



Interiors

marcel wanders



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Interiors



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IF POETRY IS ABOUT LOVE
AND ART IS ABOUT LOVE
AND MUSIC IS ABOUT LOVE
AND THEATRE IS ABOUT LOVE
AND IF OPERA IS ABOUT LOVE...
WHY DO WE THINK DESIGN
IS ABOUT FUNCTIONALITY?

*I dedicate this book to Karin, without her
nothing in this book would have been realized*

Staging Spaces

by Robert Thiemann

Exactly ten years ago I interviewed Marcel Wanders for *Frame*. While rereading the article, it struck me how much has stayed the same in the professional life of Wanders. Take for example his view on the profession of the designer. “I see design as a way to tell a story,” he told me back then. “For me, designing revolves around the fact that what I make means something to other people, around the notion that design communicates,” he continued. He still holds this opinion today. He also stated ten years ago that the profession of the designer had to be redefined by injecting it with the qualities behind love and amateurism. Herewith he referred to passion, frankness, and the need to experiment—all qualities that professionals eventually tend to lose throughout the course of their career. He continues to hold this view today as well.

Meanwhile, a lot has changed for the designer Marcel Wanders. While he was mainly designing products in 2000, he has now expanded his scope to interiors, architecture, and even project planning. This gives him the opportunity to place his products within their dreamed context. The last ten years, the amateur inside of him has developed as well. When one tries to remember his first big interior project—the VIP lounge of the Dutch pavilion at the Expo 2000 in Hannover—one visualizes a design based on a single idea: the creation of a continuously changing light by means of hundreds of roughly shaped, silver-colored objects hanging from the ceiling. An enthralling, yet simple concept. Here, he still behaved like a product designer, basing every object on one strong idea. Of similar simplicity is his Mandarin Duck store in London. It was only because of breathing, human-like figures and a singular giant that the straightforward design of the space escaped the sense of “professionalism” that it was meant to convey.

Wanders’ breakthrough as an interior designer followed in 2005, when he designed the Lute Suites in Amsterdam in

cooperation with senior designer Karin Krautgartner. Seven apartments were furnished with numerous designs of their own. This project differed from the rest of his early work because Wanders dared to deal with the complete space. No single surface was left blank: the designers’ signatures were visible from the floor to the ceiling. “Our clients ask us for who we are. And that is exactly what we present to them: us,” explains Wanders.

While the Lute Suites are not the most compelling of Wanders’ work, they functioned as the big leap towards the visually overwhelming environments that Wanders and his team designed between 2008 and 2010: the Mondrian South Beach hotel in Miami, the fashion store Villa Moda in Bahrain and the Kameha Grand in Bonn. In these commercial projects, the creative energy is endless. Floors and walls exhibit floral patterns. Doors and columns—adorned with intricate reliefs—gain added depth and conjure up an image of oversized chessmen. Surreal pictures of young women enhance the few empty spaces. Intense scaling and Baroque decorations are elements that recur throughout the space, just like the colors black, white and red—flanked by accents of silver and gold. As a finishing touch, an abstract image of Wanders’ head pops up at unexpected places, interchanged at times with another beloved symbol: the gold nose of a clown.

Wanders’ interiors project a fairytale-like romanticism. Each one, in every conceivable way, is flamboyant, rich in detail and larger than life. They communicate the notion of luxury in a direct and frank way. Here, more is more. One cannot escape this world, but is washed over by it.

And this is exactly what Wanders’ has in mind. “Others deliver an interior design,” he says. “But we offer a reason for a visit, we create a destination.” In his interiors, visitors need to feel special, more beautiful, better. In the meantime, his designs need to be understandable and direct. They cannot put up any possible

Although originally educated as a chemical engineer, Robert Thiemann became a copywriter and developed into a prolific journalist. His writing specializes in design, with a strong focus on interiors. In 1997 he co-founded FRAME: THE GREAT INDOORS, an international bi-monthly magazine devoted to contemporary interior and product design, of which he still is Editor in Chief. Currently distributed in over fifty-two countries, FRAME is considered an authoritative resource in the world of design. Thiemann is also shareholder of Frame Publishers, which launched its first book in 2001 with a monograph on the work of Fabio Novembre, and continues to publish books that cover subjects as diverse as the design of trade-fair stands and the in-depth exploration of building on water. In 2005, he co-founded MARK: ANOTHER ARCHITECTURE, a bimonthly international trade journal featuring exceptional architecture projects around the world, of which he's also Editor in Chief.

barrier. It is because of this that Wanders' designs are loaded with symbols that are easily identifiable—symbols that one can relate to without much effort. Flowers, hearts, the color red; one can call them clichés, even kitsch, but no one can possibly deny their central theme: love. One of Wanders' merits is that he is able to take these clichés to another level—a level way beyond the ordinary, where they can provide a special experience. This makes Wanders more of a “people's designer” than a “designer's designer”—he designs for the user instead of his colleagues.

Wanders does not work in a vacuum. He attributes his main influence to Starck, whom he sees as being the best designer in the world. Their affinity is particularly visible in their hotel designs. It is not a coincidence that both designers had their breakthrough at the Morgans Hotel Group: Starck with the Royalton, Paramount and Delano, and Wanders with the Mondrian South Beach Hotel. Both designers are in turn influenced by the groundbreaking work of Andrée Putman for the Morgans hotel, an establishment that is part of the same hotel chain and is regarded as one of the first “boutique hotels.” What is already visible in the work of Putman—the role of the designer as a film director—is amplified by Starck and Wanders. Both think in sequences of images, not in separate stills. Their story starts even before one enters the hotel: on the driveway. Entrance, lobby, restaurant, corridors—all are designed in coherence, like elements of the same story. Their interiors are more like theater designs than neutral containers, and Starck and Wanders are the directors—arranging their pieces and creating the preconditions for a show in their consciously staged spaces. Anyone looking for clues about Wanders' future interior designs need only look at these staged spaces. As a designer, Wanders realizes more and more that interior design offers him the possibility to use time as a tool he can play with—a possibility that product design lacks. He is not only able to assemble the

past, present and future by connecting clichés and technological inventions, but is also capable of designing interiors in which different experiences flow consecutively in time. In the words of Wanders himself: “One can listen to a CD, but one could also visit an opera and even sit on the stage of the opera, which will cause the level of experience to increase. This is the challenge of interior design: to create complex environments, in order to stimulate an audience to derive as much as possible from the experience.”

I will not be surprised when he succeeds.





The Outside-the-Box Interior Life of Marcel Wanders

by Linda Tischler

No one would ever accuse Marcel Wanders of being emotionally inhibited. His interiors, in all their puckish, often surreal glory, are the work of a man who's unafraid of bucking trends, who's unapologetically exuberant, and who's comfortable enough in his own skin to sign his work with an image of himself sporting a gold clown's nose.

For Wanders, the modern design mantra of "less is more" feels, well, a tad stingy. Who would want to live in a space, he argues, where the designer was inspired to do *less* than he could? The very idea is inconceivable. Instead, he sees the spaces he creates as gifts to their inhabitants, as precious and personal as if they were tied with ribbons and accompanied by cake and candles. As a child in Holland, Wanders pondered what qualities went into a great present. Imagine, he thought, if you opened the box, and discovered something that perfectly suited you—but that you didn't even realize you needed. Not only would that be a good gift, but it would make you feel deeply understood by the giver. Even better would be a gift that also showed the hand of its creator.

Wanders' environments inspire that kind of wonder and delight; to experience them is to inhabit a space unlike any other. I remember the first time I stayed at the Wanders-designed Mondrian Hotel in South Beach. The hotel had just opened, and the city's cabbies had yet to discover it. As my taxi pulled into the *porte-cochere*, under its magnificent gold bell-shaped chandeliers, the driver let out a low whistle. "Holy smoke," he said (OK, his language was a bit earthier than that). "Look at that!" Need I mention that Miami taxi drivers are not easily surprised? The magic continued as I walked over the threshold, entering a dreamscape filled with Jack-and-the-Beanstalk-sized columns, white lollipop-shaped trees, and a lacy black staircase that curved up into the clouds.

But the best was yet to come. The pool deck, in many hotels an expanse of chairs with all the charm of a bus station waiting room, was instead, a surreal tableau that was cinematically beautiful. Red baroque chairs, love seats and cushions, were arrayed on a red and white patterned carpet. Sky-high sheer, billowing draperies framed a spectacular view of Miami's skyline. Ivy-covered arches, sheltering secret sofas, provided discreet settings for amorous lovers. It was all so spellbinding, it took my breath away. I knew in a flash that this was a place for mystery and magic, not just lodging and dining. "I want to include fantasy in my work," Wanders says, noting that the surreal and fantastic are concepts more often appended to works in the theatre or film than to interior design. "We can do beautiful things, but we'd rather go one step further, creating something strange or surprising."

A business hotel is the last place you'd expect to find either the strange or the surprising. But at the Kameha Grand Bonn, Wanders broke from the convention dictating that hotels catering to corporate clients need to look like the lodging equivalent of gray flannel suits. Instead, the Kameha takes guests on a psychedelic trip through another dimension where pharaoh-sized urns double as columns, chandeliers look like they've escaped from a giant's Christmas tree, and a full, glowing moon rises over a headboard. One couple told a travel website that they loved the place because they never knew what they'd find around a corner. Precisely. If this hotel doesn't jumpstart creative thinking, then business groups should be forced to stay home and do trust falls in the company cafeteria.

That same penchant for surprising visitors is amply on display at Wanders' souk-inspired shop for Villa Moda in Bahrain. The store, which rotates its merchandise every few days, extends its extreme devotion to the unpredictable in its décor. There are stairs that lead to nowhere. Doors that don't open. Corners that

Linda Tischler is a senior writer at FAST COMPANY, where she has become known for her extensive coverage on the intersection of business and design. For the past several years, she has been responsible for the magazine's inspiring October "Masters of Design" issue, which celebrates people in the forefront of design thinking. Tischler also oversees the design coverage and blogs for Fastcompany.com, and played a crucial role in launching the site's team of expert design bloggers. She has addressed and moderated several design events and forums around the world, including ones for the Association of Professional Design Firms and AIGA, the professional association for design.

don't really match up. It's Wanders whimsy at full throttle. The color scheme is black and white, to throw the rich tones of the wares into bold relief.

Wanders began his career in product design creating, among other things, the fanciful Knotted Chair, a feat of technological wizardry that made an ethereal construction of macramé rope into a chair capable of supporting a body. He went on to mastermind other products that melded design virtuosity with mesmerizing creativity—a chandelier for Flos that hid lavish architectural detailing under a severe black shade, a pillowy chair that a Dutch granny might have crocheted, and a vase modeled on airborne snot.

Murray Moss, the famed curator of the New York design emporium, Moss, says Wanders has an extraordinary ability to meld technological innovation with the humanistic qualities of craft. "Marcel's work often has you saying, 'Why have I never seen this before?'"—and then you realize it's because it didn't exist before," Moss says. "It looks so familiar, and so friendly. It's because he's comfortable with new technology, but doesn't work with it in a way that flags it as 'techno.'" It was only after Wanders mastered the demands of product design that he felt ready for the challenge of interiors. Space, he says, has a raft of needs that products don't. It needs to flow around you, to tell you different things at different times of day. "In product design, I am a sculptor, working in marble," he says. "In interiors, I feel like a composer, creating an opera." Wanders is now a global brand, recognized from Dubai to L.A. But lately, his work has increasingly referenced his Dutch background. It's both an homage to his wildly creative homeland, and another signal to his audience that the work you see before you has a pedigree, a heritage, a cultural connection. He has written a book about the creative history of Amsterdam, and developed a site, Westerhuis, that houses 50,000 square feet of space for creative industries in

the city. "Amsterdam has become more in my eyes and my heart these days," he says. This project, among others, has made him a hero in his hometown. "Marcel is an icon of the creative industry, and an inspiring role model for young designers," says Carolien Gehrels, Deputy Mayor of Amsterdam. While Westerhuis is one of his newest projects, it's far from the first to tap his interest in historic preservation. Early on, Wanders recognized that the rich cultural history of the region presented unique opportunities for exploring the thrilling intersection of the old and the new.

That Dutch design DNA is increasingly finding a place in his most modern incarnations. A condo in Miami has Delft tile on the kitchen's backsplash, a sleek modern house in Mallorca is outfitted with a classically proportioned breakfront, the stools in a hip bar in New York sport spindled backs, as if they were plucked from a tavern in Leiden. It's a way of reminding people to respect the old, not just in a mischievous game of, "Name that provenance," but as a way of teaching us a primary principle of sustainability: that the most enduring objects are those that we cherish enough to keep for a long time, not replace instantly when something newer comes along. "I've lately been pushing references to history, to give more life to my projects," Wanders says. "I'd like to change the opinion of design to be modern only. Respect for our past plays a different role than sixty years ago. It's my contribution to the sustainability conversation." Modern and antique. Sober and fanciful. Elegant and whimsical. Fearless and sentimental. Sexy, sustainable, and snotty. Marcel Wanders is a welter of contradictions that make him truly one of a kind. What is the source of this extraordinary artistry? Seemingly, some inexhaustible wellspring of creativity deep inside. "Tie me to a chair, blindfold me," he says. "I'll be fine. Inspiration comes from within, there is an endless source, ideas are always coming."

Casa Son Vida

MALLORCA, PRIVATE RESIDENCE – 2008

**“ROOTS ARE ATTACHED TO TRADITION, BUT TREES
ARE DIRECTIONS TO THE FUTURE”**

The first full residential project of Marcel Wanders, the 850-square meter residence embodies Marcel's vision in each of its curved corners. The conversion and extension of the Mediterranean, Sixties-era villa gave birth to a friendly meeting between old and new. The subtle mix of classical and modern references is visible throughout the entire villa—from the classic, profiled wall lining the curved space, to the new, custom designed cupboards in straight, elegant lines. A unique atmosphere emerges as the space turns into a playground for reliefs and surfaces. A house of contrasts that displays a love for past and present, Casa Son Vida is “unavoidably exuberant and unabashedly outrageous”.









