

substance+STYLE

Surface

THE 9th annual
**AVANT
GUARDIAN**
ENVISIONING THE FUTURE
OF FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY

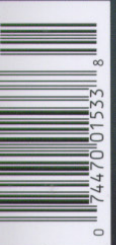
- 62**
URBAN OUTFITTERS
DILLER SCOFIDIO + RENFRO *galvanize the west side of Manhattan with their plans for the High Line*
- SEASON PREMIERE**
JUAN CARLOS OBANDO *takes L.A. style beyond the red carpet and into fashion's front row*
- FREE FORM**
Fashion designer MARIA CORNEJO *cuts her line from a different cloth*

The Transformer

Ever observant of objects in flux, Dror Benshetrit turns a user-focused philosophy into designs that reveal much more than meets the eye

Story ARIC CHEN *Portrait* NICK+CHLOE

THE BALANCE: JESSICA
ELLER GETS A LEG UP



Surface November/December 2006
Dror Benshetrit

Dror 225 WEST 39TH STREET
6TH FLOOR
NEW YORK · NY 10018

While his name might not roll so easily off the untrained tongue, the design world is abuzz over the work of Dror Benshetrit. At 29 years old, the Israeli-born founder of Studio Dror has emerged as one of New York's most promising designers in everything from apparel and interiors to ceramics and furniture. He first gained attention for Vase of Phases, a collection of porcelain vessels introduced by Rosenthal in 2005. Taming otherwise complex concepts with the simplest of gestures, Benshetrit whacked original vases with a hammer in order to create the cracked and misshapen mold from which he cast the series. From this deceptively simple idea came an intricate result: The vases embody both fragility and resilience, "simultaneously capturing a telling moment of transformation."

In many ways, transformation defines Benshetrit's overall philosophy. Curious about objects in flux, he is sensitive to the inherent poetry of movement and the pragmatism

that guides a user's personalized alterations of an object. "People like change," the designer says. "We're always adapting to different situations, so it's logical that our environments do the same." Earlier this year, he introduced a table for the Italian manufacturer Sintesi that morphs into a writing desk with a flip of its top. He also applied this adaptive design sensibility to a new line from Skins, a sneaker company for which he is providing comprehensive branding services. "The idea came from observing people's use – or, technically, misuse – of footwear," explains Benshetrit. He had noticed how people cram their feet into shoes without untying them first. To accommodate this behavior, he designed a shoe that consists of a molded structural sole, or "bone," over which you can easily stretch external, sock-like "skins." You can slide the interchangeable skins off like a slipper, and the shoe snaps back into shape when you put it back on. "Instead of trying to change behavior," says Benshetrit, "I wanted to turn misuse into proper use."



WALL HISTORY: (Clockwise from left) Yigal Azrouel's Meatpacking district showroom plays off the raw New York loft aesthetic, as does Levi's NYC Footwear showroom, *Photo Ernst van der Beek*; the Pick Chairs for Sintesi become wall coverings as well as paintings



His vanguard schooling at Holland's prestigious Design Academy Eindhoven helped hone his knack for telling stories through design, exploring the narrative power behind a user's interaction with an object. Upon graduation, Benshetrit did a stint in the Paris office of the school's director, Li Edelkoort, the influential trend forecaster who taught him to view objects within the continuum of culture. "I want to create icons – things that don't just come and go with the season," he says. Benshetrit came to New York in 2002, where he quickly established himself in a network of top-tier clients. He has even won the heart of Michele Caniato, a design-world powerbroker who represents Benshetrit alongside the likes of Philippe Starck, Marcel Wanders and Yves Béhar. "Dror has the problem-solving ingenuity of a seasoned industrial designer and the soul of an artist," says Caniato.

True to form, Benshetrit believes his ideas can be applied at any scale. And, with several retail and showroom interiors under his belt – he designed spaces for Levi's and Kiehl's – he now has his sights set on architecture. Exploring his trademark concepts of collapsibility, transportability, and easy assembly, only on a much broader scope, Studio Dror is currently discussing a new prefab housing concept with developers. The designer is also involved in the remodeling of the 16th Street Sephardic Synagogue in Manhattan. There, Benshetrit plays off the duality between the religious tradition and modern lifestyle of its members through custom-made, laser-cut furniture with reproductions of traditional Jewish ornamentation.



As if this was not enough, Benshetrit is hoping to make inroads in the area of transportation as well. The designer has been commissioned by Surface to turn a vintage 1977 Airstream trailer into a mobile bar and lounge – an appropriate metaphor for a designer who's on a roll. "Many people will tell you that Dror's a great designer but talent isn't enough without hard work and passion," says Paola Antonelli, curator of architecture and design at New York's MoMA. "Dror is just beginning to prove what he's capable of." **AC**