**Interview with Young Professionals Application Day winner Karolína Jeřábková**

Cupsle is a coffee maker used for filtered coffee, made of high-quality porcelain. The three-part set includes a double-walled filter, a cup and a wooden lid that elegantly accentuates the white porcelain. The soft lines and rounded edges give the functional coffee maker an appealing aesthetic.

In the interview, the young designer Karolína Jeřábková talks about her inspiration behind Cupsle. She explains how she combines aesthetics and functionality in the design, which aspects she is particularly proud of and what challenges she had to overcome on the way to the finished product:

**Red Dot: As a young designer focused on porcelain in the café environment, what inspired you to create Cupsle?**

**Karolína Jeřábková:** The first designs of Cupsle were created during my bachelor studies at Czech technical university in Prague, when I didn’t know much about the coffee industry, but was an amateur lover of filtered coffee. I wanted to create something that would simplify the preparation of filtered coffee, make the process more accessible to people, and at the same time serve as a pleasant object in a space.

**How do you balance aesthetics and functionality in product design, particularly with Cupsle, where the elegance of the porcelain and the practicality of the coffee-making process must work harmoniously together?**

Cupsle is a good example of the design principle “form follows function”, and I apply this principle to most of my designs, especially those intended for daily use. It’s a simple rule that always guides me in the right direction. The size of Cupsle, particularly the dripper, is determined by the size of the (paper) filter and the fact that the user should not burn their hand while handling it, which is why the dripper is double-walled. The cup’s design is based on the maximum grip of a human hand, and the spout is shaped to fit the human mouth. Overall, the shape is determined by these functional requirements, and then I adapt the aesthetics – I prefer simple shapes, no unnecessary embellishments and letting the material stand out in a clean, rounded form.

**What part of your design do you take the most pride in or what makes it particularly meaningful to you?**

People tend to take the most pride in the more complex aspects of their work, and I’m no different. With Cupsle, it’s especially the dripper – creating double-walled porcelain with grooves inside for better coffee filtration at the same time is not an easy process. These are all elements that porcelain as a material doesn’t favour. As for the meaningfulness of the product, that will be determined when more people try it and enjoy the fact that they have a fully functional product! I believe that’s the most meaningful part of being a designer. It gives you the drive to keep going and come up with new ideas.

**Were there any breakthrough moments that shaped your project**?

The basic shape of the product was well-defined from the start, but there were still plenty of breakthrough moments along the way. I often faced challenges with what was feasible in porcelain, but somehow, solutions always emerged and adjustments were made that, in my view, ultimately improved the product. What I’ve learned from the entire process is that the material should always be respected.

**Did you have any mentors or peers who helped guide your vision or challenge your ideas?**

There were quite a few doubters, but I don't think the issue was with the product itself — it was more that they didn't fully understand the message I wanted to convey. I could mention my older sister as a mentor for this project; she believed in it from the start and supported me throughout.

**As a young professional, how do you stay current with design trends while ensuring that your work stands out as innovative and unique?**

I use the current atmosphere in society more than trends. I think Cupsle has taken advantage of the boom in interest in alternative coffee preparations that has always been there and will always be there. It’s not something that goes away or fades. I try to avoid design trends that are commonly seen on platforms like Pinterest. They may be appealing, and I respect that, but they don't help you stand out from the crowd.

**What kind of projects or industries excite you for the future?**

In addition to the café industry, I also started to devote myself to applied art and the combination of glass and porcelain last year. I really enjoy this combination! People don’t use it very often because it’s a thin ice where you can easily fall into the kitsch category. But where do you draw the line?

**How has participating in the Red Dot Award: Product Design influenced your career as a young professional?**

If I am honest, me winning a Red Dot did not resonate much in the Czech Republic, nor did I expect it to. If you are not already a “famous” designer, the media is not very interested in you. It’s funny, but that’s probably our Czech nature. Whereas abroad, they have shown quite a lot of interest in me, which makes me very happy and recharges me with new energy!

**What advice would you give aspiring designers who want to participate in the Red Dot Design Award or who are early in their design careers?**

Never give up! If someone had told me five years ago that I could be awarded a Red Dot even without the support of a large company, I would have found it hard to believe. Thank you for giving young designers such a chance after school! I appreciate it very much.