

17. Jaga

Creative Darwinism



Jan Kriekels, manager of Jaga, really needs no introduction. Everyone knows him as an eccentric, inspired and visionary entrepreneur who preaches a total change in attitude with his company. That Jaga produces ecologically sound radiators and related heating products does not detract from the fact that they also set themselves higher targets. “Cradle to Cradle is not an utopian concept”, Jan Kriekels emphasises. “We really have to understand that we are speeding towards damnation. It’s one thing to have a vision, but you have to take action. We want to distinguish ourselves with design products that are efficient, innovative and ecologically sound.”

It's one thing to have a vision, but you have to take action. We want to distinguish ourselves with design products that are efficient, innovative and ecologically sound.

////////////////////////////////////

Jaga boss Jan Kriekels knows what he’s talking about when he mentions natural capital. As an anthropologist he travelled the world, left to the mercy of the laws of nature and himself. Kriekels is a fiery champion of the creative economy and makes the best of each lecture or conference to share his valuable discourse. “As the managing director of this company I know I have an economic role to play. But I can’t resist pointing out that there is more than just an account based on figures that looks at the profit at the end of a financial year. Perhaps as the management you can continue to do that with Excel files, but you have to have guts to excel at a sustainable vision which benefits society.”

Naturally Jaga has a sustainability reflex in its production. “Radiators consume energy and we do not avoid our responsibility to make them as efficient as possible”, Jan Kriekels considers the economic aspect. “We have to abandon our current consumption model which is totally wrong. As a company it’s difficult to translate that to your

core business, but it’s possible. How? By not blindly opting for mass production that you then have to sell to survive, but to reason in a different way. Creative companies propagate a philosophy and their products are appreciated partly as a result of that. Products have to have added value, for the user but also for society and the environment.” How he brings these 3 things together in one workable model can be traced to the interaction between the creative spirits and the engineers. Those with vision, those that know and those that do, who together have to create cross-border and multidisciplinary interaction.

At Jaga they want to set out a new course in visionary enterprise. The Jaga Experience Truck and also their participation in the Burning Man Festival are the best-known examples of this. Jan Kriekels knows that visionary ideas or models are not enough and that the end of the chain has to yield tangible and sustainable products. That is why he endorsed the Cradle to Cradle approach in which from the very beginning products have to be developed with the idea that a new cycle has to follow at the end of their life. “Nothing is lost in nature. Nothing at all. The waste created by nature always functions as fertile input for new life. That’s an example we need to follow.”

“In Belgium we do not have any energy sources of our own, no natural resources, so what do we do? You have to work with that in mind, departing from the knowledge available to still instigate innovations. Radiators can also be made from new materials that can be recovered later, you have to be more economical with what is precious”, thus referring to the radiators that were in service in the sixties and used at least 12 litres of water, whilst half a century later just 1 litre suffices.

Each link in the chain from raw material to product must be both socially and ecologically sound, Jan Kriekels feels, because “otherwise the boomerang will fly back into our faces. If you don’t want to think about or work on

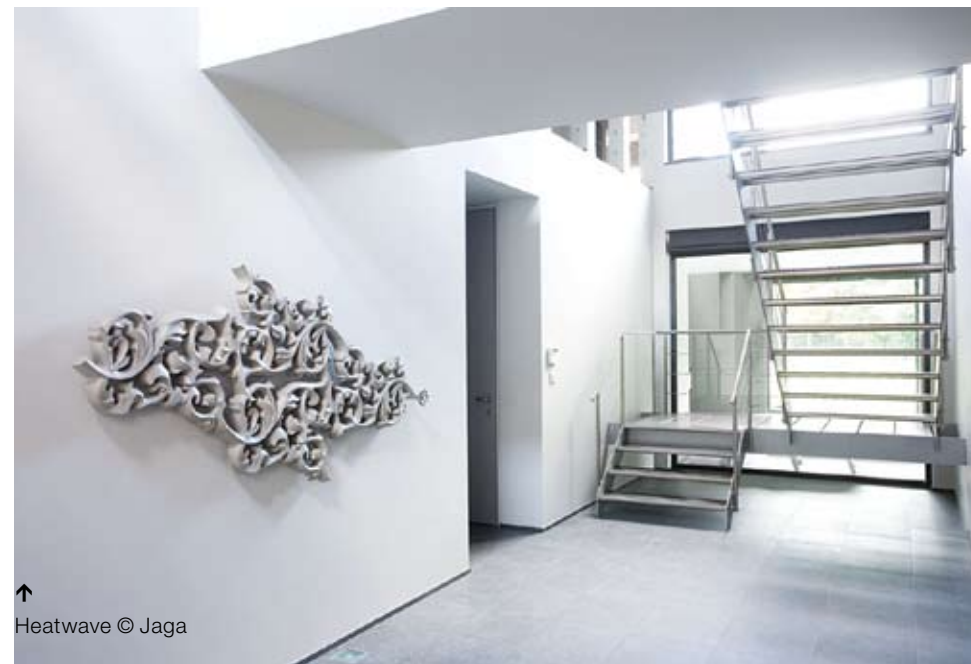
a better society, then sooner or later you will pay the price.” You could take this literally: if you don’t think about buying an efficient heating system in combination with good insulation, you will burn money, but also some of nature.

The waste created by nature always functions as fertile input for new life. That's an example we need to follow.

////////////////////

Jaga’s entire strategy corresponds with its logo in which a straight line that normally indicates a production chain is curved into a circle. Jan Kriekels also wants to bend the linear economic system into more creative and multi-disciplinary cross-pollination. He does that in person, but also as the instigator of the Unchronians.org project. “Like some kind of open operating system, the website has to let people cooperate to tinker on the software of our thoughts, actions and omissions”, he says.

“We are now laying the foundation of Green Force – analogous to our G-Force racing team that we used to enter in endurance races – which has to come up with solutions to survive simply with what is available on 1 metre squared. So you have to use the sun and rain, try to minimise the emission of CO2 or convert it and optimise your energy. Call it a bubble effect, like a greenhouse in which you have to grow food. That’s how you have to live from nature as it presents itself.” It is the umpteenth project with which Kriekels is placing himself in the forefront of the fight for a better world, a weapon in which ideas are forged into usable solutions.





You have to have guts to excel at a sustainable vision which benefits society.

////////////////////////////////////

It's difficult to say what Kriekels' ultimate breeding ground is, but his drive greatly resembles Darwinism in which in nature only the strongest survive, or those that have adapted the best. "That flexible way of thinking, the urge to adapt, that's something you also have to try and stir up in companies, it is a fire that has to burn. Looking further than your own product, your own market and above all getting inspiration because innovations are only achieved based on a creative model."

•

Christophe De Schauvre for REcentre
Interviewee / Jan Kriekels, Managing director

Jaga

Verbindingslaan 1
3590 Diepenbeek
Belgium

www.theradiatorfactory.com

Sector • Heating

Year of foundation • N/A

Number of employees • 450

Turnover (2009) •
68 million EUR

