



THE WAY LIGHT CHANGES IN A ROOM IN HIS MOTHER'S HOUSE INSPIRED RYBAKKEN TO DESIGN CONCEPTUAL LAMPS.



**Subconscious Effect of Daylight**  
2008

A projector mounted underneath a simple black table beams a patch of light onto the floor, giving the impression of daylight entering the room.

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— Daniel Rybakken —



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Text **Terri Peters**  
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DESIGNS DAYLIGHT

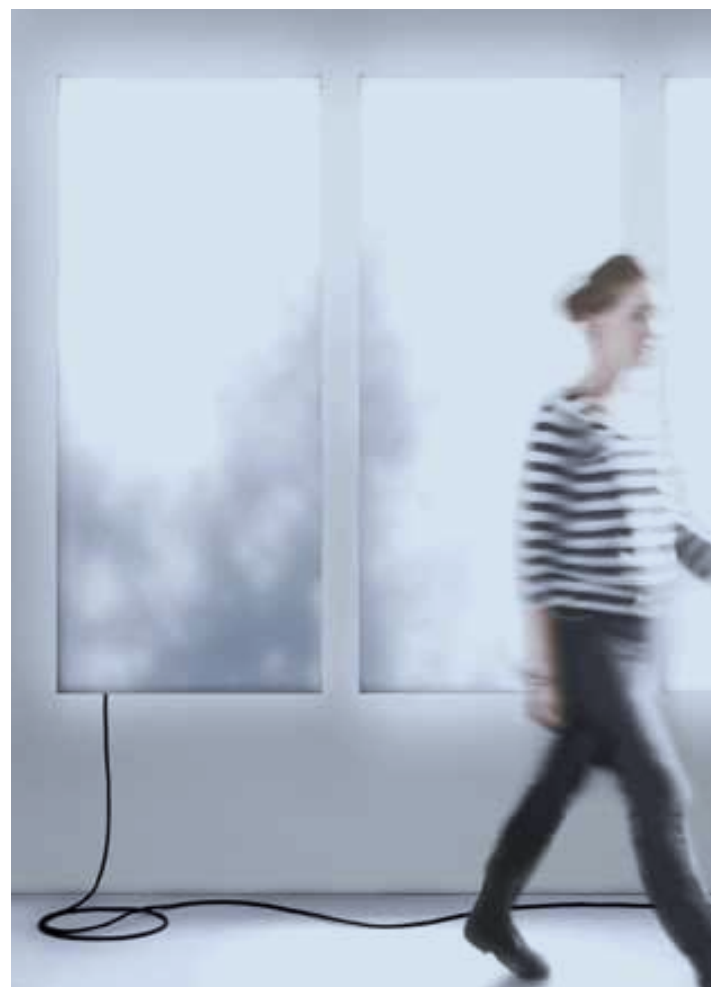
‘I think I’m a little bit sensitive,’ says 25-year-old Daniel Rybakken, a Norwegian industrial designer who has just spent three years studying daylight, in photographs, prototypes, models and drawings. ‘Would I have designed these projects if I hadn’t been based here, in Scandinavia, if I had been from, say, Spain? No, of course not!’ Now located in Gothenburg, Sweden, where he graduated from university in 2008, Rybakken was born in Bergen, Norway, and moved south to Oslo when he was a child. A room in his mother’s house has been the main inspiration for his award-

winning series of conceptual lamps. He shows me a photo. ‘It’s a nicely proportioned room, with high enough ceilings, a big window and a balcony. During the day, the light comes in through a sheer curtain, making it a very pleasant room.’ Another photo, taken from the same angle, is of the room at night. Artificial light makes the space seem small, low, crowded, even dirty. His work, from lamps to tables to interior spaces, seeks to re-create the feeling in the first image, the positive sensation of daylight and spatial depth, using artificial light. ‘I think it’s possible to make it look the same to

the eye, and to make people feel the sense of light and of space.’ Rybakken is most well known for his graduation project, Subconscious Effect of Daylight (2008), a simple black table with a projector mounted underneath that beams a patch of light onto the floor. It is a very minimalist concept, but when it was shown at Salone Satellite in Milan in 2008 it won numerous awards, and soon Rybakken was approached by manufacturers who wanted to turn his prototype into a production piece. He recently sold the award-winning prototype to the National Gallery of Norway and

has since produced another, which continues to be exhibited. It is hard not to smile when you see this table – or rather the space beneath the table. The eye is drawn immediately to the beam of ‘sunlight’ shining on the table leg and floor, and to the resulting shadow. Somehow the object makes the room seem bigger; people gravitate towards it. This simple concept, a tiny patch of light, creates a focal point for the entire room. The projection includes a small logo with the designer’s name, the date and a copyright symbol, reminding the viewer that this designed ray of light is, in fact, a product.

The project evolved from an early series of photographs and studies called Daylight Comes Sideways (2007). The installation was designed to create a feeling of space and natural light, using a blurred image on an acrylic LED screen that resembles a window. Like the table, it is an attempt to draw a feeling of natural light from the side, not from above. He tells me that people often misunderstand how the table works; they ask how he gets light to behave in such a way. ‘I am not trying to trick anyone. I mean, the text on the floor that is projected from under the table – of course the viewer »



**Daylight Comes Sideways**  
2007

Daylight Comes Sideways is an installation that creates a feeling of space and natural light by showing a blurred image on an acrylic LED screen that resembles a window.



knows it's not real – although several people in Milan did ask me how I managed to get the light down into the basement! Rybakken says he designed the table as an alternative to a lamp. 'Critics have said it's not a proper lamp because it can't be used for reading, but lighting is more than the quantifiable and the measurable. Surely there are other ways to define a light?'

Local press coverage of Subconscious Effect of Daylight led Sweden's largest property developer to contact the designer about contributing to an office-refurbishment project in central Stockholm: Daylight Entrance (2010). The brief was to infuse a windowless entrance lobby and staircase with a sense of daylight. 'When I first saw the interior before any of the refurbishment work had been done, I thought oh, no. It was a single-level, dark entryway, off the street! Before the architectural refurbishment began, the building looked like any other dated 1970s' office building, even though it's next to the Nordic Light Hotel in Stockholm, a trendy boutique hotel

that serves as an exhibition space during Stockholm Design Week. 'At first I wondered whether it would be all right to move the lift shaft. But it was structural, of course. The building was designed in a strange way; it is actually on top of the underground station. Every beam has to be there.'

The architects did manage, however, to open up the entry space and create a triple-height atrium. Rybakken wrapped the walls in seamless panels of white Corian and set off the floor with a black reveal, to contrast with the gleaming black-tiled floor. Creating the illusion of natural light are 'light patches', which mark select walls that feature built-in lighting which is visible through the white panels.

In contrast to his early conceptual prototypes, Rybakken's design had to take into consideration fire and safety regulations related to heat emitted from the lights, as well as durability of materials and finishes. This shift in scale from table to interior, from university assignment to architectural intervention for a paying client, was

surely a bit daunting. Rybakken sees it as a natural progression, since he has always conceived of light and space as working together in an architectural way. For more than a year he developed ideas and tested prototypes for this spatial installation. Rybakken is unapologetic about his choice of fluorescent lamps for the prototypes. The final installation, which includes five light patches in the entry and atrium, uses about 6000 LEDs, but he says the concept could have worked with various light sources. 'For me, it's just technology. It's not so important,' he says, citing reasons of cost and time to explain the use of fluorescent lamps for the prototypes. The source of the light is hidden anyway. 'None of my work is about the light source. In the past, the way lights worked was fairly straightforward. But nowadays, with LEDs, things have changed. When a bulb or LED is exposed, the design can never become a "classic". Sooner or later it will be outdated. What will people think of it in a decade or two, as technology moves on?'



While conducting his longer-term studies for the office entry, Rybakken was also experimenting with the design of a series of mirrors intended to reflect and distribute both natural and artificial light. 'I hope to continue to work this way,' he says, 'on a sort of *haute couture* line of lamps and installations and, at the same time, on a more ready-to-wear collection of products like these mirrors, for example.' In 2009 he designed Aluminium Mirror, a polished object that he CNC-milled from a single piece of aluminium. This year's model, Right Angle Mirror, is made from polished aluminium with a chromed finish. He has been pleasantly surprised at the response from manufacturers and visitors at various trade fairs and exhibitions. 'The mirrors got a lot of attention, despite being only mirrors.'

The mirrors are CNC-milled, and the aluminium is cut with water jets. 'It's a very precise operation. I just created the digital files and sent them to a local workshop, where the mirrors will be made.' Picking up one of the

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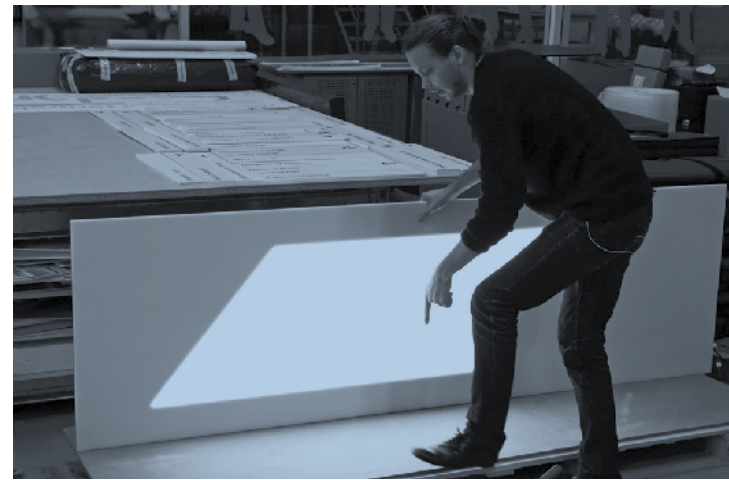
**Aluminium Mirror**  
2009

In an attempt to reflect and distribute both daylight and artificial light, Rybakken experimented with mirrors made from single pieces of aluminium. The mirrors are CNC-milled, and the aluminium is cut with water jets.



mirrors, I'm surprised at how heavy it is. 'It weighs 5 kilos,' he says. It feels solid, and the edges are almost sharp, like those of some sort of industrial component. 'This is the light version,' he says. 'You can get five of these out of the amount of material I used on the first prototype.' With this material, it's the milling time that is expensive, but Rybakken likes the fact 'that no human touches the prototype before it is finished'. The mirrors have hollowed-out mounting options, but the most interesting effect occurs when the long edge is placed against the wall, creating a perpendicular. 'The mirror has a rounded edge where it meets the wall, so it doesn't feel like an extension of the wall, but something different.' When held up to the wall, it reflects dramatic shards of sunlight, but the reflections at night – 'when artificial light alters the composition' – are equally interesting.

In Rybakken's small, tidy workspace, located in a shared industrial building in Gothenburg, I spot digital tools such as a Mac cinema screen, a white »



BEFORE.

## ‘I like the unchanging state of this raw industrial material’

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### Daylight Entrances 2010

Rybakken wrapped a windowless entrance lobby in central Stockholm in white Corian panels. LEDs built into the panels create ‘light patches’ on certain walls, infusing the space with a sense of daylight.



AFTER.

wireless mouse, a digital camera, various iPods and an iPad, but no equipment for actually making prototypes. Sitting on his desk is a large-scale model of a person in a room with a model of his Colour (2010) prototype. Leaning against the wall are a few large mock-up panels of Corian with wires and bulbs hanging out the back, delivered from a local workshop. ‘I make sketches, models, prototypes – and I use photography a lot. I don’t do any 3D renderings, but I do a lot of line drawings in Illustrator that can be sent straight to production for testing.’ He shares his mezzanine workspace with a furniture designer but has no real desire to make large physical objects on his own. ‘I actually built my graduation project, the table, myself. I wanted to have control over the process, to get the piece as sharp and precise as possible. It’s made of birch, a living material, not really the style I’m developing now. You could say that aluminium has no soul, but I like the unchanging state of this raw industrial material. Having no soul can be good – in this case, it’s communicating the idea.’

‘People say that everything has been done, but I think new things are still possible.’ Rybakken looks at the world in a curious yet critical way, examining why things are the way they are. In the case of Daylight Entrance, most people notice the patch of light on the wall but few pause to contemplate the emotions it evokes or even whether they like it. ‘Even this year in Milan,’ says the designer, ‘every light is about the lampshade, not about the light. Designers have had it so easy. You just do something crazy – a sculpture or a material experiment or whatever – and put a light source in the middle.’ Rybakken’s work is about attempting something different, about designing the experience and manipulating the quality of artificial light. ‘I’ve only had three or four really inspired ideas, and I’ve tried to get to the essence of each one. I don’t need to do ten different things a year. I’d rather edit, be critical and do something that’s powerful.’ ◀

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### Colour 2010

Colour is a collaborative effort between Rybakken and designer Andraes Engesvik, formerly of Norway Says. Although Rybakken worried that people would criticize him for doing a lampshade, Colour looks nothing like a conventional lighting object. ‘It is an exploded concept of a lamp,’ he says. Sheets of coloured glass placed in front of a light source – in any arrangement desired – create a mix of hues. The result looks slightly unstable, as if the components might slide and fall, but a concealed brass weight holds everything in place. Like all of Rybakken’s work, Colour produces a sense of light that is ethereal yet incredibly heavy and grounded.



## ‘Every light in Milan this year was about the lampshade, not the light’

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