

OCTOBER



ARMANI/MANZONI 31

PEYTON KNIGHT

JASON WU
KARL LAGERFELD
ROBERTA MELONI
DRIES KRELKAMP

SPACES Onda 11	24
MASSIMO GIORGETTI By Maggie Kelly	26
BRIAN ATWOOD By Jason Yezen	28
LUKE MEIER By Jason Yezen	30
BARBARA & LEIA By Ebonye Ray	32
FLORIANE DE SAINT PIERRE By Pierre A.M.	34
SIMON COSTIN By Peter Desantis	36
MARTIN ANDERSSON By Zurain Imam	38
SHIRLEY MULDOWNEY By Ebonye Ray	40
OUTDOOR By Kyle Johnson	42
APSE By Aaron Michael	44
ETTORE SOTTASS By Taylor Edward	56
THERMAE By Jorge Perez Ortiz	58
MARIO BOTTA By Ebonye Ray	72
TRABEATED By Philip Mench	76
NICOLAS ANDRÉ By Natalia Gouzenova	86
MARNI By Perwana	88
RUBBERG Special Marni F/W 2016-17	90
SHONA HEATH By Lucinda Ince	100
DIOS VAN HERPEN By Peter Desantis	104
PEEK-A-BOO Special Iris V. Harpen Architects	106
DRIES KREJIKAMP By Peter Gashier	116
STEF L SLUDGE Collection Menswear	118
LUIGI COLANI By Taylor Edward	130
SURFACE By Magdalena Lawiczak	132
KARL LAGERFELD Casa Malaparte	140
GOLDEN RATIO By Raúl Hidalgo	146
GAUDÍ La Pedrera Foundation	156
PRADA By Perwana	158
4.6 m x 7.6 m Special Prada F/W 2016-17	160
PRADA MARFA By Peter Gashier	176
LOOPHOLE By Taylor Tupy	178
PRESLEY GERBER By Harold Jenkins	188
ROBERTO CAVALLI By Harold Jenkins	190
LIMESTONE Special Roberto Cavalli F/W 16-17	192
PETER DUNDAS By Bradley Higgenbottom	202
MINDS OUT OF LIMITS By Jason Yezen	204
MATTEO THUN By Stephanie Summers	208
TALBOT By Oliver Lee Shippen	210
IN & OUT By Kyle Johnson	220
SIDELIGHT By Paul McLean	222
ETENDUE Special Still Life F/W 2016-17	232

MIU MIU By Perwana	242
WUNDERKAMMER By Taylor Tupy	244
PETER SHIRE By Kyle Johnson	254
BLANCA LI By Isaac Pérez Solano	256
DYLAN BROSNAN By Mario Saalmink	260
BLINDING GLARE Special Marc Jacobs F/W 16-17	264



BOB GRUEN By Eduardo Gión	276
CAULICULUS By Rebekah Campbell	280
MONCLER By Jason Guronen	290
REBAR Special Moncler & Friendswithyou	292
FRIENDSWITHYOU By Maggie Kelly	302
CELLA By Minoru Kaburagi	304
ERWIN WURM By Kyle Johnson	314
INDOOR By Kyle Johnson	318

CROWNED By Masha Mel	320
GERI By Jason Guronen	328
ROBERTA MELONI By Kyle Johnson	330
PHILOSOPHY By Perwana	334
DIAZOMA Special Philosophy F/W 2016-17	336
LORENZO SERAFINI By Lily Templeton	346
CARLO MOLLINO By Isaac Pérez Solano	348
STOLARKA By Sonia Szóstak	350
THE BUNKER By Eduardo Gión	360
SPALIER By Rene Fietzek	364
ALICE SPRINGS By Eduardo Gión	372
ISABEL COIXET By Eduardo Gión	374
SCOTT HOVE By Jessica Cooper	378
COMPASS TOOL By Joaquin Laguigue	382
ALESSANDRO MENDIDNI By Kyle Johnson	392
MARISCAL By Eduardo Gión	396
SOAKED By Sophie Mayanne	400
ZAHA HADID By Adrian de Banville	410
750 SKYLIGHTS Collections Womenswear	412
JAMES GOLDSTEIN By Harold Jenkins	422
JOHN LAUTNER By Peter Gashier	424

CONTENTS

ANTONINO CARDILLO By Zurain Imam	426
-------------------------------------	-----



BERNARD DUBOIS By Skye Grayson	428
STOEL By Alice Schillaci	430
RYAN GANDER By Harold Jenkins	440
ADRIAN JOFFE By Zurain Imam	444
GINGERBREAD By Takahito Sasaki	448
BILLY NAME By Eduardo Gión	458
DAGON JAMES By Eduardo Gión	462
MINDS IN HISTORY By Jason Yestenia	464
PAT CLEVELAND By Bradley Higgenbottom	468
R. ARAD & S. MARICH Talks	474
THE BUNNY MUSEUM By Stephanie Summers	478
CROCKET By Taylor Tupy	480
SCOTT BROMLEY By Eduardo Gión	490
PENUMBRA By Jack Waterlot	492
MARIPOL By Ilapnyc.com	502
ALEXANDER WANG By Perwana	506

P.U.U.C Special Alexander Wang F/W 16-17	508
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ALEXANDER WANG By Maggie Kelly	518
JASON WU By Adrian de Banville	520
BALUSTER By Virginie Khateeb	524
MANUEL OUTUMURO By Eduardo Gión	534
MODILLION By Ferry Van Der Nat	536
FERRAN ADRIA By Eduardo Gión	546
NANGA MAI By Harold Jenkins	554
TREND PANEL WOMEN Resort 2017	550
CASTING & FITTINGS Givenchy By Riccardo Tisci	554
BACKSTAGE By Kyle Johnson	564
PRADA S/S 2017	566
MARNI S/S 2017	568
TREND PANEL MEN S/S 2017	570
THE OFFICE Farida Khelifa	574





ANTONINO CARDILLO

Born in Sicily, Antonino Cardillo is considered one of the most important Architects of our era. After going to Rome and study Classical architecture, he has developed significant architectural works such as Nomura House in Japan or connected with Fashion as the boutique of Sergio Rossi in Milan. Antonino's vision has been showcased in different museums worldwide such as V&A in London.

"Light is architectural. It is sculptural" - Robert Wilson

Interviewed by Zurain Imami
Portrait by MIMO VISCONTI

Initially, what drove you to become an architect? Did you always see yourself designing and creating structures?

I spent my adolescence playing fantasy video games such as Labyrinth, Zac McKracken, Ultima IV, Forgotten Realms and Dragonlance. These fictional worlds opened up my imagination, creating the premise to see architecture as a narrative. But at a certain point, I recognized video games as a distraction that were passive, and I suppose I was attracted by architecture for its concurrence between magic and reality.

You are originally from Sicily. When one looks at Sicily's architectural heritage and culture, it is very eclectic, spanning from decorative structures, elaborate architectural forms, use of myriad materials and iconic mosaics. Did growing up there have a large influence in the way you design and view spaces?

My youth was populated with symbols which came from an ancient past. My imagination was also moulded by the desires of people that inhabited the island long time ago. I think Sicily is more syncretic than eclectic. Since Greek colonization, the island society was an idiosyncratic representation of the complexity of the ancient world, a blend of far away cultures. I think that such a Dionysian setting specifically influenced my personal way of interpreting the classical epoch.

What is your most marked characteristic?

I see architecture as an attempt to investigate forgotten meanings from the past. I am currently constructing an architectural codex which references to ideas of protection (the grotto) and eroticism (the arch). The grotto alludes to uterine protection and the arch to the phallus; both sacred origins of life. Thus such classical references, unconsciously seeded in the imaginations of people admonish us that other worlds also existed.

How would you describe your work process when you approach a project? Do you focus particularly on certain aspects of a project or is it an overall organic approach?

Architecture should aim to interact with anthropological values, unveiling the stories concealed in places. Thus for me, the deepest sense of architecture is in its philosophical and literal connotations rather than technical or functional achievements.

From your drawing board to the final execution of construction, installation and production, what is the most challenging aspect in creating your final vision?

It would be finding producers to make the architecture. Nowadays enlightened clients are rare ever, since the final aim of the global market is the monetary exploitation of ideas, culture is continuously banalized. Thus the difficult challenge for an architect today is to find sensitive producers inside such a confused and superficial society.

Your work spans several countries such as the United Kingdom, Japan and Italy, which ushers the issue of context. How do you focus on adapting a design or building to its surrounding cultural context?

As I said before, in most of the cases, the place guides my work's sensibility. I would say that each work of mine is the consequence of the place where it was constructed. Each work represents an investigation and emotional interpretation of the anthropological values of the site.

The aesthetic and formation of your designs simultaneously have a classical and minimalist touch. Do you purposely try to contrast these two together or is it an organic process?

I spent nine years studying classic architecture in Rome and once there I wondered how I could convey the significance of classic heritage to our present day. For this reason I am currently engaged in defining an architectural codex compatible with the things we have at our disposal nowadays. Perhaps for such a reason you can recognize a minimalist touch in my work. But I see minimalism just as a syntax, not as a style.

In your work and designs you heavily introduce the theme and essence of the grotto, an almost experimental volcanic after-touch. The span of your work seems to dwell in the sensory: touch, smell and acoustics, the primal instincts of man. What are you trying to achieve when you create such spaces and textures?

Since 2013, by constructing the House of Dust in Rome, I renounced the mise-en-scène of my narcissism that was characterized by the earlier computer-made projects of mine. Thus the House of Dust reminds us that architecture is mostly a physical experience. For such a reason its vault refers to the grotto as a remembrance of the primordial home where our senses were refined. Grotto is also a constant of past architecture. It unveils to us symbols that are able to bring back the timeless space of myth into the present day.

There is a strong sense of a cultural backdrop and narrative when one views your architecture.

"My idea of style is a consequence of the sense of time; and the sense of time expresses the idea of the permanence of life across the ages."

"I see architecture as an attempt to investigate forgotten meanings from the past."

In essence there is also an innate sense of time and journey when one looks at the spaces in your designs. Do you think it's significant to vocalize the concept of narrative and the original idea of inspiration in the space in order to make it memorable and significant to the viewer?

Architecture is a narrative. It should open up the imaginations of individuals by establishing a durable dialogue, in the same way it happens with a novel, music or cinema. Actually, architecture is more rich as it includes symbolism and subtext and architecture survives the times only if it succeeds in inhabiting the imaginations of people.

Good architecture reflects purpose; style a sense of time and emotion. What type of architecture do you strive to create?

Style, sense of time and emotion are aspects of the same singularity. My idea of style is a consequence of the sense of time and the sense of time expresses the idea of the permanence of life across the ages. What matters to me is why the elegance of architecture is able to survive beyond the ages.

Your work is quite distinctive, garnering success along with international acclaim and expansion. What do you make of it all and how do you envision the future of your company? If architecture is poetry then the lifestyle of an architect conditions the work he makes. I do not own an office. I am used to designing alone in beautiful places. I do not want to alter my freedom for a bourgeois status. The financial achievements of the company are irrelevant to me.

What do you think there is too much of or too little of? Architecture is a balance of parts. I do not see a place as having too little or too much.

What is your life mantra that you live by? When I am in doubt about something I often ask myself: "Would a countryman do it?"

"Architecture should aim to interact with anthropological values."