

# INTERIOR DESIGN<sup>TM</sup>

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*fashion: on the catwalk*



## Isn't It Romantic?

Nothing could be more flirty and feminine than Milan's Luisa Beccaria boutique,  
a confection by architect turned jewelry designer Nathalie Jean

*text: ian phillips photography: santi caleca*



*Previous spread:* Women and children can try on clothing in the mirrored fitting rooms at Milan's Luisa Beccaria boutique by Nathalie Jean Architecte. The resin floor owes its tint and shine to pale red and blue pigment, silver powder, and flower pollen.

*Top:* Evening wear hangs from an acrylic rod with crystal finials; it's suspended, in turn, from a chain of handblown glass beads. *Bottom:* A velvet-covered ottoman and a Murano glass chandelier, both custom, anchor the entry.

*Opposite:* For a vestibule between the cash desk and the younger area, Beccaria's artist friend Idarica Gazzoni designed mirrors shaped like a chandelier's drops.

Canadian-born Nathalie Jean originally went to Milan for only five months, to intern at Sottsass Associati. That was back in 1988. "I just ended up staying," she says. "It's such a wonderful country." Although her initial training was in architecture, nine years ago she added another string to her creative bow: jewelry design. It's more or less consumed her existence ever since. "My husband says it's not a passion—it's an obsession," she says with a laugh. "I work 14 hours a day, seven days a week." In Milan, her limited-edition pieces can be found at the trendy 10 Corso Como. One of her necklaces is in the permanent collection of the new Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Oh, and Donna Karan is a huge fan.

That said, the ebullient Jean does still find time for the odd interiors job, especially for an old friend. When it came time to renovate and expand Luisa Beccaria's fashion boutique, designed by Nathalie Jean Architecte in 1992, she naturally returned. "There's a symbiosis between Luisa and me," she says.

For starters, both designers believe in the importance of memory and continuity. Jean's own apartment is full of flea-market finds. "I love the idea that people have lived with things before you. I think it's so much richer and deeper than having something brand-new," she says. Likewise, for her professional projects, she's not a fan of the tabula rasa. "I've never liked the idea of wiping out everything and changing styles completely."

At Beccaria's shop, Jean was especially keen to preserve a number of the original elements. Ask her what the old boutique was like, and she'll tell you it was ultrafeminine:

"Luisa's fashion is the most romantic thing you've ever seen, so the store had to go with that." To capture something of the spirit of a Parisian couture atelier, the walls have →



*"The shop sparkles, Nathalie Jean says, like a 'crystal palace'—glass is present everywhere"*



*Left: The glass front door features custom crystal pulls mounted on steel bolts. Right: These glass-and-crystal pendant fixtures are Italian antiques.*

always been the palest of pinks, with delicate classical moldings.

Jean retained the niches where the clothing hangs but raised them and backed them with mirror. She also stuck to the floor plan of the existing part of the boutique but modified the facade. Previously, the five windows were just over 6 feet in height, barely enough for a mannequin. "It was sort of cramped and sad," she recalls. With the glass extended upward to the structural arches and radiators removed from the floor right inside, the windows now measure 12 feet high. To expand the boutique from 1,600 to 2,700 square feet, she ripped out the ground floor's workshop and storage rooms and the mezzanine's office. In their place today are four wonderfully airy spaces where decorative elements almost seem to float. "You go from feeling enclosed to something extremely light," she says. "I think it's important, in such a big space, to alternate sensations."

Overall, the shop sparkles, she says, like a "crystal palace." Glass is present everywhere: glass shelving, back-painted glass wall panels, and lots and lots of crystals. Door handles look like an enormous chandelier's oversize drops, 10 different types in all. There are also numerous actual chandeliers, some of them antique. To make the →





new, custom ones as ethereal as possible, she insisted that their armatures also be glass, rather than metal. When glass couldn't be used for handrails and clothing rails, because of strength reasons, she substituted acrylic. And when the span of certain rails was too long even for that, she painted steel rods in the shop's wall color and encased them in acrylic tubes.

Mirror clads the display stands and the cash desk as well as appearing to striking effect on faceted walls both outside and in all five changing rooms. "It's an incredible effect. Because of the endless reflections, you don't really understand what's going on," Jean says. Equally magical is a wall studded with mirror inserts shaped, again, like drops from a giant chandelier.

Jean admits to being "fanatical about every single detail." She not only designed most of the furniture but also developed incredibly complicated, unpredictable finishes. For the

floor, she mixed pale red and blue pigment, silver powder, and flower pollen in resin. "When we started pouring the floor, we didn't have any idea how it was going to turn out," she recalls. For the walls, she added the pigments to transparent paint and applied the result over a white ground. "It's really subtle, a glossy surface that seems to

move," she enthuses.

Jean calls the look a contrast to "all the white, chrome, and wengé you see today. The hand of the craftsmen is truly evident everywhere. For our job, Italy is the best place on earth." ■

*Top:* A vintage armchair, now covered in velvet, sits beside the cash desk. *Bottom:* A fitting room contains a custom light fixture with a frame of hand-painted steel and a diffuser of acrylic lined in gauze. *Opposite:* The interior door of this evening-wear fitting room leads to a storage area.

- 1 WOMEN'S WEAR
- 2 EVENING WEAR
- 3 FITTING ROOM
- 4 COURTYARD
- 5 CHILDREN'S WEAR
- 6 CASH WRAP
- 7 BRIDAL AREA





## Ron Arad Associates

"It Takes Two," page 200

principal: **Ron Arad.**

**completed projects:** Duomo Hotel in Rimini, Italy; a guest floor at Hotel Puerta America in Madrid; a Maserati showroom in Modena, Italy; Y's clothing boutique in Tokyo; products for Alessi, Artemide,

Cappellini, Cassina, Draenert Studio, Driade, Fiam Italia, Kartell, Moroso, Swarovski, and Vitra; limited-edition pieces for the Gallery Mourmans in Maastricht, Netherlands.

**current projects:** A museum in Holon, Israel.

**honors:** Gio Ponti International Design Award; Barcelona Primavera International Award for Design; Salon du Meuble Designer of the Year.

**born:** Arad is a native of Tel Aviv.

**bred:** He is also a graduate of London's Architectural Association.

62 Chalk Farm Road, London NW1 8AN, U.K.; 44-20-7284-4963; ronarad.com.



## Carbondale

"Luxury Goods," page 232

principal: **Eric Carlson.**

**completed projects:** Ten Louis Vuitton boutiques in Europe and Asia; a Celine boutique in Paris; penthouse apartments and Celux private club in Tokyo.

**current projects:** TAG Heuer headquarters in La-

Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland; residences in Paris and Japan; a boutique hotel in Israel; a boutique hotel and spa, 10 luxury villas, and a winery, all in Uruguay; custom wooden furniture.

**honors:** Outstanding-design award from Seoul Metropolitan Government.

**his bag:** On the road 75 days a year, Carlson travels with a Louis Vuitton overnight bag.

**in his bag:** He never leaves home without his toothpaste.

54 Rue Etienne Marcel, 75002 Paris, France; 33-1-44-82-76-76; carbondale.fr.



## Established

"Book Smart/Street Smart," page 248

principal: **Sam O'Donahue.**

**completed projects:** Robert Kree hair salon, Avalon nightclub, and XL lounge, all in New York; bottles for Evian water and Banana Republic perfume.

**current projects:** A second Robert Kree in New

York; a boutique hotel in Moscow; a vodka bottle.

**relatives (close):** Monkeying around with his three sons.

**relatives (distant):** Visiting his mother on her finca in Spain.

95 Horatio Street, 334, New York, NY 10014; 646-262-7981; establishedny.com.



## Nathalie Jean Architecte

"Isn't It Romantic?" page 240

principal: **Nathalie Jean.**

**completed projects:** Luisa Beccaria in Moscow; an apartment and beauty salon in Milan; products for Driade, Rosenthal, and Abet.

**current projects:** A jewelry collection in gold, ru-

bies, and diamonds.

**first:** Jean started designing jewelry after playing around with folded paper, which she gold-leafed and turned into a necklace.

**first:** In 2000, she curated a groundbreaking Jean Prouvé exhibition at Galleria Carla Sozzani in Milan.

39-02-2900-0636; nathaliejean.com.



## Patrick Jouin

"Sparkle and Stardust," page 208

principal: **Patrick Jouin.**

**completed projects:** Bar du Plaza Athénée and restaurants Alain Ducasse au Plaza Athénée, La Terrasse Montaigne, and BE Boulangé-pâtisseries, all in Paris; a plastic-products factory in Nantes, France;

furnishings for Cassina, Fermob, Kartell, Ligne Roset, and Materialise.

**current projects:** Jules Verne restaurant at the Eiffel Tower, Charm & More time-share, and a rental system for urban cyclists, all in Paris; Auberge de l'Île restaurant in Illhaeusern, France; a house in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**honors:** Maison & Objet Créateur de l'Année; Enseigne d'Or.

**shopping destination:** Jouin buys his signature jackets from Yohji Yamamoto and Prada.

**shopping around:** He likes to browse at Parisian bookstore La Hume.

8 Passage de la Bonne Graine, 75011 Paris, France; 33-1-55-28-89-20. patrickjouin.com.



## Fabio Novembre

"Land of the Free," page 226

principal: **Fabio Novembre.**

**completed projects:** Meltin' Pot showroom in Milan. Bisazza showrooms in Milan, Berlin; New York; and Barcelona, Spain. Una Hotel Vittoria in Florence, Italy. Tardini boutique in New York.

Furniture for Cappellini and Meritalia.

**current projects:** Meltin' Pot showroom in Paris. Stuart Weitzman boutiques in Los Angeles; Boston; Monaco; Capri, Italy; and Saint-Tropez, France.

**down to earth:** "I make gifts of pins to ensure I never put on airs."

**in the clouds:** "I want to love till I die."

26 Via Perugino, 20135 Milan, Italy; 39-02-504104; novembre.it.



## RB Architect

"Book Smart/Street Smart," page 248

principal: **Rafael Berkowitz.**

**completed projects:** Yujin restaurant, a condominium facade and lobby, and residences, all in New York; Dior in Los Angeles and Paris.

**current projects:** Chris Chase salon, an office, a res-

taurant, and residences, all in New York; a house in Cutchogue, New York.

**south:** Berkowitz hails from Caracas, Venezuela.

**north:** He moved to the U.S. in 1990 to attend the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation.

445 West 19th Street, 6F, New York, NY 10011; 212-691-5922; rbarchitect.com.



## Rogers Marvel Architects

"Theory and Practice," page 216

principal: **Robert Rogers.**

principal: **Jonathan Marvel.**

**completed projects:** Stephen Gaynor School and Ballet Hispanico, Studio Museum in Harlem, and New York Stock Exchange security and street-scapes, all in New York; Pratt Institute School of Architecture and 14 Townhouses in Brooklyn, New York; South Fork Museum and Natural Center in Southampton, New York; boutiques and offices for Theory nationally and Kate Spade worldwide.

