

Lab of Luxury *Science meets design at a Parisian think tank's glossy new HQ.*

Dream client for a retail/office complex: A guy who doesn't want any desks or task chairs around and hardly any shelves or countertops. Parisian product designer Mathieu Lehanneur just finished this plum assignment for Le Laboratoire, a year-old foundation near the Louvre that fosters synergies between artists and scientists on everything from pharmaceutical-spray container design to mathematical formulas for universal beauty standards.

The organization's founder, David Edwards, a Harvard bioengineering professor and self-described "artscientist," had previously collaborated with Lehanneur on Bel-Air, a purifying machine that filters air through plants potted inside its clear dome. For the ground floor at Laboratoire headquarters, Edwards asked for a LaboShop—a coffee bar and store convertible to a gathering space—and a LaboBrain, his own office, with not much more than an expansive whiteboard, a couch comfy enough for naps, book and paperwork storage, and clear sightlines to the street.

Lehanneur dangled the store's cases from steel shafts that can be

scissor-folded and retracted to the ceiling, and he cantilevered tiny mirrored-steel tables over wall-hugging leather banquettes. In the LaboBrain, a curvy whiteboard faces a foam-stuffed, beanbag-like geodesic dome upholstered in leather. "That would have been a nightmare for Buckminster Fuller, to see his solid structure made to look broken," the designer quips. Quilted-steel cabinetry is meant to evoke American skyscrapers and hotdog carts. To pump idea-inducing oxygen into the office, Lehanneur sunk a moss garden into the floor alongside a Bel-Air. (This spring, that machine will be available for about \$375 from the LaboShop and U.S. distributors.)

Edwards has given Lehanneur a key to the office, so the designer can use it when the professor is out of town. Lehanneur plans to scribble on the whiteboard and tend the moss patch while pondering a new global undertaking: In 2009, he'll reshape vitrines and display shelves at Cartier's U.S. outlets and create a temporary Christmas facade for its Fifth Avenue flagship. What better place to conjure up diamond displays than while perched on a faceted leather dome?
www.laboratoire.org —EVE M. KAHN

