

Konstantin Grcic and Toan Nguyen Explore New Dimensions in High-Tech Ceramics

Enabled by revolutionary advances in the ancient material, the prolific designers share their bold visions with Laufen.

by Amara Holstein
June 12, 2018



sponsored by:

LAUFEN



Ceramic has been around for almost 10,000 years. A blend of kaolin, clay, feldspar, and quartz sand is molded, glazed, then fired in a kiln at around 1250 degrees centigrade for twenty hours. With its millennia-old production technique, there's something entirely elemental about the resulting material. But what if you combine cutting-edge technology to retain the classic aspects of ceramic – while making it even more versatile? "We wanted to make the material slimmer and lighter and more precise without losing all its amazing attributes," says Marc Viardot, director of marketing and products at the Swiss manufacturer Laufen.



Ino Collection, by Toan Nguyen, for Laufen.



The result is a material called SaphirKeramik. Five years in the making, this groundbreaking product was first introduced by Laufen in 2013 and integrates an aluminum oxide found in sapphire. Much stronger than traditional ceramic, this new material can be turned into extraordinarily thin forms, with washbasin walls and curves less than half of what can be achieved with standard ceramic.

Rather than simply being content to have created such a revolutionary material, however, Laufen wanted its application to be similarly innovative. As Viardot says, "SaphirKeramik allows for completely new shapes. We wanted to work with designers on new applications, to push the boundaries of manufacturing and development and design. We encouraged the designers to push us to our limits in order to make new things, to make the impossible possible."



Ino Collection, by Toan Nguyen, for Laufen.

For this journey of design invention, Laufen invited French designer Toan Nguyen and German designer Konstantin Grcic to experiment with SaphirKeramik – an invitation they eagerly accepted. "Laufen invented this new material, and they were eager to give it to us and see it become alive in the products," says Grcic. "It was a very rare opportunity to get my hands on a new technology, to make the first interpretation of a material. It was very easy to say yes."



Konstantin Grcic with the Laufen team discussing a prototype.

The design and production process was entirely collaborative. Highly skilled factory workers at Laufen's own central European factories – some of them third-generation Laufen artisans, there for over forty years – met with the designers to explain the production process and the potential of SaphirKeramik. After the designers sketched out their own ideas, they worked closely with the technical team to adjust them for production. "When we showed them our designs, they were excited, they understood what we were trying to do," says Nguyen, "These are people who didn't want to stay in their comfort zones, they wanted to innovate, to take the challenge to produce our designs."



Toan Nguyen observes a prototype for his Ino collection.

With SaphirKeramik allowing for a single-walled basin rather than the usual double-walled basin, Nguyen pared his design ideas down to the essence of SaphirKeramik. Maximizing the durable, slim potential of the material, Nguyen created a generous washbasin with an integrated shelf alongside. "It's elegant because it looks very light, but it's very strong at the same time," he says. Playful yet chic, the clean curves and swoops of the basin are unlike anything seen before – and it's the perfect centerpiece of Nguyen's Ino collection for Laufen.



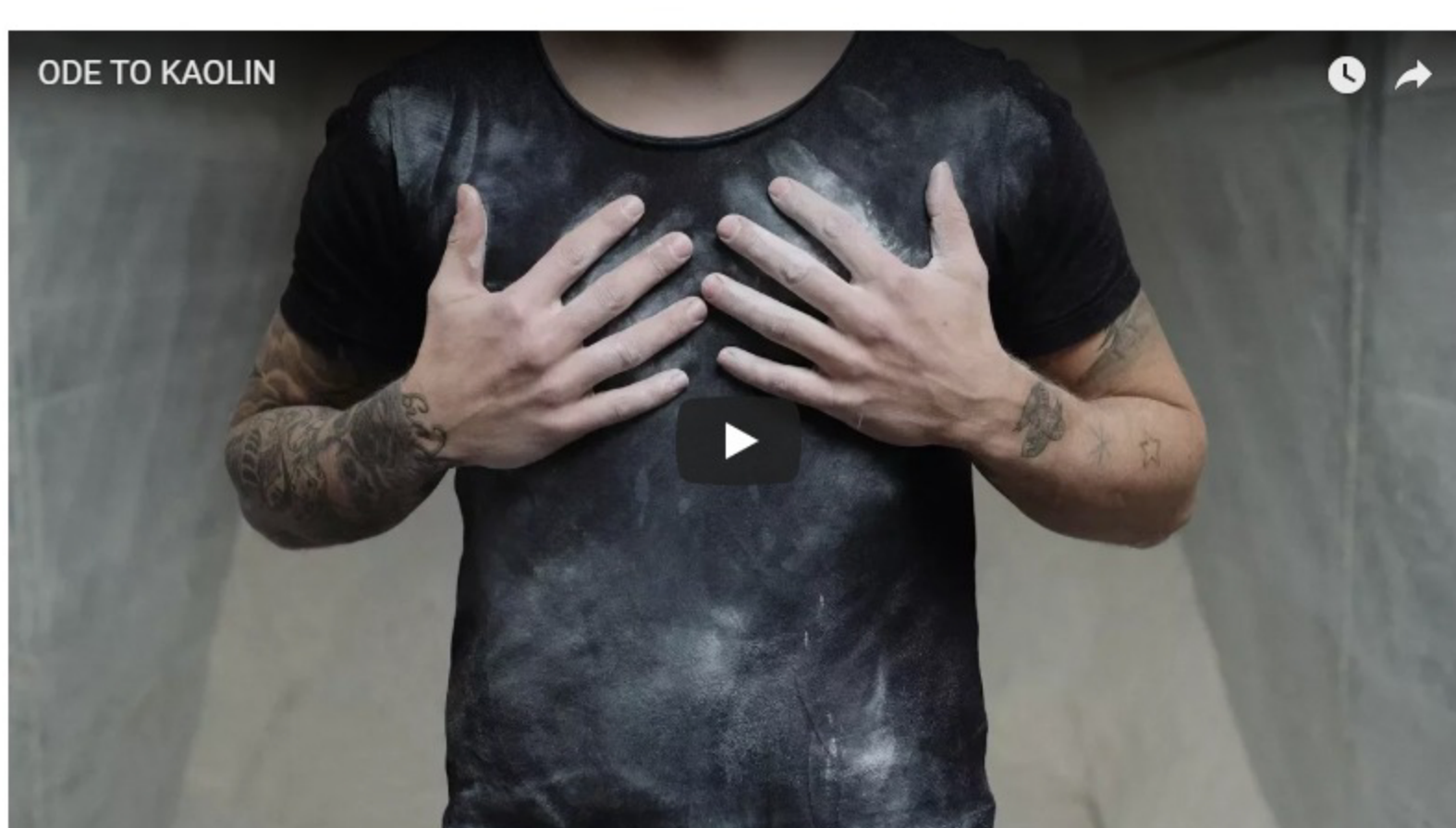
Val Collection, by Konstantin Grcic, for Laufen.

"Toan's project is more sculptural, more about organic forms, which is possible in this type of ceramic," says Grcic, reflecting on the work of a fellow designer. "My approach was to create fine 3-D textures with the material, to exploit the incredible ability to make very thin sections and work with precise geometries." The washbasin Grcic created for Val, his own Laufen collection, lightly floats on countertops, and a pair of subtle trays are like modernist bathroom jewels, with their careful textures and fine lines. "The fact that the two collections are so different shows the scope of possibilities for the material," says Grcic.

The collections also demonstrate that Laufen has revolutionized the market with the material. "SaphirKeramik is a great innovation, that allows for a new generation of product," says Nguyen. "And arriving at this point, creating something that was not possible before, is not just about the designers, but also about the technical team and the company's spirit of innovation – it's a result of Laufen's teamwork and collaborative approach."

To learn more about Laufen, click [here](#).

To learn more about Laufen's commitment to excellence in craftsmanship, watch the short film *Ode to Kaolin*, winner of the Silver Award at the 2017 Cannes Corporate Media and TV Awards:



Subscribe/Renew
Subscribe on iPad
Give a Gift
Customer Service