

THE GREAT INDOORS 2007

CELEBRATING THE BEST
— INTERIOR DESIGN
— WORLDWIDE

THE GREAT INDOORS NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Paul Rinkens (chairman)

Director Hotel La Bergère and QBic Hotels, Maastricht

Irma Goedemondt

Editor in Chief *Eigen Huis & Interieur* and *MTC*,
Hoofddorp

Richard Hutten

Designer, Rotterdam

Kiki Niesten

Fashion Retailer, Maastricht

Gerrit Schilder

Interior Architect / Chairman BNI, Rotterdam

Huub Smeets (partly present)

Director Vesteda Real Estate, Maastricht

Rob Wagemans

Architect / Co-Founder Concrete, Amsterdam

Accompanying the names of the nominees in the various categories are the comments of committee members and brief project descriptions.

SHOW & SELL (RETAIL)

This category not only received the most entries – it also represents those projects that captured the bulk of the committee’s attention. Limiting the nominees to a mere five demanded long hours of discussion and debate. Among the nominees are both exhibitions and shops: a nice balance of ‘show’ and ‘sell’. A surprising number of car presentations came under review. Wagemans: ‘What brand of car haven’t we seen yet? Boy, what a load of showrooms. And have you noticed how similar they all are?’

NOMINEES

Exhibition Sur Place / Amsterdam

Studio Van Eijk / Van der Lubbe

Wagemans: ‘The great diversity that marks the art collection is reflected in the design of this exhibition.’ Smeets: ‘On the contrary, I think there’s too little focus on the art. You’re immersed in a cascade of ideas where I’d like to see a bit more restraint. All that busyness does create a certain atmosphere, though.’ Hutten: ‘For me, it’s all about the art – wherever you look – and really quite explicitly.’ Rinkens: ‘Is this a temporary exhibition or a permanent interior?’ Wagemans concludes by commenting on the humour in this project: ‘That wall of computer screens symbolizes the rather stodgy nature of banks. I’m impressed that the client allowed that.’

Sunao Kuwahara Flagship Boutique / Tokyo

Steve Lidbury

Smeets: ‘The design couples simplicity with allure.’ Wagemans: ‘It is indeed an attempt to reinterpret classic ingredients: luxury in contrast with ruggedness, the existing building – which remains intact – with the intervention of the designer. I have a problem with the museum-like character of this crystalline space, but in the end it all works. This is a money-maker.’ Niesten, who finds the interior too dark, has doubts about the lighting scheme: ‘Good light is essential to the success of a shop.’

Jin’s Eyewear Store / Chiba (Japan)

Ryuji Nakamura

The simplicity of this rather unusual design wins the approval of everyone on the nominating committee. The only slight shake of the head comes from Wagemans, who spots similarities to the Viktor & Rolf shop in Milan, with its upside-down décor. Niesten sums up the committee’s overall reaction in two words: ‘Sublimely done.’ Rinkens: ‘I wouldn’t mind shopping for a pair of glasses at this store.’

Istanbul Exhibition / Amsterdam

Kossmann De Jong

Two committee members have actually been to this exhibition. They came away deeply impressed. Wagemans: ‘Here the designers have created a rich environment with simple means. I immediately felt as though I was walking the streets of Istanbul. Very cleverly done.’ Schilder: ‘The designers have demonstrated an ability to immerse themselves in the subject at hand. And you’ve got to give them credit for taking on this enormous church and coming out on top.’

Bernhard Willhelm Store / Tokyo

Item Idem

The final nominee in a category replete with commercial, often slicker-than-slick projects causes quite a stir. It’s one of the very few that doesn’t go with the flow: reigning supreme in this design is an anti-aesthetic approach seen in virtually no other entry. Fashion retailer Niesten appreciates the humour in this perverse design for enfant terrible Willhelm. Wagemans comments on the uniform execution of the work: ‘In my eyes, this shop seems to have happened, not to have been designed.’ Smeets nods in apparent agreement before saying: ‘Not designed, indeed, but contrived. Horrible.’ Goedemondt wonders what the exterior of the shop looks like: ‘Walking into this place from the street must be a tremendous shock.’ Schilder winds up the discussion: ‘Almost a work of art.’

RELAX & CONSUME (LEISURE)

Despite a relatively large number of entries in this category, the nominating committee finds the quality of the projects disappointing. Genuine innovation and stark contrasts are nowhere to be found. Wagemans had hoped to see both in a category that covers the hospitality industry, 'where a design has many more opportunities than in any of the other areas'.

NOMINEES

The Clinic / Singapore

Concrete Architectural Associates

This club in Singapore, the work of Dutch designers, gets a round of applause for its unique and unconventional theme: even without the name, this is clearly a hospital-inspired nightspot. Opinions galore. Schilder feels that here and there the designers have been too literal in integrating hospital elements into the interior. Niesten says a table with wheelchairs is simply 'not done'. Smeets refers to the design as 'anecdotal', but also says it's 'original and translated consistently throughout'. And although Goedemondt senses an Asian atmosphere, Rinkens isn't hit with an instant jolt of 'Singapore', noting instead an ambience with a great deal of variation. Hutten likes the exuberance, but finds certain parts of the design a bit 'interchangeable'.

Y+ Yoga Center / Shanghai

Neri & Hu Design and Research Office

Here the committee spots the signature of Neri & Hu, a firm that's submitted several projects in this category. Kudos go to the reserved professionalism of the Chinese outfit, which may not be creating 'world wonders' but certainly displays an ability, time and again, to plan a project down to the smallest detail and to implement that plan with equal proficiency – here in a design that Wagemans calls 'the best wellness interior among all the entries. A small handful of ideas have been faithfully carried through.' Rinkens: 'A good, serene space for yoga.'

Dusk / Melbourne

Diretribe

The Dusk Bar leads to a lively discussion among committee members. The use of 'ready found' furniture made from cable reels is a surprise. 'But other than that,' says Smeets, 'it's a bit of a clutter.' At first glance, Schilder assumes that the bar comprises several rooms, but ultimately discovers only one. The project finds a champion in Hutten, however: 'In this category, it's Dusk that jumps out at me. It's an eye-opener. These designers have turned a minimum of resources into a maximum result.'

Winery / Haro (Spain)

Zaha Hadid Architects

Recent years have seen the appearance of an increasing number of wineries, many of which bear striking similarities to one another. This example by Zaha Hadid is a winery with a difference. Old and new come together in an unexpected way in the interior of the wine-tasting room, which exhales a contemporary, computer-generated aesthetic despite the presence of an age-old wooden exhibition stand, which takes centre stage in this interior. The project is a successful amalgam that bears the stamp of a talented designer.

East Beach Café / Littlehampton (UK)

Thomas Heatherwick

The nomination of Thomas Heatherwick and his beach pavilion is not without controversy. Isn't this project too architectural to qualify as interior design? Committee members have nothing but praise for the architecture itself, which refers to waves visible from the nearby shore. But does the interior deserve a nomination? Hutten likes the undulating white walls but finds the rest of the café boring. Smeets uses the term 'sculptural Gesamtkunstwerk', while adding that 'the interior may be good in its genre, but it has little to offer otherwise'.

CONCENTRATE & COLLABORATE (WORK)

The nominating committee is more than pleased with the high quality of projects submitted in this category and expresses appreciation for a growing interest in the workplace on the part of clients. Committee members are in agreement, however, when it comes to restraint. Designers should avoid making the office a furniture showroom: working environments that exhibit more thought given to the choice of furniture than to the spatial qualities of the interior have a phoney, contrived look.

NOMINEES

Nexon / Seoul VOID

Planning

Despite the fact that this office receives a majority vote from a committee that views it in a largely positive light, the project is the brunt of several critical remarks as well. Schilder, for example, likes the idea of ceiling lights that evoke the image of clouds but fails to appreciate the enormous letters that dominate the space: 'Too much.' These letters make Wagemans think of Microsoft's X-Box video-game console. But he, too, gives the lighting high marks. In Goedemondt's opinion, this is a 'sound' project.

Maguire & Partners / Santa Monica

Clive Wilkinson Architects

All eyes are drawn instantly to the ceiling that Clive Wilkinson designed for this office. Hutten: 'It's been a major focus of attention, whereas ceilings in workplaces are usually ignored.' Wagemans: 'Thanks to the design of the ceiling, the various rooms appear to form an entity.' Schilder also remarks on the spatial continuity created by the all-embracing presence – yet continually changing form – of the ceiling. Point of criticism: the committee is not keen on the insistent reference to surfboards. Although the connection between Santa Monica and surfboards is evident to all, its interpretation is a bit too literal and thought to be inappropriate for the offices of a real-estate developer.

Xue Xue Institute / Taipei City

E15 Design and Distribution

The committee finds the selection of furniture – chosen by a firm also known for furniture design – especially praiseworthy. Schilder: 'Here the office is home; Scandinavia becomes Taiwan. It's all imbued with the mood of a place of learning and underpinned by the sacredness of a chapel.' Wagemans, who commends the communal nature of the kitchen, marvels at the sight of the pristine white floor. 'Hats off to the client.'

BBH / Singapore

Ministry of Design

In this office, designed for an advertising agency, it's the contrasts that stand out. Niesten is surprised by the contrast between the old façade and the ultramodern interior. Rinkens discovers countless antitheses in the interior as well. Wagemans points out 'various worlds into which you can retreat – very important to an advertising firm with a creative staff that needs not only private spots for concentration but also communal areas for brainstorming sessions. I also note a great deal of humour in this interior.' Schilder is equally positive: 'This office shows the careful eye of the designer from wall to wall and floor to ceiling.'

TBWA/Hakuhodo / Tokyo

Klein Dytham architecture

Most of the committee members are enthusiastic about the interior design for this advertising agency, but Wagemans waxes lyrical: 'The spaces created here generate a sequence of open versus closed. It's all been done in a consistent and whimsical manner, and the witticisms involved are not corny jokes that grow tiring over time. This is literally and figuratively a great project. A city. A park.' Schilder agrees: 'The ultimate translation of the office-landscape concept.'

SERVE & FACILITATE (PUBLIC)

After reviewing the entries in this category, the committee finds only four worthy of nomination. These four, however, are projects of such high quality that it's safe to say no other category tops Serve & Facilitate in terms of distinctive design.

NOMINEES

Viikki Church / Helsinki

JKKM Architects

The committee is laudatory about the design of this church, which radiates a balanced mix of austerity and opulence. Goedemondt praises the 'tranquil, typically Finnish ambience' of the interior. Schilder remarks on the craftsmanship that characterizes work rooted in the Finnish tradition. 'In designing a church, you really have to do it all – there are no standard interior products for a church. These designers have managed that very well.' Wagemans discerns a new manner of decorating, with very simple interventions. 'One might wonder whether this is a Catholic or a Protestant church. It has the ornamental look of the former and the soberness of the latter.'

Garden Parkrand Building / Amsterdam

Richard Hutten

Although this entry involves the design of a semi-public outdoor space that is part of an apartment complex, no one seems to question its evaluation within the framework of an interior-design competition. Schilder: 'For me, an interior is the space between two vertical planes, and that space can be either indoors or outdoors.' Owing to Hutten's interventions, Rinkens no longer experiences this particular space as an exterior volume. Wagemans believes the architect intended the communal garden to be perceived as an interior. He finds one object particularly amusing: 'Who in the world hangs a chandelier outside?'

Fleet Library, Rhode Island School of Design / Providence (USA)

Office dA

An ovation for the way in which the architects have given an old building a new interior. Hutten: 'The new insertions touch the existing building only here and there, and always at the right moment.' Rinkens points out that the interior elements do not take over the space. Wagemans: 'If it's aliens you're after, I do like this one. Let me add, however, that I don't promote the idea of an entire world turning out aliens.' Schilder particularly admires the final result, calling the library 'un-American in its fragility and fine detailing, and not at all coarse'.

Moltke Refectory / Karlsruhe (Germany)

Jürgen Mayer H.

This German university refectory, whose interior and exterior form a seamless sculptural volume without interruption, evokes a sense of alienation. Wagemans calls it a 'uniformly realized concept that seems to deny materiality'. Hutten comments on the 'scalelessness' of the project. Certain committee members seem at a loss for words to describe the building. It's this very identity – both bizarre and individual – that appeals to Schilder: 'Students will walk in and immediately say: "This is my dining hall." The only thing I can't get my head around is the choice of furniture, which is so conspicuously colourless. Do you think it came from the old refectory?'

INTERIOR DESIGN FIRM OF THE YEAR

An award in this category is not a tribute to an entire oeuvre, but to the development of a company during the past two years. The nominating committee finds it difficult to choose five nominees from the 20 firms entered in the competition. An air of professionalism is apparent in every portfolio viewed; what's missing is diversity: nearly all entries are from organizations that create interiors for commercial premises. A long period of discussion ends in the selection of four nominees.

NOMINEES

Wonderwall Inc. / Tokyo

In the eyes of the nominating committee, the Japanese firm Wonderwall stands head and shoulders above the rest. Wagemans calls the work iconic, colourful and consistently sublime, project after project. 'This outfit's forte is not simplicity, but everything they do is carefully planned and executed down to the smallest detail.' He notes, however, that a high degree of precision is aided by the generous budgets that Wonderwall is used to working with. In a sterner tone, he says: 'Conceptually speaking, not all the work is equally strong. And it's weak in a cultural sense as well.' Schilder's comment is brief and to the point: 'A feel for materials, never cursory, always decadent.'

Concrete Architectural Associates / Amsterdam

Concrete gets its share of praise as well. This firm seems to spend time reflecting on the substantive nature of luxury, while realizing that the need to create identities is greater than the need to produce interiors. Niesten envisions Concrete's designers enjoying what they do, 'and their clients probably have fun too'. Rinkens believes that Concrete carefully studies its commissions before getting down to work. Schilder, as the last to speak, says that Concrete's nomination is totally justified: 'Looking at the firm's work over the years, you have to grant Concrete the position it deserves. This is a team that makes solid, well-considered, top-quality work.'

Maurice Mentjens Design / Holtum (Netherlands)

The nomination of local hero Maurice Mentjens is the subject of a bit more debate. His portfolio reveals him as an original designer, but the committee's evaluation finds his work not yet completely in balance. Nonetheless, nearly everyone gives Mentjens a thumbs up: Niesten cites Mentjens' sense of humour, Goedemondt is surprised at his originality, and Schilder notes that his work is always recognizable. Wagemans says he's 'almost an artist, in the good sense of the word, as well as the bad. I'm curious to see how he develops.' Rinkens ends the discussion with the remark that this nomination should be seen, first and foremost, as an incentive for the future: 'This is an up-and-coming designer.'

Neri & Hu Design and Research Office / Shanghai

Emerging as the great unknown among the entrants in this category of The Great Indoors is Neri & Hu of Shanghai, a firm admired by the entire committee for its high level of professionalism. Neri & Hu's projects are as clean as a whistle. And the lack of a sensational signature is precisely what makes committee members sit up and take notice. Schilder looks in vain for an imitation of Western design and finds only 'a distinctive signal from Southeast Asia that gives us an idea of what's being made in that part of the world'. Wagemans, too, is impressed by the unique language spoken by Neri & Hu: 'There's a taste of something here that we can't identify, and it's bubbling up from the depths of their culture.'