

SPRING COLLECTION

It is possible to make connections between things which are apparently unrelated. In design, this can sometimes be easier than expected, as so many subjects or themes run through all types of design by virtue of the nature of the process: materiality, for example; constructive logic; aesthetics; the relationship between budget and quality; even the thinking process. Yet design's end results are consistently diversified, disparate, often seemingly unrelated in any definable way. One could describe a kind of 'Six Degrees of Separation' quality to the connections that can be made between different designs. Of course, that game could be played in a conventional sense: The architect of building A once studied under master B, who happened to have worked on the construction drawings for building C, that occupied the site D... You get the idea. Conversely, one could randomly toss a series of buildings or interior design projects together with no deliberate order, and see what they have in common – or where, instead, they diverge.

What are the veins that run through all design enterprises? Are designers and architects invisibly bound by the same set of principles, rules and conventions? What of the rebels? Don't they consciously set out to avoid these commonalities, striking out in original directions in part as a reaction to familiar habits? What of genuine invention? There is a bias among the design professions, for the notion of creative originality, away from an interpretation of the design process as an evolution of internally-focused examination. We cultivate the romantic image of the genius-creator, blessed by otherworldly gifts. We love this image – and let it survive – in spite of the elaborate processes we have produced for teaching design; the systems of quantifiable information and procedures intended to train our young students how to do it. We claim the ability to learn (and thus to teach) design, even as we place our stars on hallowed ground, flock to their productions, wait upon their utterances.

In truth, even the most remarkable buildings and spaces share most of their DNA with all other buildings and spaces. Only a small fraction of what we see, touch, stand within, is actually unique. All the same, the alchemical combination of parts presented in a fresh way, astonishes us, fills us with surprise, replenishes our wonder at the magic of design, over and over. Perhaps it is exactly the re-presentation of what we all know how to do that actually amazes us, when it is done extraordinarily well. In any case, if we didn't retain a bit of wonder at our own profession, wouldn't we quickly exhaust our very interest in it? If you don't believe in what you're doing, how can you continue doing it? This includes all the mere mortals – those who know absolutely that they will never be great, that their 'talents' are modest or questionable. They too must believe in the larger picture, and believe they can contribute genuinely.

In fashion, each and every year, the entire industry undertakes an extraordinary collective effort to present the best of their work. In fact it is done twice a year, Autumn and Spring. Huge quantities of money are spent on this effort, and it generates deep interest. The actual products may be ephemeral, but they are treated almost like talismans or nuggets of 'Truth'. Architecture and interior design, thankfully, do not follow such an arbitrary or regular schedule, though we do know how to hype our own goods. At times, such as recently in China and the Middle East, the collective production of architecture has seemed not too different from fashion collections. Critics and 'buyers' (clients, students, etc.) "ooh" and "aah" at the latest 'styles' emerging from the worktables of the grand masters; at the most recent proofs of genius. And again just as in fashion, hundreds of lesser talents rush to imitate, cranking out ersatz, at times comical, variations on the originals that can find their way to a discounted market. The analogy should not be taken too far. For one thing, unlike a garment, buildings can't easily be tossed out after a season or two, or given to charity (though we could nominate a few candidates that should be). Buildings stick around a bit longer. And quaintly, perhaps, those that pass quickly into an 'out of fashion' mode enter a different zone called 'nostalgia', where they can remain for long, benign periods of time, viewed with affection and fascination as relics that represent specific moments. How will the Bird's Nest or the CCTV centre be viewed a decade from now? Will they represent the naïve bursting forth of China's modern architectural youth? Will they seem like profligate articulations of non-architectural aspirations, such as politics, propaganda or nationalism?

Naturally we hold lesser examples to lesser standards. A simple restaurant or retail interior is hardly the vessel of national pride that a national stadium is. But every design in its own way expresses intent – and reflects the cultural moment of its creation. So we have decided, at the onset of Spring, to assemble an ad hoc 'collection' made of large and small things, all designed, all embodying the intentions of their makers, all sharing many facets and each holding a few things uniquely. All the result of the same process, no matter how it is followed literally. A kind of snapshot of just a single moment in time, for whatever cultural value that might offer, and whether collectively they encourage or distress. In these weird, unhinged times, make of design what you will.

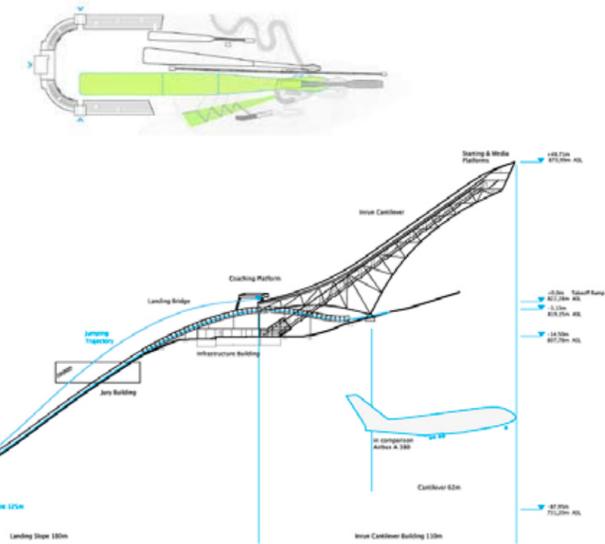


Olympic Ski Jump

Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

BDA Architects

Images courtesy of Terrain



Why?

Because how often do you get to praise a ski jump? Because despite the technological challenges of cantilevering a structure this huge (a 100m+ inrun, thank you) the architects made it almost elegant. Because while they were doing it, they thought things like "its architectural impression and formal dynamics also invite associations with the risk and acceleration of the ski-jumping sport". In case you ever had the inexplicable urge to hurtle yourself down 100 metres of ramp and then shoot off into very thin wintry air with no more protection than long underwear, BDA has at least provided you a place to do it, even in summer, when there's no snow; the affectionately known 'Olympic Cantilever' sports a thermoplastic track that doesn't even need real snow, if there's none around. We assume the paramedics are available all seasons as well.

What we like most...

At night, the whole thing transforms into a translucent sculpture visible right across the valley. Sure, some might have X-rated associations, but not us. We think it's cool, not hot.

Yoga Studio

Virginia, USA

Carter + Burton Architecture

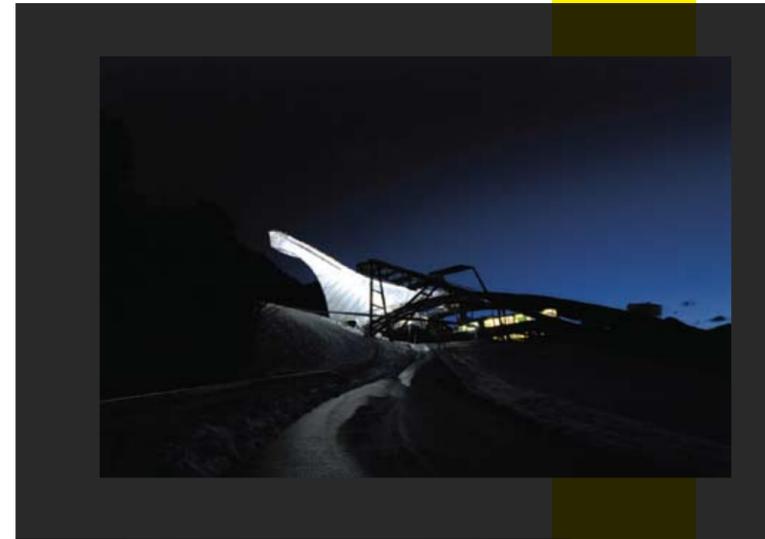
Photography by Daniel Afzal

Why?

Because a yoga-studio-cum-guest-dormitory (it can sleep up to nine) is just what every residence should have in its backyard forest. Because its owners realise that a little meditation might help people who live in Washington DC, which happens to be nearby. Because they and their architect knew that to build an environmentally insensitive place devoted to sensitivity of the spirit, would be a gross contradiction, so they didn't. And because this humble little building ends up doing so much more by trying to do so much less. Less impact on its site (topsoil and existing trees were protected during construction), less energy use (a living roof, water collection, indigenous materials, local workers, etc.), less pretension (a simple shape, a single double-height space, concrete and wood). Factual stuff: geoechange system for heating and cooling; thermal storage system; local poplar wood boards; beeswax/resin-polished MDF substituted for gypsum wallboards (i.e. no formaldehyde included); maintenance-free galvanised corrugated metal siding; low-E solar glass wood windows manufactured 10 miles away; all the subcontractors involved were based within a 30-mile radius of the site.

What we admire...

Foldaway floor-beds, so that kids, guests, or really sleepy yoga types can catch a nap by opening sections of the floor. That local workmanship was used. That once again an architect has reminded us how little it takes to impress.





Porsche Museum Stuttgart, Germany Delugan Meissl

Photography by Brígida González

Why?

Because this chicer-than-chic motor manufacturer has decided to make an architectural statement with its visitor attraction, rather than just ram the branding up everyone's collective tailpipe. Because rather than mining the company's 100-year+ history for some hackneyed motif of tradition and steadfastness, Porsche has boldly commissioned a building which is as exciting in its own right as the vehicles inside it. Because the company has chosen to stamp a standard-bearing symbol of urban progress on its hometown that works with, rather than against, its context at the intersection of rail and road.

Diagnostic signs...

Choosing to tease out the foundations of architecture and the foundation of the company by literally exposing the foundations of the building, in a sense. Delugan Meissl goes for a gravity-defying upper volume which seems to rest precariously on its 'pilings'. These oblique-angled stanchions and further angular adventures on the upper envelope not only contrast with the unmistakable smooth-flowing forms of the cars themselves, but trope for drive and speed. In the interior, recessed, circular red-on-black washlights in the ceiling drop neatly to echo both the company logo and Porsche's iconic taillight design.





Why?
 Because selling real estate isn't easy these days, and this model suite for a thoroughly upscale urban residence in Toronto does its level best to persuade. IlbyIV, known for sleek interiors in many genres, from retail to residential, has produced what they call a "sophisticated and innovative classic/contemporary mash-up" that allows residents to modify and personalise. Creamy lacquered panelling meets stone floors and Flower Power chandeliers. Opulence meets restraint and space is expanded with clever lighting and smart furnishing – in other words, the applied skills of the interior design talents. Dark greys and golds, artworks and a distinctive 'bachelor' vibe finish the palette. Totally urban, completely contemporary, Minto sort of sums up the last couple of years in a certain style of residential interiors.

What we'd change...
 Maybe a little more light? A bit more 'mess'? We don't have the wardrobe to look good enough for these rooms.



Minto Toronto, Canada IlbyIV





Living Pod Residence Hong Kong, China Joey Ho Design

Photography by Graham Uden and Ray Lau



Why?
Because this *Jetsons-meets-Clockwork Orange* interior totally ignores its banal and angular developer floorplan to create a fantasy of curvy white sterility, as if a pharmacist fell in love with an astronaut and decided to raise a family in downtown Hong Kong. Leave your day – and shoes – at the door and enter a world of zoomy, blanched psychedelia, punctuated by swathes of ocean blue or grass green, cuddled by wraparound walls and swirling profiles. The designer has done everything possible to make the owners forget that they bought a standard, dumbed-down 2,200sq-ft apartment; now they live in an almost virtual reality.

What we like most...
That it so totally contrasts with the dirty, maximalist city just outside, creating a dreamlike environment cleansed of detritus, objects, blemishes. Also the fake fish.

Haunting question:
What would you wear to dinner here? A labcoat by Jil Sander?



Mondrian South Beach Miami, USA Marcel Wanders



Images courtesy of Morgans Hotel Group



Why?

Because when this international design celebrity touches things they turn to gold, or at least that's the perception. Because his, yes, unique viewpoint allowed him to bring a new outlook to a tired typology: the tropical getaway residence. And because he had the energy to produce so many of the pieces, from lighting to flooring to furniture, right in his own studio. The man is apparently inexhaustible. Maybe it's Wanders' attitude: "Unlike product design, interiors are about theatre, leading you from one idea to the next and the next. You need to breathe life into a space, which is a fascinating process for me." Some people deserve their fame.

Dominant traits...

Tinted mirrors, gold candelabras, onyx stools, "new antiques", gold-leaf wallpaper, dark herringbone floors and a generally subdued translation of Floridian luxury that combines youth and money and colour and eros and the suddenly quaint idea that absurd luxury can still be indulged in as the empire burns.



Belvedere Hotel Mykonos, Greece Rockwell Group

Why?

Because on an island already so beautiful, the last thing it needed was a slick Manhattan designer. This client threw logic to the wind and got one anyway. And because in what should have been a forced-marriage disaster (what could possibly improve on the vernacular?), design love prevailed. Whitewashed plaster, timber, marble, stamped metals, mother-of-pearl inlays... what's not to adore? Branch motifs, wave motifs, guestroom furnishings inspired by nautical fittings. Big-cushioned banquettes, organic wood screens, emperor bathtubs. It's *Mamma Mia!* without the wacky in-laws.

What we love...

That Rockwell was intelligent enough to use the vernacular, and modest enough not to try to re-invent a wheel that worked so well. Anonymous? No, just the softest footprint, the quiet tweak of the theatrical master. When you have something to say, you can whisper it and they will listen.

What we hate...

That anyone gets design commissions this fun.



Images courtesy of Rockwell Group





Golden Lotus Sales Office

Hong Kong, China

Kinney Chan

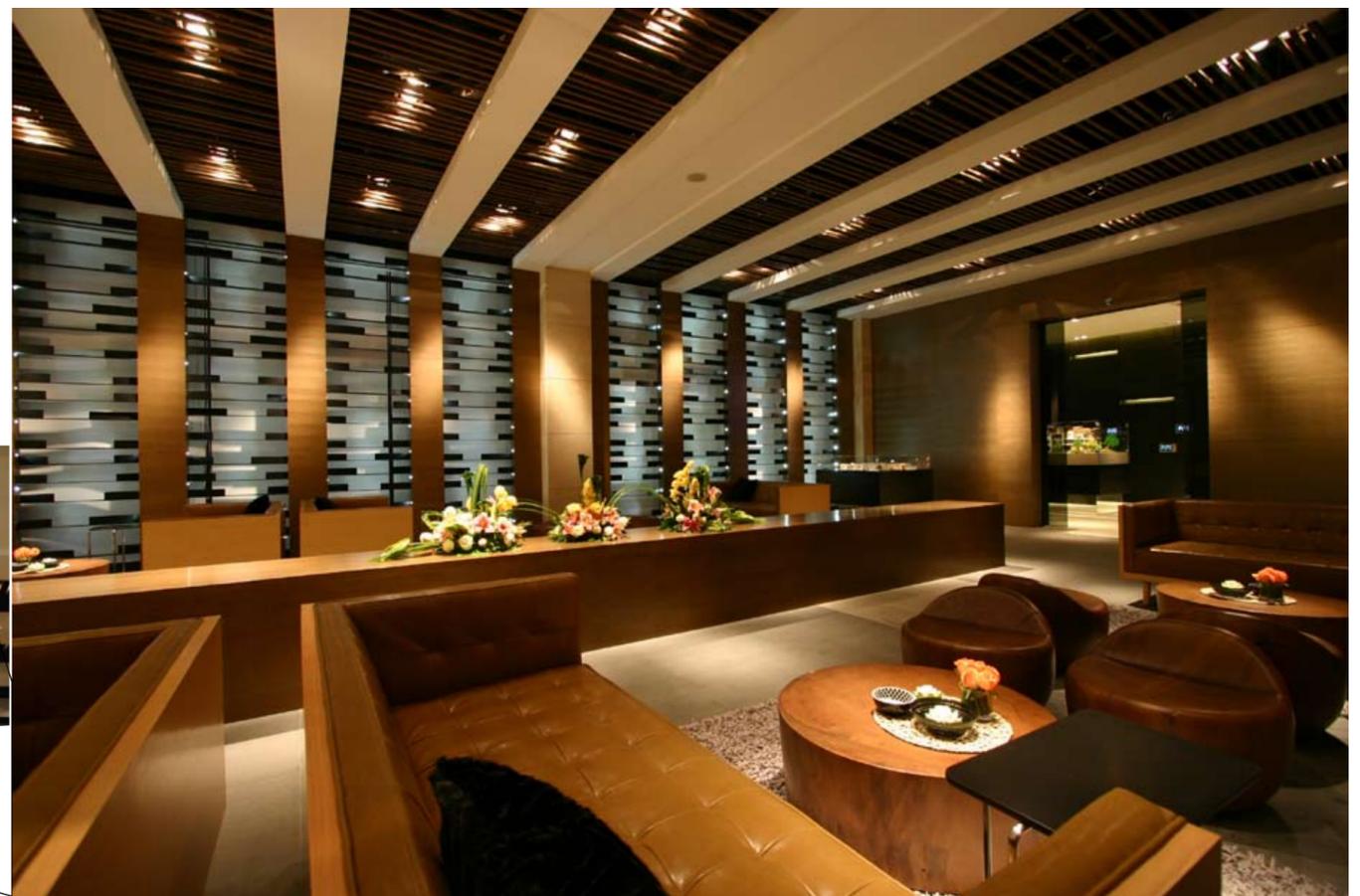
Images courtesy of Kinney Chan and Associates

Why?

Because it shows that even with a modest space and budget, an ambience can be created that equals separation, seclusion and a romantic idea about even the most mundane activities – such as sales – being made more agreeable through the hand of the designer. And because most sales pavilions reek of temporality, of expediency, of bad coffee... whereas this one is actually a place one might want to be. The materials help a lot: wood, marble and granite. The lighting helps a lot: soft and accented where it needs to be, soothing. Yes, soothing, and if you've ever experienced a Hong Kong sales office, you need soothing. Great idea to split the hard sales area from the chill-out zone.

What we love...

The lounge lizard mood of the non-sales side of the space (the fact that there is a non-sales side). The chestnut-y single-seaters. The woody, extra tall meeting room. The fantasy of booting the staff and bringing in the DJ.





Photography by Francois Marechal and Peter Hebeisen

Le Meurice Paris, France Philippe Starck

Why?
The famed Paris hotel, dubbed the 'Hotel of Kings', is given a makeover of its public areas, lobbies, restaurant and interiors by the worldly master designer. And in case anyone – anyone – thought Starck was tired out or passé, they ought to take a look at this. He has attacked an iconic place (and style) with a strategy that allows it to be what it already was, but also something quite new. The colour palette of beige, gold and cream, with red or black highlights, may seem entirely original, as do the ornate decorative layers covering virtually every surface and piece of furniture. But look again. Starck has quietly, almost secretly, introduced his customary wit and cheekiness within a language that appears entirely historical. After decades of genuine contemporary invention, he redoes history this time. It's less like a sophisticated critique (or what most would have done: a respectful 'update') than like he had actually lived when the building was first constructed, and had the commission for the interiors – with his signature approach. In other words, 100% Starck, but completely integrated with the building, the volumes, the surfaces and the mood of its time.

What we love...
Starck's interiors are sexy without being louche, dramatic without shouting. And he has bent time: Le Meurice now exists in some disconnected plane neither then nor now. A lesson on how to treat the old, by an old master.





China Mobile Experience Zone Shenzhen, China Marc & Chantal Design

Why?

Because in case you hadn't felt impelled to rush to Shenzhen for the Coco Mall, this space might change your thinking. The purpose of the Experience Zone is "to stimulate, learn and interact" with the services and gadgets the company is bringing to the consumer market, rather than to actually buy something. Famous for their original exhibit designs, Marc & Chantal took inspiration this time from the radio waves emitted by mobile phones (and hopefully not frying our brains), to make circular zones representing different aspects of China Mobile's services, namely, entertainment, lifestyle and business. The concept included everything from smart

cards given to visitors to LCD screens, animated graphics, life-size virtual hosts, wood and pebbles and a very active use of colour. Since interactivity was naturally a big part of the brief, the designers had to make technology not only user-friendly (so people older than 20 could still function here) but also palatable visually. Yuco Lab (HK) helped out with the multimedia aspects.

What we like best...

That Marc & Chantal have made a spaceship aesthetic look inviting and actually warm, and that they've avoided many of the current clichés attached to anything technological.

Casablanca House Osaka, Japan Keizo Matsuda



Why?

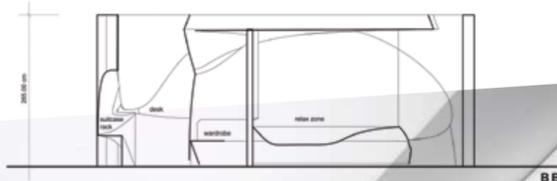
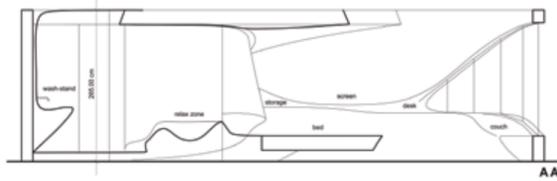
Because new houses in Japan are like a drug, you can never get enough and no matter how weird, it's good weird. This house for a young couple outside Osaka opts for a courtyard parti to deliver on a request for privacy amid closeby neighbours. A library with plenty of book storage was also high on the programme list, as was a parking space for the family motorcycle... in other words, the chance to be alone with one's bike and books. As there were no great views (the area is a suburban development), Matsuda walled the garden to full two-storey height, internalised the views and created openings from above for natural light. Bedrooms were conceptualised as 'panic rooms' (don't ask) and the kitchen and dining room are on the second floor. Separate stairs lead to separate rooms, in keeping with the double-height centre of the plan. Basically, it's a rectangular box opening onto a triangular garden determined by the roadway. The structural system is timber.

What works...

The simplicity of the house is compelling, and we suspect, allowed the architect to get on with creating smaller, more in-depth pleasures, such as the space of the garden, the contrast between the two long edges of the house (garden and adjacent building) and the relationships between internal spaces. An intricacy takes over, revealed through a hushed, understated voice.



Future Hotel Showcase Duisburg, Germany LAVA – Laboratory for Visionary Architecture



© Gee-ly, Zurich und Fraunhofer IAO

Why?

Because even though hotels have led the way to myriad innovations and trends in interior design for the last dozen years or so, they keep coming up with new ideas and details. And this time, they set out to do an experiment. Who? The Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering, if you must know. With the collaboration of a number of participants, from product firms to software producers, the group has decided to learn and determine what the future of hotel design holds. In its own words: "The central task for the project's research was to meet the expectations and requirements of hotel guests using tomorrow's technology. In the Future Hotel Showcase, a symbiosis of technology and space can be experienced." What this adds up to is a prototypical hotel involving the very latest in technological gadgetry guided by the goal of ultimate human comfort. In plain English, that means climate, light and media. And since hotels regularly include spas and restaurants and lounges, the research didn't stop at the bedroom doors.

What we think...

If you ask us, it's just a scientific-sounding excuse for making cool spaces. But what do we know?

