

A Year of Design...

hinge magazine has long avoided joining the rushing river of design awards bestowed, glanced upon, blanketing, drowning the design fields, including architecture and interior design. It occasionally seems that not a week goes by without the announcement of annual awards sponsored by a fellow publication or association. We're not implying the winners are undeserving of recognition, only that something overdone is something undervalued. There have been moments when even we considered – fleetingly – whether we should grant our own prizes, invite our own jury, host our own gala. But the halting question always brought us to our senses: Why? What could yet another awards scheme contribute to the profession or discourse. Very little, it seemed.

So this story is emphatically NOT to be understood as anything like an awards programme. It is instead the result of a particular interest in a particular year because of very particular circumstances. (And it may or may not be repeated ever again.)

As 2009 crawled ignominiously to a close, it came to seem logical, nay, actually imperative, that we pause to review what should have been a Design Annus Horribilis if ever there was one. The world economy disclosed its foundations of sand as it crumbled before our eyes. Projects of monstrous ambition screeched to sudden halts, thousands of designers and their entourages found themselves suddenly as underemployed as an American autoworker, and clients became a species so endangered that some predicted permanent extinction.

Professionals with sufficient solid commissions far enough along the pipeline were able to stumble through the year and wait for things to evolve. They became newly enthusiastic about smaller jobs, and construction-site visits; they took rejuvenated interest in tasks previously assigned to peons; they alphabetised their libraries. They allowed themselves to smell the roses a bit, and take weekends off.

Those less fortunate weren't thinking about roses, and every day was a weekend. The optimistic researched second careers, re-acquainted themselves with

old musical instruments or decided to get serious about physical fitness. The pessimistic researched second mortgages, re-acquainted themselves with old loan-officer friends or decided to get serious about alcohol.

It was not a good year. Yet, lo and behold, slowly but surely, little signs of life sprouted here and there on the economic horizon, and light glimmered, if faintly, at the end of the tunnel. Offices may not yet be hiring back laid-off staff, but they've stopped laying off more. No one is actually 'busy', at least by the definition of three or four years ago, but people aren't idle either, and those expressions of imminent disaster, of barely constrained panic, have ebbed away. We can breathe again.

So the question is, did design actually suffer, in a material sense, from this strange and horrifying year of 2009? Did a recession unprecedented in our lifetime wipe out good work, eviscerate principled production, make of us impotent cogs in a mere-survival machine? That's why we chose to look back; to see what has paraded across our desks over the last 12 months; to see if there was a collective body of work we were impressed by.

We note: the 'categories' of the following highlighted projects resulted from the process of review, rather than drove it. In other words, we looked through all the material we had received and published over the course of 2009, and selected things that stood out, or seemed better or more pronounced than average, then deciphered in what way they did. Sometimes it was something general or specific: a detail, the use of a material, the composition of a facade. The category titles suggested themselves. These are things we like, projects – or bits of projects – that we think deserve another look, that might stand for what was achieved in this trying year. And in that way, work that might prove that despite awful circumstances, design survived.

So, at the dawn of a new year in design, we wrap up, in no particular order, one that wasn't so bad after all...

Standout Building



Ok, this does sound like an unequivocal award, but we couldn't get over this lovely little building by Elliot & Associates for ImageNet's Houston HQ [*hinge* vol 172]. It's simple, exciting, economical, smart, witty, and does so much with so little that it's the perfect reminder that architecture needn't scream or jump up and down to earn our attention, provide us pleasure or make us think. *hinge* has pretty cool offices, but if we had to work in any other space, this would be our first choice. Well, if it weren't in Houston, that is.



House



Our annual Houses cover story is one of our most important, but among some great new examples of domestic architecture, the Grid House in Sao Paulo, Brazil, by Forte, Gimenes & Marcondes Ferraz Arquitetos, really jumped out [*hinge* vol 164]. Ranging across its spectacular rural setting like a metal archeological site, the building set down a rational grid frame in rusting steel and then filled, voided, planted, glazed or otherwise manipulated the 'system' as programme, views, light or sheer imaginative talent suggested. A place as much as a house, this thrilling residential ride made us wonder: Does everything in Brazil always look sexy?

Eerie Interior



But in a good way, Marcel Wanders' interiors for the Mondrian South Beach, Miami [*hinge* vol 165] succeeded in jumbling scale, familiar forms and unsettling super-graphics to serve up a memorable new hotel interior, in a very clichéd genre. Wanders' ability to make things (and spaces) that are neither beautiful nor ugly, but never forgettable, cements his place in the club of hip design meisters.



Unbuilt Tower



Yes, we get enough unbuilt tower projects for these to deserve their own category. This one by OMA for Mexico City [hinge vol 162] struck our fancy. Not always enamoured of the firm's formal concepts, we found this one enticingly sensuous, even as it proposed a striking and ambitious volume and scale. OMA would probably scream at us for saying so, but the Torre Bicentenario is really elegant.



Room

Of the hundreds of rooms we looked at in 2009, this one popped out. The living room of a major house addition in Kuala Lumpur [hinge vol 172], RT+Q's sublime pavilion captures the spirit of domestic living in contemporary Asia with bull's-eye formal efficiency. Excitement plus beauty equals total seduction.



Impact for Cost

It isn't much more than a dumb retail box, but what Wingardh Arkitektkontor AB did with lighting on the exterior canopy of Sweden's K:fem [hinge vol 163] building struck us as ingenious. The red-and-white material palette and simple but effective logo list glowing above as one enters is just the kind of thinking to jazz up our retail experience.

Unrealis



FZD Media | Internal Project

Who wouldn't flip over this weirdly wonderful vision of the future, by film illustrator Feng Zhu [*hinge* vol 165], just a teaser for his newly-launched animation course at Singapore's 3dsense Media School, called the FZD School of Entertainment Design. With the upsurge in media imagery throughout our lives, his courses covering industrial design, video games, feature films and TV, fashion and set design are bound to be over-subscribed. If this is the future, sign us up.



Unreal Tournament | Set Design

Place to Keep Your Horse



Why would we have a category just for barns? Because this is our list and we felt like it. Besides, with barns this great, all Best-Of lists should have one [*hinge* vol 170]. Studio Pali Fekete Architects in Los Angeles is responsible for some damn fine contemporary residential architecture and the odd barn to go with it. Okay, this one wasn't built in 2009, but that's when we saw it, and as we say, we write the rules here.

Library

Why would we have a category just for libraries? Because we love books, and that means loving this little private library in London, by Timothy Hatton Architects [*hinge* vol 170]. If the printed word is dying, we want to be buried with it, right here.

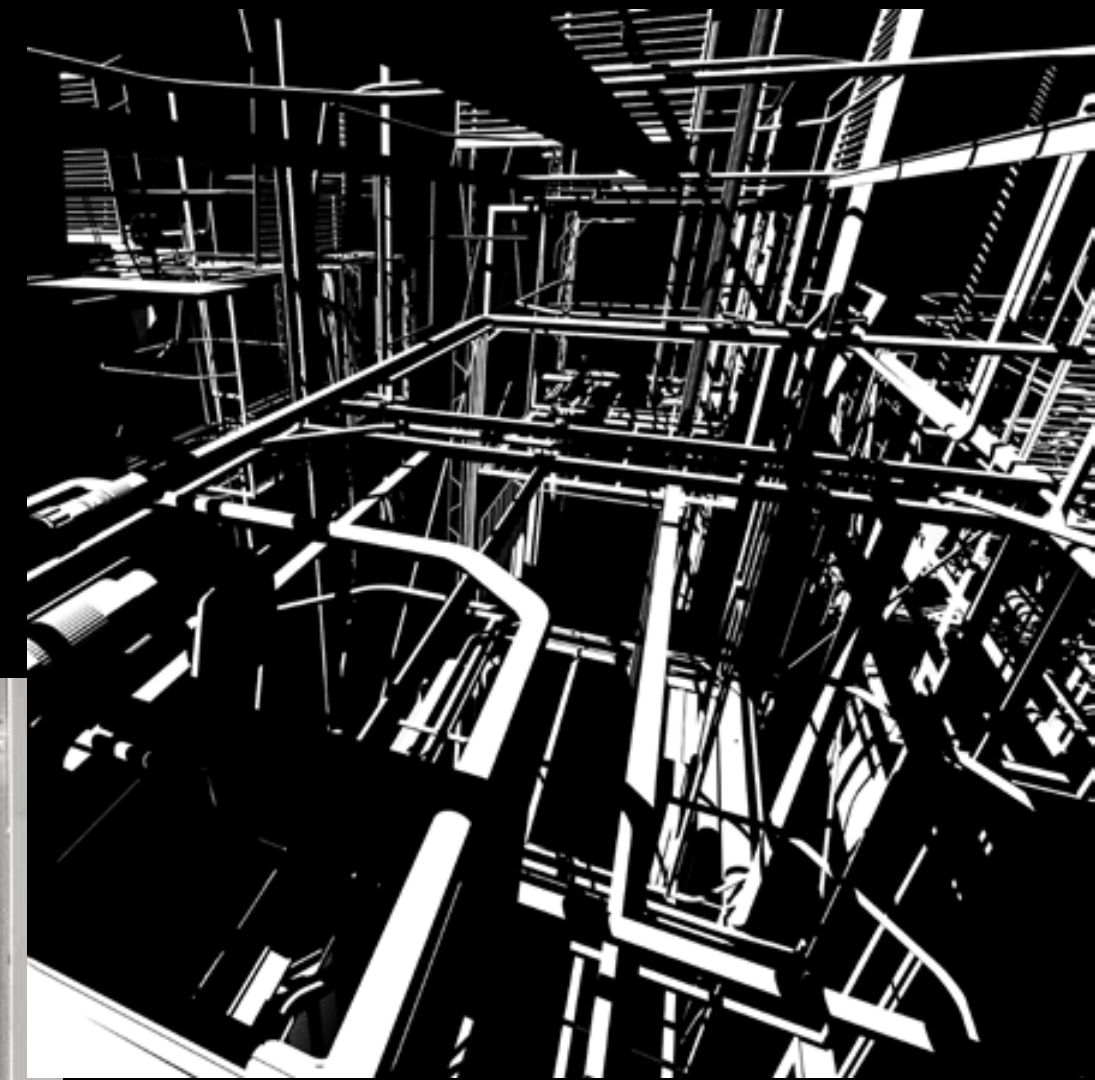
Cantilever



Coop Himmelb(l)au gave us this one, at the Akron Art Museum in Ohio [hinge vol 166]. Gravity-defying to the edge of scary, this gesture identifies the building as a whole, and produces a charged tension with the historic masonry building it leans over. Just don't ask us to stand under it during hurricane season.



2D Imagery



Architecture is 3D, but we love our graphic design brothers, and we loved the work of this one especially – Alexis Cladiere, a young Parisian with an angel's hand married to a slightly twisted brain... How perfect is that? [hinge vol 168]



Cheap Building

Hong Kong's own Raymond Fung showed us his experiment with inexpensive – and rapidly constructed – domestic bliss, and we wanted to move right in. Taking a standard issue 'village house' (like the ones that populate all of the territory's rural areas) and chop-socking it into this mini-masterpiece [hinge vol 165] was enough to make us look anew at our ubiquitous housing stock, though the flower-power decals were a tad too 70's even for us old hippies.

Factory



Who says working an assembly line has to be dull? Making sewer pipes may be, but not if you do it at the St-Germain company in Quebec, designed by Allaire Courchesne Dupuis Architectes [*hinge* vol 173]. There, you get to walk into a museum-like facility complete with reflecting pond, giant window wall and sleek, minimalist details. If the workers go on strike here, it'll be for designer uniforms or canapé receptions.



Architectural Photo

It was a year of good pics, but this one, of the Mountain Dwelling in Denmark, by Bjarke Ingels Group [*hinge* vol 163], stuck with us. Urik Jantzen was the shooter here, and an artist he truly is, lending the modular housing project a strong aspect of drama, thanks to a stormy dusk sky and the almost robotic stance of the three building blocks. Even if the picture leans toward the 'man versus nature' side of things, it happens to express quite a bit about the project: the massing relationship, orientation, scale and aesthetic bent of these buildings. But, yeah, we like the apocalyptic part the best.



Sketchbook

How do you improve on something designers already use adoringly? Fill it with the sketches of their heroes, that's how. Moleskin came up with the idea of inviting 110 international architects to contribute drawings to this special edition and the result is the ultimate inspirational incentive for the profession. Ought to be mandatory study material for every young design student who thinks a mouse is as good as a pencil. [*hinge* vol 174]



Object

This one was difficult, because our Search segment turns up plenty of groovy stuff every month, but these 'Bonnet' pouffes by designer Liset Van der Scheer of Belgium [*hinge* vol 164] were what we wanted to take home (no, we didn't get samples). Colourful and playful even while they are quiet and practical, they look good whether alone or in herds.



Forest Retreat



What's not to love about this tiny Virginia yoga cabin by Carter + Burton Architecture [*hinge* vol 165]? It's cute, useful, sits gently in its landscape, and proves good things come in small packages. Besides yoga, we can think of other things we'd like to do in it: draw, write a novel, compose music, sleep...

Historic Revisionism



What roundup could possibly omit this category(!)? Leave it to Philippe Starck to upend our preconceptions – and memories – of historic interiors at the famed Paris hotel, Le Meurice. The master lends his mirthful approach in a series of superficially period rooms that reveal their twists and turns in tiny increments visible to the careful eye. Is it all a bit 'in-the-know'? No matter, for those who don't get it, the hotel is merely a grand dame of hospitality. [*hinge* vol 165]



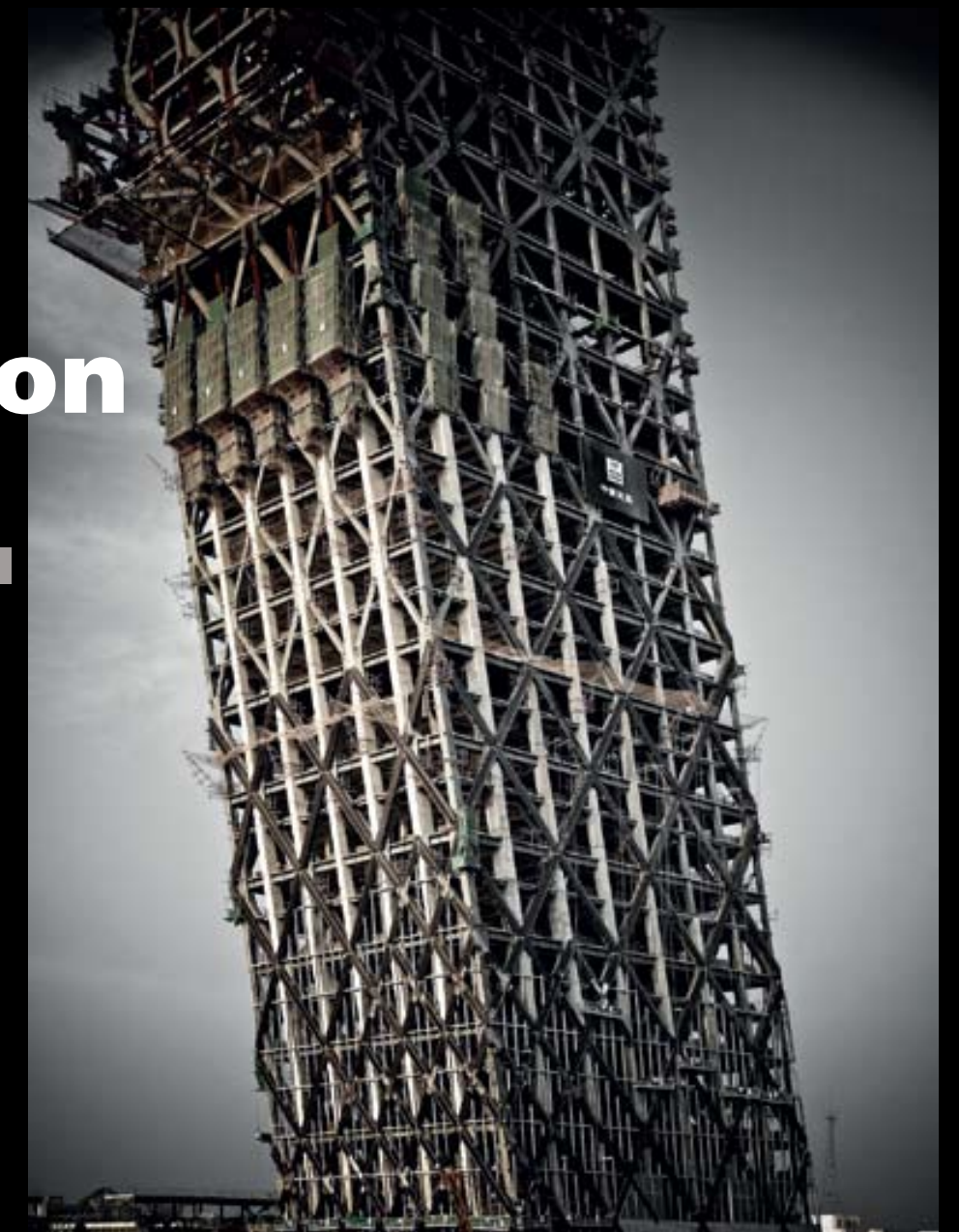
Space for Art



CL3's exciting Art Pavilion for China Resources Land [*hinge* vol 169] sets up a thrilling gallery experience, seamlessly integrating space, scale, lighting and artwork (some by the architects) to produce a backdrop for more mundane activities such as showcasing developments. Running under the whole exercise is the strong belief that art plays its role in many aspects of our daily life.

Construction Shot

There was never any doubt about this one; when we saw Virgile Simon Bertrand's photograph of the unfinished CCTV HQ in Beijing, we had to catch our breath [*hinge* vol 172]. We still think it looks better than the final building.



Eatery

Food on the run may not be our thing, but Steve Leung's latest makeover of Fairwood Café (Generation II) made us rush out and order pork chop rice [hinge vol 169]. It's a good thing most fast-food joints don't look this good, or we'd be 12 kilos heavier.



White Design

We mean literally. This house in Osaka by Keizo Matsuda slipped into its site like a puffy cloud, ready to cheer all the neighbours – and us – right up [hinge vol 165]. Who says Japanese domestic architecture is all dour concrete and empty rooms?



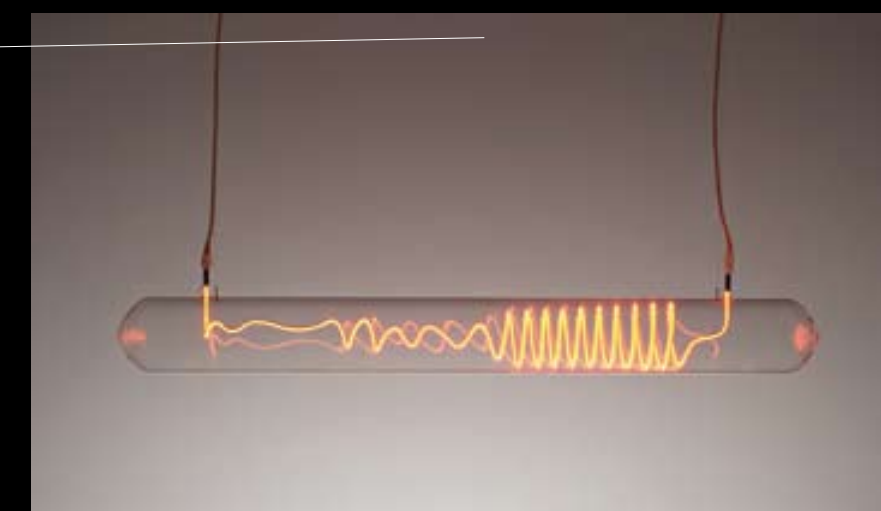
Small Museum

Tham & Vedegard Hansson made a little jewel out of their Kalmar Museum of Art [hinge vol 166], a sensuous black box propped among unfilled mature trees within view of the Kalmar castle. Rational, geometric, orthogonal and coated with a snakeskin of black modular panels, this little building first startles, then soothes.



Light

As in lamp. As in Rolf Sachs' gorgeous inventions for illumination that straddle science equipment and installation art, looking forward while harking backward [hinge vol 172]. Luminous.



Eco-Object



As if the name weren't adorable enough ('Robo Scooter') this little green get-around, by William J Mitchell and his students, is sweet enough to eat. If this is the future, let's get rolling. [hinge vol 172]

Workplace

We want Steve Leung's new office for ourselves. We want to forcibly remove him, install ourselves there, and never leave [hinge vol173]. He has been warned.



Bigger Makeover



Makeover

Who says only celebrity gossip columns cover this category? Gary Chang's transformation of a run-of-the-mill Hong Kong tenement into super-sexy serviced flats brand ACTS [hinge vol 162] is the architectural equivalent of plastic surgery plus a little black dress.



Possibly the most deserving award winner in years of HKIA prizes, the Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre [hinge vol 167] by P&T Architects and Meta4 Design Forum, which took the Medal of the Year, is brilliant proof – if any were needed – that old buildings don't die; they just need a new love affair.



Hotel Interior

Hotter-than-hot Nini Andrade Silva did it again with another show-stopping hotel design in Lisbon – the Fontana Park Hotel [*hinge* vol 168]. This time the palette was mostly black and white, but oh, how colourful the achievement.



Water



This little pavilion for the Expo Zaragoza by Patxi Mangado Arquitectos hits the mark on a few targets, but its use of water pushes it over the edge. A forest of metal tubes grows out of a plane of still water, casting reflections and shadow plays in multiple directions. The aqua isn't there just for looks; it acts to cool air driven through the hollow cylinders, semi-passively cooling the space. But it's the visual effects that are coolest of all. [*hinge* vol 173]



Stone-Age Building

A very close contender for our favourite building of the year, the NK'Mip Desert Cultural Centre by Hotson Bakker Boniface Haden Architects (repeat all that quickly!) kept us going back for more... those walls, those walls [*hinge* vol 163]. Softly monumental, deferential to its extraordinary site yet commanding at the same time, this building approaches the highest purpose of architecture: transcendence.

Convention Centre



How many of these would we actually like to visit? Buro ll gave Guangzhou an exception to the banality of the type, with the Baiyun International Convention Centre. As southern China may be the trade fair epicenter of the globe, it's a great relief to know that someone's rethinking the boxes. [hinge vol 163]



Low-Tech Object

Because it's lovely. And because it's fun to give an (unofficial) award to an umbrella. Tucci's Max collection [hinge vol 173].



Retail Design



If there's anyone who can design better retail spaces than Yabu Pushelberg, we haven't met them. The Duo's latest Lane Crawford in Beijing [hinge vol 168], is a tour de force, all silvery layers and glorious white surfaces. What we love most is that they never let their innate elegance constrain their inventiveness.



Service Apartment



A crowded category indeed, but Philip Liao and Partners' entry widened the parameters a bit, introducing a little loft consciousness to a city without lofts. We're a sucker for the exposed copper piping [hinge vol 169].



Gadget

Michael Young has made an anti-gadget gadget, with his i24R3 Portable Waterproof Speaker for EOPs [hinge vol 173]. Intriguing, mysterious, cute, potent... This clever little number looks nothing like what it is, which is exactly why it's a winner.



Residential Idea

Normally we'd be a tad sceptical of schemes like this as they tend to trade logic for image. But OMA's housing concept for Singapore manages to have both, keying in to many of the particularly Singaporean aspects of residential complexes, including massive scale, volumetric aggressiveness and liberal inclusion of greenery. The fact that it will become iconic is almost beside the point. [hinge vol 172]



Place to Contemplate Death

Albeit an unusual category, it's an appropriate way to end. We could have chosen Peter Zumthor's Brother Claus Field Chapel (or, for that matter, his Vals Thermal Baths - [hinge vol 167]) but that would have been too obvious and besides, he got the Pritzker, he doesn't need a *hinge*. Instead, we like this tiny pavilion by OFIS, called the Farewell Chapel, in Slovenia [hinge vol 170]. Nestled modestly into a sloping cemetery, the concrete and timber structure uses curvilinear form and an absence of ornament to help people say goodbye.



Details

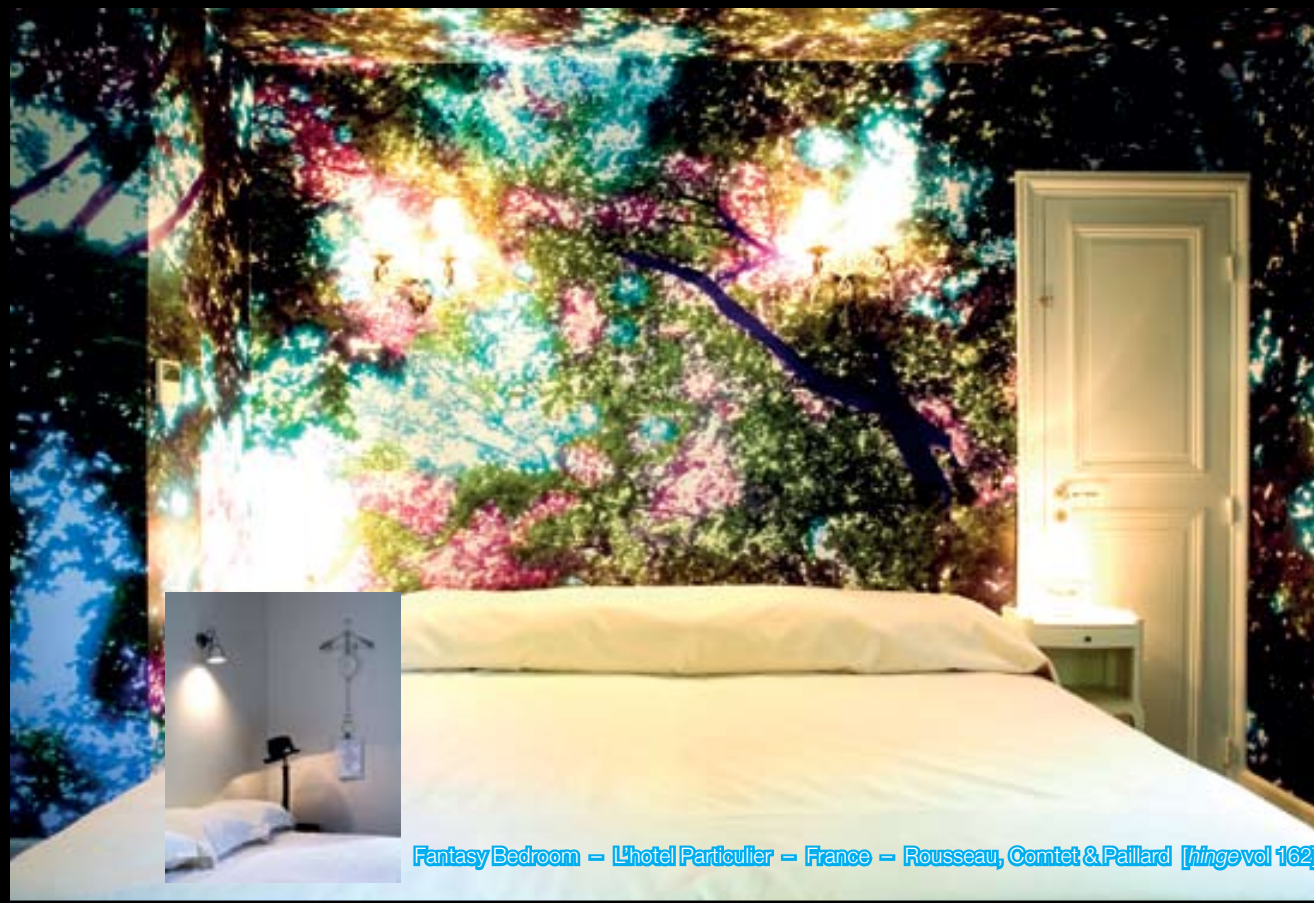
Herewith a compendium of some of the sharpest details we found for the year – evidence that in design, big ideas are only one route to magic.



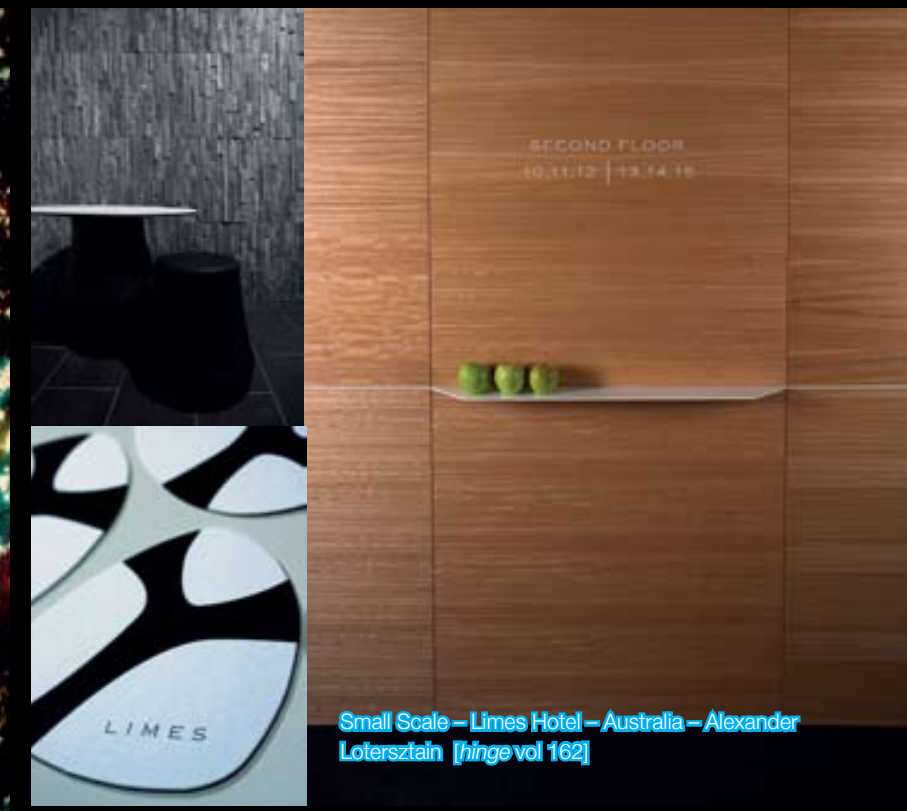
Dematerialised Mass – Duo Bldg – Chile – Sabbagh Arquitectos [hinge vol 163]



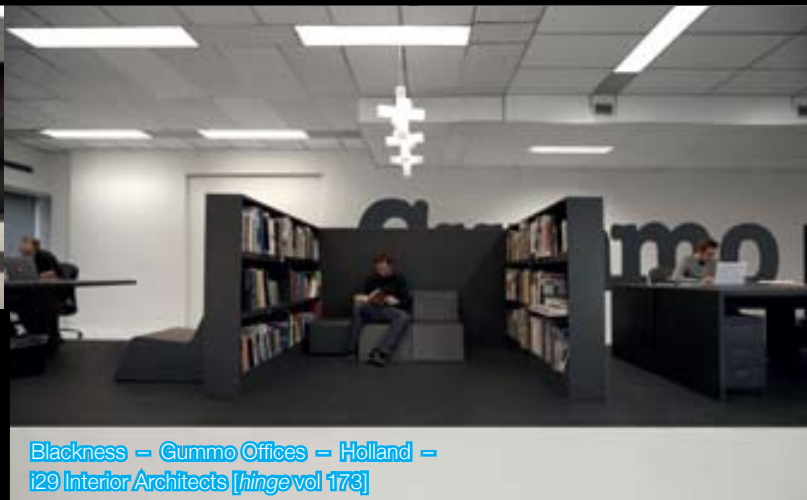
Otherworldliness – Dwell – USA – Philippe Starck [hinge vol 163]



Fantasy Bedroom – L'hotel Particulier – France – Rousseau, Comtet & Paillard [hinge vol 162]



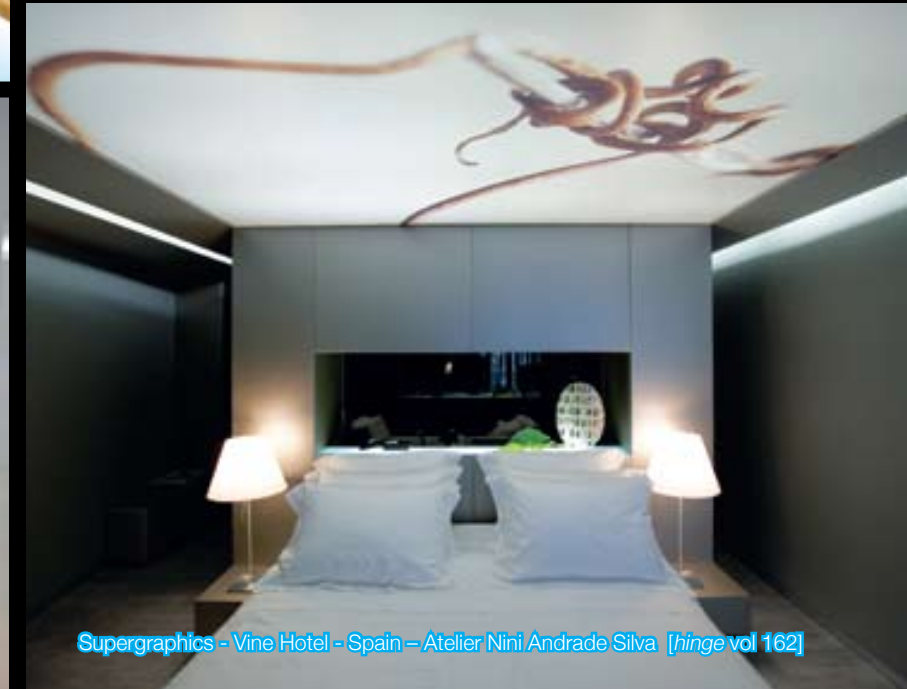
Small Scale – Limes Hotel – Australia – Alexander Lotersztain [hinge vol 162]



Blackness – Gummo Offices – Holland – i29 Interior Architects [hinge vol 173]



Whiteness – Taubman Asia Offices – Hong Kong [hinge vol 162]



Supergraphics – Vine Hotel – Spain – Atelier Nini Andrade Silva [hinge vol 162]



Redness – HSBC – Hong Kong – Marc & Chantal [hinge vol 166]



Sculptural – Opera House – Norway – Snohetta [hinge vol 163]



Curtain Wall – NJP Art Centre – Korea – KSMS Schemel Stankovic [hinge vol 166]



Stone – The Westminster Terrace – Hong Kong – Paul Davis & Partners [hinge vol 173]



Plasticity – Espace 400e – Canada – Hangrau & Cardas Architectes [hinge vol 173]



Gorgeousness – The Hazelton – Canada – Yabu Pushelburg [hinge vol 163]



Suggestive – Moving Picture Co – USA – Patrick Tighe Architecture [hinge vol 173]



Serene – Breathing Factory – Japan – Takashi Yamaguchi & Associates [hinge vol 173]

