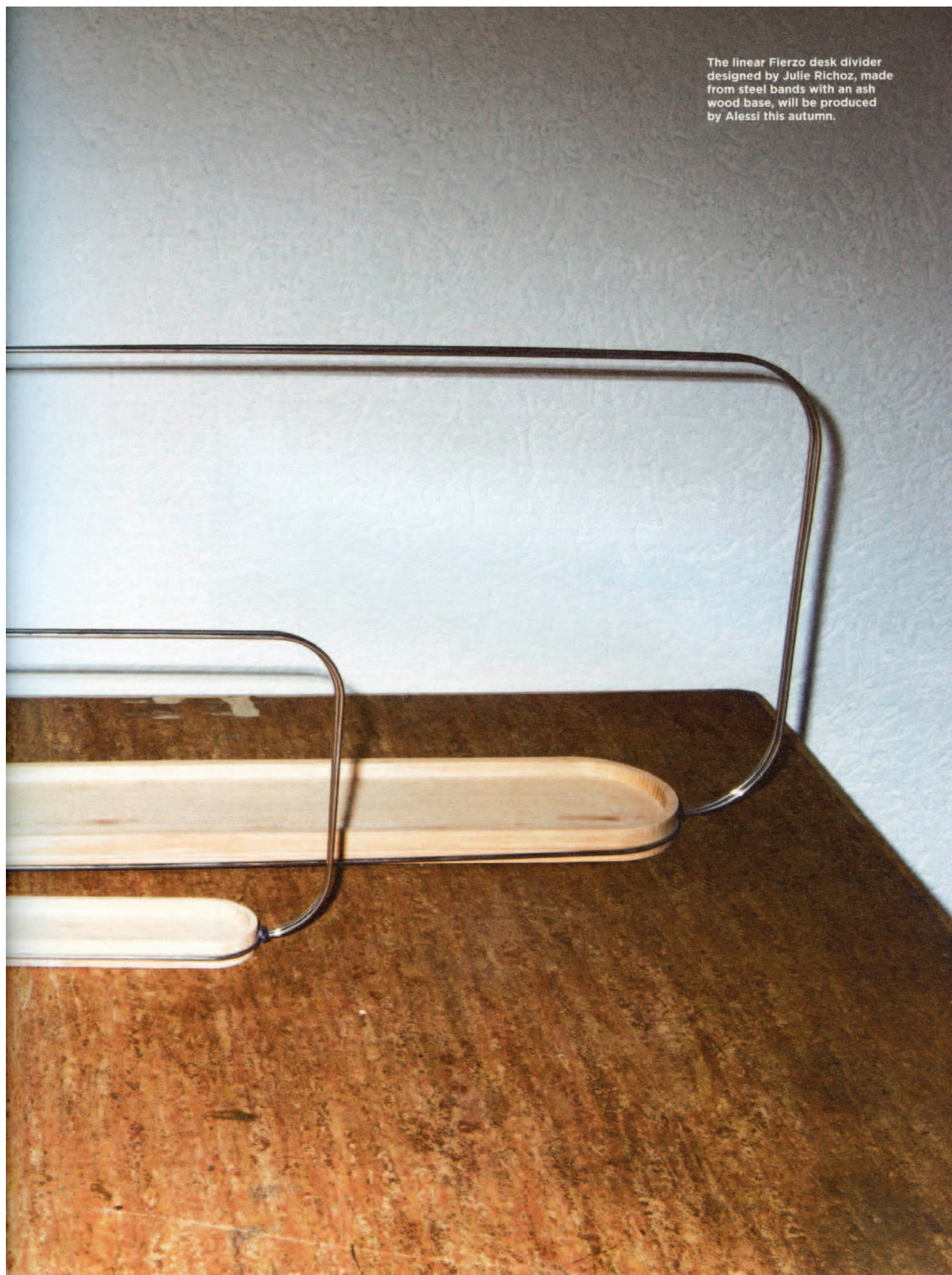


Exposé

There is a smell of fresh paint in Julie Richoz's Lausanne apartment. She moved in a few days ago and a pile of neatly arranged cardboard boxes rests in the small, open-plan kitchen. This is a new beginning for Richoz, in more ways than one.

A month ago, she graduated from the BA Industrial Design course at the Ecole Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne (ECAL) in Switzerland, and shortly after, she won the Grand Prix at the 10 Young Designers competition at Villa Noailles in the south of France. >



The linear Fierzo desk divider designed by Julie Richoz, made from steel bands with an ash wood base, will be produced by Alessi this autumn.



The Thalie bowl transforms from a flat metal sheet to an object by picking up the fine rays.

> And, in just a month's time, her first commercial product will launch with Italian homewares brand Alessi – the Fierzo desk divider, made from two softly curved, parallel rectangular steel bands on a base of ash wood, to screen work areas. The divider itself is constructed by the customer, from readily available office material – card and paper – which slots between the steel wires. While the immediate future often seems uncertain for recent graduates, Richoz's already has a sudden, if somewhat unexpected, structure.

Through the Grand Prix from Villa Noailles she won two residencies: one at Cité de la Céramique de Sèvres and at Centre International de Recherche sur le Verre et les Arts Plastiques de Marseille and a €5,000 prize to develop a new project for the Parisian Galerie Kreo. "So, I will be spending this coming year working on these three projects," says Richoz as she sits down at a small dining table in the apartment's modestly furnished living room. The balcony door is open, allowing for a breeze, a few lazy wasps and the distant sound of a neighbour's piano playing to enter the room. Richoz is taking it all in and looks a little pensive: "It will be challenging to work on these projects because, so far, I have always worked at university with other people – in collaboration. It will be very different to work by myself; there will be no teacher and, for me, this is the challenge, to see if I can do it on my own."

In 2011, while a second-year student at ECAL, Richoz designed Fierzo, the linear desk divider. Conceived during

a workshop with Alessi, Fierzo was among five desk objects selected for production. Its strength, like all of Richoz's projects, lies in its simplicity and it's these minimal objects, which she enjoys designing the most. "The designs I like to create are small, like bowls or plates," says Richoz. "When I think about an object, I try to find the easiest way to make it because I have to do it myself and I don't want to use complicated technology or machinery."

As a result, her portfolio of work is deceptively simple. At the ECAL exhibition during the Milan furniture fair earlier this year, she exhibited Armand – coloured paper with

Her uncomplicated, straightforward approach gives her designs their functional and humble character.

an extraordinarily delicate cut out pattern, which is formed into different-sized tubes which she inserted into each other to recreate the feeling of "soft focus". It was a brave choice at an event where designers come to launch their careers, often with bravado and grand gestures.

It is Richoz's uncomplicated, straightforward approach that gives her designs their functional and humble character and it was this no-fuss attitude that swayed the jury, led by French designer François Azambourg, to give her the Grand Prix at Villa Noailles. The perfect example of her approach is the metal bowl Thalie. It starts

out as a flat surface – imagine a child's drawing of a sun with a solid, round centre and spindly rays coming out of it – then, imagine it created from a fine sheet of spring steel. All Richoz does to create the bowl is, pick up the "rays" one by one and fasten them in the desired position with the help of metal wire. "I am fascinated by turning something from one dimension to three dimensions," says Richoz.

However, if it was just this ingenuity and economy of material that was Richoz's stamp it would be easy to imitate, but her sensibility and feeling for the materials she works in and the forms she creates is what really sets her apart. Her brand is a fragile beauty which is seductive to look at and pleasant to the touch. With her two forthcoming residencies she will be let loose on materials she has never worked with before – porcelain and glass – richer, rarer, more complicated materials to the ones Richoz has favoured until now. It will be interesting to see how she treats them and how it will propel her work forward, but before then she is taking a long holiday.

She's leaving tomorrow and an empty backpack lays deflated and empty in the middle of her new apartment. For six weeks this piece of luggage is going to hold all her belongings. But it's not a real concern; after all, Richoz has a certain talent for creating meaningful somethings out of almost nothing. ●

The 10 Designers exhibition closed 30 September at Villa Noailles.

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Julie Richoz sits in her new apartment in Lausanne, Switzerland near ECAL, where she graduated from earlier this year.