

OBSERVED

WRITTEN BY
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DESIGNER
Thomas Meyerhoffer
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PROJECT
Tork Elevation Paper
Dispensers

A Seamless Experience

Thomas Meyerhoffer takes pride in products that succeed by going virtually unnoticed.

It's not the usual brand of celebrity. "I got a call from a Danish friend in Milano who said, 'Hey, I just got out of the restroom, and there was your range,'" says Thomas Meyerhoffer, the Swedish industrial designer who is now based in the San Francisco Bay Area. The range in question is Tork Elevation, a Red Dot award-winning series of 14 paper dispensers for public bathrooms that started rolling out in the United States late last year. And since they were designed for SCA, the second-largest paper company in the world, more than a million people will encounter them every day in public venues like hotels and airports.

Given those high-volume demands, the products needed to be easy to maintain, but Meyerhoffer also wanted to make them slim and sculptural, with "a slight tension to the surface, so that it appears there's something in there which is protected." Perhaps the single most important functional requirement was the window that reveals when towels need to be refilled. "After a while, it became clear to me that we could integrate it into the overall volume," Meyerhoffer says. But joining a translucent plastic to an opaque one had a significant ick factor: it produced a seam that would have become a petri dish for dirt and bacteria. Fortunately, Meyerhoffer and SCA engineers discovered a coinjection process (also used in Germany for car lights) that could deliver a smooth joint. "It took us almost a year to figure that out," he says. The finished products are smooth, with subtle curves. "You get the nice highlight, and it's just sitting there like a shiny pebble on the wall," he says.

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But how many of us will, like the designer's Danish friend, linger in the bathroom long enough to admire his handiwork? That's not important to Meyerhoffer. "If the object works functionally, everything is clean, you get your one piece of paper, and you dry your hands and walk out of there without thinking about it," he says. "If that can happen all over the world a million times a day, great." ■



Meyerhoffer took pains to minimize the volume of all the dispensers (paper towels, above), but most challenging was the toilet-paper container (top), which holds two rolls.

Courtesy Meyerhoffer