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# The luxury website rebranding the knick-knack

How Abask became the go-to destination for the chicest decorative homewear



Snakes and ladders, William & Son, £1,795  
ABASK

[Lisa Grainger](#) | Monday August 21 2023, 12.01am, The Times

It's reassuring to know that even those with unlimited funds and access to just about anything also have problems sourcing the perfect items for their homes. When Tom Chapman, the co-founder of MatchesFashion, was putting the finishing touches to his home in Los Angeles, his interior designer Pamela Shamshiri brought an assortment of "smalls" (US designer speak for diminutive decorative objects) with which to bring the spaces to life. "The problem was that I need to connect with things around me," he says. "To me, having a personal connection is fundamental. I didn't want to be surrounded with things that meant nothing. I want to know who made it, how it was made and when, because that has an impact on how you use it."

Other people, he soon discovered, felt the same way. But although he says "around 90 per cent of gifts are things for the house", no single site stocked beautiful objects made by hand by some of the world's finest craftspeople.

So the serial entrepreneur set about creating one.

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Tom Chapman and Nicolas Pickaerts  
ABASK

Abask, launched in November 2022 with the French e-commerce specialist Nicolas Pickaerts who had successfully helped Chapman to launch matchesfashion.com, has in only eight months become the smart destination for those who want to know not only the provenance of their purchases but also the people who made them. As well as being able to browse products by room (from dining and bar to flower room) and by style (bohemian, classic, minimalist and modernist), clients can read about the maker, and look at pictures and watch films of the piece in production.

It is knowing the provenance of each of the products, Chapman insists, that makes Abask different. "Bringing something, or someone, into your home when you're not connected feels odd. Everything should have a story." Today, each of the 3,000+ pieces on the Abask site is made in one of more than 200 ateliers in countries from Korea to Ghana, as well as from esteemed European brands, from Asprey to Venini.

The products range from simple French walnut chopping boards to intricate backgammon sets for which the production involved 30 different workshops. Many have been made in the same premises for centuries: Futagami brass plates, for instance, have been manufactured in Japan since 1897, and the Viennese glassmaker J & L Lobmeyr collaborated with Thomas Edison on the first electric chandelier. Keeping these businesses going is one of the key aims of the founders, Pickaerts says. Augarten, the porcelain manufacturer in Austria, for instance, made the wedding service for Marie Antoinette and is "incredible". "So if we can help to shine a bit of light and warmth on them — which is what Abask means — then we will," Pickaerts says.

The price, he says, is not a deciding factor when it comes to the products' selection. When it comes to games, for instance, an Italian handmade chess and backgammon set may cost £180, or a 1920s Mahjong travelling set £1,250. Customers can browse the website according to their budget and create wishlists. "What's important to us is that the products are the best," he says. "They have to be things we'd want to own ourselves."

With the help of Bryony Rae Sheridan, a former Liberty buyer, and the stylist Hubert Zandberg, the Abask founders have brought on board not only current makers, such as Bellerby & Co, which create globes, but also vintage experts to source one-off items from bygone eras. In the UK, for instance, they work with the pen expert Ray Walters, who has been collecting and restoring fine vintage fountain pens for decades, alongside making his own under the brand Raw. In Italy the NasonMoretti museum gave them access to its 100-year-old archive and allowed them to reissue vintage vases.

What clearly thrills the founders is that the business is working. They have started to collaborate with yacht makers and private jet companies, interior design companies and brands wanting to work on partnerships. The US is "a considerable" market for them, followed by the UK, with several big spenders splurging on collections of the same items for their homes around the world. "It's quite fun as we can see that sometimes what they buy is delivered to their St Moritz chalet, sometimes to their New York apartment, sometimes their beach house in the Bahamas," Pickaerts says, happily. "So we know they like us."

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And because Abask's clientele is international and the company is able to deliver to 165 countries within 48 hours, its products don't have to be seasonal. As Pickaerts says: "It's always summer somewhere."

The most surprising discovery? Just how much their clientele like games. When Abask was launched just before Christmas in 2022, its handmade games, from Snakes and Ladders to puzzles and a casino set, were an unsurprising huge hit. But Santa hasn't stopped ordering since. Perhaps he's delivering one for the yacht, one for the plane, one for the beach house . . .

Snakes and ladders, [William & Son](#), £1,795 (pictured above)

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