

A broad-chested design

Today it gives us great pleasure to welcome to our programme, the famous designer François Fort, and as my first question, I would like you to tell us about how you started off in the design business.

Well, my very first experience of industry happened as I was reaching the end of design school. For a school project I made a multi-position coffee table that could also be used as a chest.



At that time, one of my teachers was quite clued up on intellectual property issues and he advised me to protect my creation. As I knew nothing about it, I went to a specialised firm. They first of all explained the differences between copyright and drawings and models or design, as it is called nowadays. They also explained why my table, which didn't really have an individual character, had to be protected by a design. I therefore only filed in one country, which I could afford, even at that time.

Once my design was filed, I went to see quite a lot of companies, hoping to find the rare pearl that would want to market my product. I can tell you that it wasn't easy. What with the ones who weren't interested, those who proposed frankly dishonest conditions and those who wanted to throw together three tables to hawk on the streets, there wasn't a very big choice.



Then, I was introduced to a company called "Les réversibles". My table fitted their niche market perfectly and things went well straight away with the marketing manager. Then I went to negotiate a licence agreement with "my" intellectual property firm, which then formalised our discussion in a licence agreement. There was a whole series of points to be dealt with that I had no idea about: whether or not there were any economic rights, royalty amounts, exclusivity, the term of the agreement, etc.



So, every time a table was sold, I got my share of the proceeds and I will keep on receiving it until the end of the design protection, which is between 15 and 50 years depending on the country.

The company that signed the agreement also paid for protection of the design in other countries, while I remained the owner of the rights. They didn't want other people to be able to manufacture and sell the same product.



That's how my first « works » were sold. It didn't make me really rich, but at least my investments started to make money quickly and earned me enough to continue my studies in Italy.



Conclusion

Protecting your works by filing a design, provided that they fulfil the criteria for protection set out by law, not only enables you to protect yourself against any infringers, but also constitutes an important asset when you are negotiating with an industrial company. In fact, this type of intellectual property title can be the deciding factor in the signing of a contract, since it gives the company the assurance that in the event of an infringement, it will have the appropriate weapons to defend itself.