

# Mixmasters:Ottawa husband-and-wife design team upcycle hip new way to wear iPod Nano

BY PATRICIA LEBOEUF, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN JANUARY 13, 2012



Dominic and Chrystale Ladouceur have invented a watch case that holds an iPod nano. Called the 'Deckster,' it opens like a tape deck to accept the iPod nano.

**Photograph by:** Pat McGrath, Ottawa Citizen

The basement of Chrystale Ladouceur and Dominic Coballe's Alta Vista bungalow is a little like Santa's workshop — if Santa were nostalgic about vintage timepieces, cassette decks and typewriters.

Laid out on tables are thousands of springs, screws, leather straps, aluminum casings and the couple's own patent-pending Pop+Lock System. These are the components of the Deckster, the Ottawa husband-and-wife design team's fashionable and functional wristwatch-like way to carry an iPod Nano. It works like a cassette deck works with a cassette: Pop it open, slide in the Nano and snap it shut. It's a nod to the Walkmans and mix tapes of the couple's teen years in the '80s.

Admittedly, there are other products that allow a Nano user to wear the mobile device. But Coballe and Ladouceur believe none rival the whimsy and craftsmanship of the Deckster, which sells for about \$150.

"It was a unique aesthetic that was trying to find its way," says Coballe of the couple's fondness for the '80s. "We've always like the aesthetic, the music, the colours. We just have a fondness for stuff that was made to last."

The Deckster has won favour with high-tech product reviewers. PC World, for example, said it not only solves the Nano wearability problem, "it also borrows heavily from a popular device from our past — the audio cassette player."

While the couple have one foot in their formative years, the other is in the "slow goods" movement, a step back to a time when things

were made with care and wouldn't break after a few weeks of use. Their collection of technology and furniture from the mid-20th century through the '80s reflects that interest.

"We both kind of regressed into the style back to when we were 12 right now as 35-year-olds," says Coballe, a web designer who has worked in marketing and branding.

"Things you experience (at that age) really stick to your psyche. For us, it never went away, and we kind of embraced it. The whole notion of nostalgia we use as our tag line. It's modern nostalgic, taking things that we both love and appreciate and giving (them) a modern twist. It feels natural to us."

The idea for a Nano timepiece came to the couple in September 2010 while they were taking their infant son and dog for a walk. A name for the product came soon after.

Every part of the Deckster is produced in North America in limited production runs. The final product — 39 pieces in all, including the packaging — is assembled in the basement of their bungalow, where their son, now 2, often plays right outside the studio.

Making a quality product solely in North America can be a challenge. It took over half a year to find someone willing to produce the Deckster. Although it would have been easier to contract out the manufacturing to a factory in China, Coballe and Ladouceur wanted it to be as Canadian as possible.

"It's really difficult to get manufacturers on board for new idea like this," says Coballe.

"They've been suffering for decades now. Price is not very competitive, so they need to make sure that, if you are going to be making an order, it needs to be in the hundred thousands, not in the thousands."

Coballe was born in Vietnam and lived in India before moving to Ottawa with his family when he was five.

"We were immigrants, but now we are Canadian citizens, and we were really proud of that fact," he says.

"I remember seeing things saying, 'Made in Canada' on T-shirts and toys, and I felt this pride as a kid. So (making the Deckster here) was just something that we said, 'Can we do it? Yes. Then let's try to do it.'"

The couple also wanted to make their products greener. Even the packaging is sustainable.

"Green is such a trendy term," says Coballe. "We just wanted to make the most responsible and sustainable decision. We just try to be as responsible as possible. It's been a challenge, for sure."

Last month, the line expanded to include three "vegan" styles, including one with a wristband made of recycled backpack fabric, another made of recycled bicycle tire rubber and a third made of recycled inner tube rubber. The couple's called the new line "re: class."

The idea to use recycled material came from Ladouceur's hobby as an upcycler, reusing old things and giving them more value than their original state and allowing beauty to come out of what is essentially garbage.

The couple sent out a lot of emails, but got only one response — from Mountain Equipment Co-op, which gave them old tubing, backpacks and bicycle tires in return for a simple promise: Use it.

"It's a win-win on both sides," says Coballe. "It saves them some headaches and some costs, and it saves us some headaches and some costs."

The Deckster has been on the market for about six months and about 100 have been sold through pre-order. A Japanese distributor has expressed interest. Coballe doesn't want to produce more than 10,000 a year.

"Like a good BBC show," he says. "Two seasons, then out."

View the Deckster products at [deckster.ca](http://deckster.ca).

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