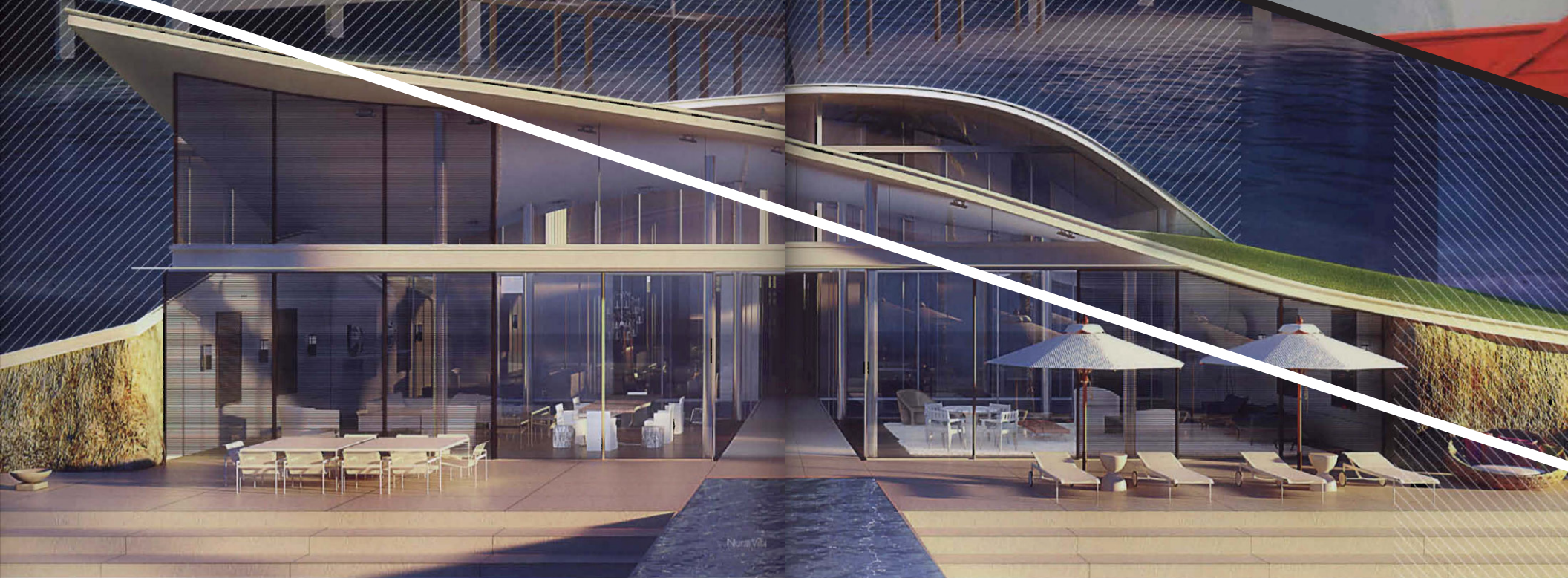


EXTRAORDINARY MACHINE

Dror's latest design contributions

are anything but ordinary.

WORDS BY



"I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china..."
—Oscar Wilde

Design is the art form that impregnates every part of our lives. It challenges the way we see the world, and the tension between aesthetics and functionality will usually make for some pretty exciting creations. I suppose this is what that old bastard Wilde was talking about in the above quote: as the founder of the aesthetic movement, for Wilde functionality came a distant second to achieving pure visual orgasm.

I wonder what the author of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) would have made of the output of Dror, the multidisciplinary design company launched in 2002 by Dror Benshetrit? The Israeli-born

designer has said in interviews that he has "no interest in adding another ordinary object to the market," and that he gets his ideas "from physics, from movement, from observing people's natural behaviors, from fashion and from my heart." All of which seems pretty close to Wilde's chosen philosophy of "Art for art's sake." I'll go out on a limb here and suggest Dror's seemingly effortless blend of style and functionality would have caused the world's most famous dandy to reconsider the worth of his blue china altogether.

For the outsider, venturing into the world of design can be a pretty daunting experience. It seems that suddenly you have wandered into a parallel, alien universe. I suppose that this is down the prevalence of design-speak. Descriptions are universally cryptic and vague, and couched in what seems to be some kind of secret

code. Take, for example, Dror's Nurai Island project. This set of ultra-luxurious residential villas on the 1.5-kilometer island sits just 12 miles off the coast of Abu Dhabi. Browsing the literature I found myself reading about the client's need to be "languorously alone," and how the "calculated breaches in the surface reposition points of view and referee streams of activity by subordinating it into a larger topographic framework."

All of which had this particular writer reaching for his dictionary while simultaneously scratching his head. I mean, come on—tell me what it LOOKS like!

Thankfully, Dror has some truly breathtaking images available, and designs that more than make up for the obfuscatory hyperbole

(see, I can do it, too!). The architecture here is a visual marvel: free-flowing, curvaceous and organic lines that rise and fall like the undulations of the sea. Infinity pools sit front and center, seemingly defying the laws of gravity. The villas themselves have become mini-islands, an ultramodern take on Superman's Fortress of Solitude, with the surrounding skies and clear water seamlessly integrated into the design.

The buildings blend flawlessly with the natural surroundings of the island itself—from a certain angle the habitats almost become invisible. The gently curving grass-covered roof acts as both camouflage and an opportunity to feed that niggling urge to walk barefoot across your own roof. Estates and villas come with outdoor bar-beque areas, private gardens, beaches and pools, and gourmet



Buildings blend flawlessly with the natural surroundings of the island itself.



Dror

kitchens. Besides these high-end residences, the island will also have a boutique luxury hotel with 31 beachfront estates and 60 waterfront villas.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 70 percent of the project sold out within two days, to the tune of approximately \$750 million. Selling for a record-breaking \$21,525 per square inch, the Nurai project will be inhabitable in about 2.5 years, a signal that this project has been an unparalleled success for the young designer.

Audacious projects like these have won the Dror Benshetrit design house a solid following. In just six years, Dror has amassed an impressive and varied client list on the back of its groundbreaking and maddeningly desirable creations. Mass-market clients like Bombay Sapphire, Puma and Levi's sit alongside purveyors of luxury items like Bentley, Swarovski and Maya Romanoff. The guiding prin-

ciple of bringing "poetry to function" can be clearly seen in objects of desire such as the delightful and playful collapsible champagne glass ("an instillation in your hand"), the sleek, ultramodern home furnishings, or the Swarovski *Floor Chandelier*, whose sweeping frame and 6,400 Swarovski crystals suddenly make the traditional chandelier seem clunky and old-fashioned. Particular favorites of this writer include the *Pick Chair*, which transforms from a functional, minimalist chair into a piece of art capable of hanging on the wall of even the most cramped Manhattan apartment, and the stunning *Vase of Phases Collection*, in which the vases themselves are subjected to shattering before being reconstructed into shapes that are simultaneously alien and beautiful.

After the success of Nurai, more architectural projects are in the firm's pipeline, including a high-end Vietnamese restaurant slated to open in early 2009 and a private residence in Costa Rica. Dror is

currently working on a piece for Luminaire's Paperlove show, which will take place at the prestigious Art Basel in Miami this December. Although still hidden away from prying eyes, the philosophy behind this new piece seems to be a reclaiming of paper as a structural force, now that its authority as a source of information has been undermined in this fast-paced, digital age.

The design house's previous Art Basel showing was a breathtaking collaboration with Bentley, which blended video art and choreography to create a stunning film clip in which the contours and construction of Bentley were elevated into a kind of fetishistic, ballet performance.

After these significant successes Dror Benshetrit is showing no signs of slowing down. Although the design house is characteristically tight-lipped about upcoming work, when I asked the man himself about what the future holds for him, he responded with an eye

toward bigger and more grandiose projects.

"For the past six years I have been able to experiment with ideas, forms, shapes and materials. In the future, I simply want to continue enjoying this freedom, but would of course like to keep increasing the scale to which my projects can be executed. Today, I am fortunate enough to work with clients that for the rest of my career I can consider the best in the industry."

In short, the future of Dror is limited only by its founder's imagination. And from the evidence on display we don't have to worry about that particular well drying up any time soon...

All New: Images courtesy of Dror