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INSIDE

A MONTHLY ROUND-UP OF
THE WORLD'S BEST INTERIORS
AND DESIGN STORIES

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ISSUE
28

Welcome to the largest edition of INSIDE ever!

Our final newsletter this year is packed full of the latest projects from around the globe, innovative products and editorial delights. To coincide with our Retail and Leisure Interiors Award that closes for entries on the 31 December 2012, we focus on retail and hospitality. Projects have been entered from a diverse range of countries and can be viewed on our website now.

This month we bring you interviews from both sides of the English Channel to see how the 2011 Retail Interiors Award shortlisted design agencies have fared a year on. Denis Montel of RDAI talks to us in Paris and Paul Nicholson of Chalk Architecture meets us for a coffee in Brighton.

This month in Events we bring you a review of the hotel industry's biggest trade show, SLEEP London 2012, with all the highlights of the two day event. Looking ahead to 2013, we bring you an exclusive event preview of INTERIORS UK, which will be held at the Birmingham NEC in January.

For our Focus On feature we talk to lead designer Imogen Long from Haworth Tompkins about turning a forlorn public library into a busy cultural space for the Bush Theatre Company in West London.

And finally, If you need some last minute gift inspiration this Christmas, look no further than the INSIDE word on 'What every designer wants for Christmas.'

Season's greetings from your WORLD INTERIORS NEWS team!

Annalisa

Annalisa Hammond, Editor

Send your projects to sarah.roberst@wantoday.com

Profile



[RDAI](#)

Snapshot



[Chalk](#)



The INSIDE Word...

This month we asked designers what design gift they would most like for Christmas. Ideas ranged from decadent interior furnishings to fantastical objects that traverse time. If you are looking for inspiration this year, read on for our designers' festive tips...

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TALKING LUXURY DESIGN WITH RDAI



December 12th - Interview by Sarah Roberts - TALKING LUXURY DESIGN WITH RDAI

French agency RDAI has been at the forefront of luxury retail design for over three decades and continues to produce beautiful interiors for some of the world's leading fashion houses. Sarah Roberts travels to Paris to find out more.

It's a crisp winter morning as I walk along the river Seine en route to the RDAI studios to meet Managing and Artistic Director, Denis Montel. The RDAI agency is synonymous with luxury retail interiors, having designed a global network of stores for French couture fashion house Hermès. Last year, Denis Montel and his team picked up the WAN Retail Interiors Award for their Hermès Rive Gauche store in Paris. Following their win, the agency's 35-year collaboration with the fashion house has continued to develop. Inside the RDAI building, I find myself in a bright and spacious studio with original herringbone parquet, stucco ceilings and a view out to a picturesque Parisian courtyard. The place oozes style and simplicity; a philosophy adhered to by the practice itself, in its architecture, interior and product design. By considering the basic structure of all objects in line and form, Montel embraces a dynamic vision that sets design in context to its environment. Through their collaboration with Hermès and other major luxury labels, RDAI has developed its own language that is simple, eclectic and very French. "French design exports very well," Denis, tells me and it's clear to see that RDAI's success has become a global phenomenon, run on Tokyo to New York. Over a cup of Japanese tea, the charming and charismatic Montel tells us about his career to date and the agency's future plans.

You joined RDAI in 1999 to work alongside studio founder Rena Dumas. How did your collaboration with Rena come about?

I was a young architect with dreams of grandeur and after my studies I wanted to build. I worked with various architects and entered competitions in different fields such as landscape, scenography, and interior architecture. Eventually I won a competition with a small firm in Paris to build a school. They took me on for two years to design the project and so my career began. A few years later a friend of mine asked me to design an apartment interior in Paris and her mother just happened to be Rena Dumas! Rena called me one day and said, "I saw what you did for my daughter, and I really like it." She took me out for lunch and asked me to design a few projects for her. In hindsight it was a test because she called me back eight months later and said, "I want you to join my agency." She never asked about my background, she just took me on the merit of those designs. That was how our relationship began.

How much did Rena Dumas's original approach influence you?

Even today I sometimes ask myself how she influenced me. It was a wonderful thing that we met and in only a few short months we became friends who shared many thoughts and ideas. It is difficult to describe this but she taught me about the relationship between perfection and beauty, that the pursuit of perfection is a quest, something necessary but also impossible to achieve. She was upset by this quest for perfection and I guess I learnt that from her. Our relationship was a real collaboration. We spoke about nothing and everything. She was much more sensitive to colour and form than ideas and concepts. She had a very distinctive way of designing.

What most influences your designs?

I always believe in simplicity because it is looking at what is essential. It's not the fact that an object has a simple shape, it's "What is essential?" If you keep three lines out of a hundred, you need to ask why you are choosing those three and are they the essential lines? It's a reduction to the minimum and I really like that. It's looking at the essence of things.

Hermès Rive Gauche, Paris is a retail store set within a 1930s swimming pool. It won the WAN Retail Interiors 2011 award. How was this a departure from your other Hermès stores?

We have designed all the Hermès stores and found a common language. Firstly, the spaces that the stores occupy are typically very similar, even if you look at the biggest ones in New York or Japan, they are never over scaled. So when Hermès found the swimming pool and invited us to visit we found the site spectacular. It was a forgotten space right in the centre of Paris that had been boarded up since the 1960s. It definitely had a wow-effect but immediately I thought, how are we going to make a proper Hermès store in such a void? The ceilings were 15 metres high, and there was a huge empty basin right in the middle of the space. In this case, the approach was really about the manipulation of space, rather than objects. Of course, we introduced a theme related to my own vision of Hermès, which involved fantasy, lightness, the vision of a child, the motif of the horse and nomadism. The building was also listed so we could not introduce any new architectural elements but stick to the original characteristics. We couldn't keep the basin but it was difficult to change the topography of the space. Instead we suspended a concrete slab on a bed of metal and wooden supports so that it can be removed very easily. We did not drill one hole in the original floor. The new floor is auto-stable; there are no real foundations so it can be totally removed at any time.

Has winning the WAN Retail Interiors Award benefitted your practice?

It has benefitted us, yes. We have made lots of new contacts and clients, especially in the retail industry. The office became much more visible and part of that came from the award's international recognition. We recently won another award called the Paris Shop and Design Award for the same project.

How often does Hermès change the interiors of its stores? On average every six to eight years, sometimes longer.

How has your work with Hermès developed over your 35-year relationship? When Hermès first started to open its international stores in the late 1970s Rena was already there, working alongside them. And over the years we have developed a real design language. Hermès stores are all different. The similarities come from a similar typography of furniture or pattern, but there is no strong chart that we follow in our designs. You cannot apply the same elements to every store design. When some design companies grow in size they begin to chart, so that they can send their books to local architects and orchestrate the design from afar. We do not work like that.

In some ways there are parallels between us and the way Hermès design their own products, they have two collections a year and are extremely creative. Every three months they have new colours, new products, and a new collection. It's profusion. But there is an overall style, a line that runs through their work. We design in a similar way - there is a definite line but there are always new elements and new reflections.

How do you design for different locations?

We give a lot of importance to context, which is unusual for a brand. Brands typically adopt a strong identity and need to be the same in different countries, but Hermès stores are more and more contextual. They are like a dress. It is not a uniform coming from France in a package, but rather something that understands the climate, people and traditions of each place and tries to play with that.

Can you explain how that concept works in terms of a store, for example the new Hermès shop in Genève, Switzerland?

The context here was the building itself. Hermès occupied the whole building with offices and retail space. The building was badly modified in the 1950s and we had to redesign the proportions. It was cut into two and we had to reconnect the two sides. An understanding of the building and how to emphasise its architectural qualities was the first challenge. And in fact the connection actually comes not on the first but on the second floor.

This project is interesting because it is a real mix of the two sides of Hermès - the classic image and its eccentric elements. This traditional atmosphere that is almost strict is, in my opinion, quite Swiss. So the Genève store is classic with a twist - and the twist is how we linked the space between the two sections of the building. We used an undulating and somewhat convoluted staircase. It should have been a simple move but we made it complex to emphasise the join between the two sides of the brand.

In that sense is it perhaps easier to be more flamboyant in your design in places such as Japan or South East Asia? Yes and no. Japanese people are looking for the new, for modernity. They are very open to new things, which is not necessarily the case in Europe.

What does the future hold for RDAI?

Our activities are becoming continuously more diverse. Hermès is a fantastic client and we are doing lots of things together. But we are also pursuing other avenues in terms of projects and products. We are developing our design department with new collections, such as Surface and Volume - a furniture collection of birch wood and lacquered tables. Other projects include bespoke and commissioned objects such as a range of jewellery, silverware and even our own perfume bottle.