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FEATURING
**ALINE WEBER &
DAAN VAN DER DEEN**

Architecture itself emerges from a perfect storm of enlightened and vision-driven clients, risk-taking design work, and keeping an eye on the richness of cultures, working in history and making radical departures.



ARCHISCENE

INTERVIEW WITH ASYMPTOTE ARCHITECTURE FOUNDER

HANI RASHID

For this issue of DESIGN SCENE Magazine our Editor IGOR CVORO sits down for an exclusive interview with Mr HANI RASHID to talk about the artistic gene in his family, signature style, ASY_Lab and his latest collaboration with Missoni.

Back in 1989 HANI RASHID founded ASYMPTOTE ARCHITECTURE in New York with LISE ANNE COUTURE turning it into one of the leading Architecture Practices. Today Asymptote is working on striking projects on an international level. No matter the project task the practice is dedicated to challenging the quest of delivering exciting architectural designs while having in mind the prediction of upcoming technology and living trends. Some of the latest are two new projects for Moscow, the soon to open Hermitage Museum for contemporary and modern art, and a new 150m tower currently under construction on the ZIL property in central Moscow. Furthermore other impressive designs by Rashid and Couture include the Yas Marina Hotel on Abu Dhabi and the ARC Multimedia Museum in Daegu South Korea. Asymptote Architecture has offices in New York City and Vienna, Austria. Their latest endeavor is the Miami based MISSONI BAIA project, delivered in collaboration with the Miami-based development company OKO Group.

The artistic gene seems to be running in the family. When you were a child, what did you want to be? When exactly did you realize you wanted to become an architect?

I was very inspired by my father, who was a very talented and accomplished abstract painter, sculptor, set designer, and intellectual. And from that sprung a desire for what I thought would be making films, however my father noticed my talent for sculpture and encouraged me to think beyond film making as a career and life choice. I stumbled on architecture as a situation I found to be a mix of these passions and interests.

Which designers and architects were you influenced by the most?

Many, but early on the sculptures of Jesus Soto and Brancusi, then I discovered the architecture of Marcel Breuer, Oscar Niemeyer and Paolo Soleri.

How would you describe your signature style?

Our style is based on tectonic and mathematical models and research. We have always been interested in technology and how technology allows us to play with light, optics,

structures, form and utility. We have shunned stylistic moves and instead have always gone after an architecture that has longevity, a sense of permanence, and history without being nostalgic. I think our work is evolving always and so any stylistic readings now emerging are probably the result of constantly probing our position and attitudes towards making form, space, and architecture.

What does your creative process look like? Where do you work on your designs and architectural projects?

We always start with a reaction to the place we are working in, and we speak often of seeking a place and context, DNA and nuances. We also start with a sketch or computer model that evokes possibilities and a starting point. After that, we pay a lot of attention to math, computer modeling, physical modeling and planning to find the right balance between form, meaning, and pragmatism.

What projects are you working on at the moment?

We are building a museum for contemporary art in Moscow for the State Hermitage Museum of Russia. We are also starting construction on a large scientific facility in Vienna in the Danube River and designing a new sport, leisure, and hotel combination in Wynwood in Miami. Obviously, we are excited also by the construction now underway for the Missoni Baia tower in Edgewater in Miami.

How was it to collaborate with Missoni, a brand with such a strong heritage?

Missoni is an aesthetic brand of quality and pedigree, so with that it has been a nice fit to our architecture and clean attitude to building handsome, dignified residential spaces and facilities. Since Missoni's textures, colors, and materials are very decorative and striking, we thought it best to produce a neutral sophisticated backdrop for their brand to be overlaid on carefully and respectfully. It's been a very nice symbiotic relationship between Missoni and Asymptote, which I think will result in an extremely dignified building for the Miami scene.





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What would be your dream project/something you'd like to design in the future?

Actually, we are working on projects that are in some ways dreamlike for us, focused on possible Mars habitation and also on things we are discovering through that research applicable to dwellings here on earth. We are doing these projects in what we call the ASY_Lab and these, as well as other experimental projects, are proving to be very inspiring and eye opening for us.

You and your firm, Asymptote Architecture became pioneers of the digital revolution early on and started the debate on implementing new digital tools in architecture. What does, in your opinion, the future of architecture look like?

Essentially, two words on the production side, robotic and sustainable, and two words on the design side, exploratory and tailored. These are the trajectories we are on for both sides of the equation. My hope is that these words and tendencies will inspire new, exciting creative solutions for our built environment and cities, but I also fear we might see more mundanity, repetition, and sterility if we are not attentive. Architecture in the highest sense of the discipline will become even more important in the hands of thinkers, conceptualists, and artists in our field in order to offset automation, machine learning, and solution-driven banality that's also on the horizon.

What is your ultimate goal when it comes to your work?

I have always seen architecture as a science and an art form at the service of the human condition. Making things work, intelligent, beautiful and desirable are goals and key to enhancing lives and cultures.

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The most interesting thing that you have learnt from being an architect?

That not all architecture is architecture. Actually, what I have learned mostly is that 'architecture' and mere building are quite different, and the latter unfortunately dominates our built environments globally. Architecture itself emerges from a perfect storm of enlightened and vision-driven clients, risk-taking design work, and keeping an eye on the richness of cultures, working in history and making radical departures.

Any advice for young architects, starting out in the business? Stay versatile, open and critical, and most of all, retain some naïveté and vision regardless of the forces that push on that relentlessly.

Keep up with Asymptote Architecture on their official web page: www.asymptote.netAR