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PRESENTING FAMOUS NAMES

Peter Marino plans in New York and Röthlisberger builds the elements in Gümligen.

Author: Thérèse Balduzzi

Röthlisberger's work is extremely precise and that makes an architect very, very happy", says Peter Marino with a roaring laugh. "The difference between their plans and those from other carpenters is like night and day." The New York architect first came across the company in 1994 when he was designing the interior for the Feldpausch fashion boutique in Zurich. From then on, the prize-winning architect has repeatedly called in the Swiss precision carpentry and joinery company when there is a really tricky task. And Peter Marino Architect (PMA), a company employing a staff of 130, certainly has some of those. Peter Marino is an avowed material fetishist, who keeps an archive of antique fabrics in his office and loves using and combining materials in unusual ways. Marino designs not only architecture and interiors but also furniture, so there is no limit to the number of experiments he can carry out. Stone, wood, bronze, textiles, leather, hand painted finishes, plaster, textures – he enjoys working with warm materials. Peter Marino explains his preferences, "I am known for modern architecture which comprises luxurious, tactile materials. Many contemporary architects use concrete, metal and plastic. Concrete in a multi-storey car park is fine but not in a private home. And plastic often ages badly." Marino also distances himself from trend materials because they can look so passé after a few years.

BOOSTING SALES BY DESIGN The 59 year old New Yorker has long gone against the grain. Thirty years ago, Andy Warhol, a friend of Marino's, entrusted him with the renovation of both his Upper East Side town house and the legendary Factory near Union Square. But, when the founder of Barneys – still a trend-setting fashion store nowadays – asked Marino to design for him, the course for his future career was set. Although at that time a serious designer who designed a boutique interior was seriously frowned upon, Marino finally accepted the commission. Today the most luxurious brands Chanel, Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Calvin Klein and Donna Karan are among his clients. His designs can be found not only in Fifth Avenue but also in the most famous shopping streets in Tokyo, Rome, Paris and Hong Kong. Giorgio Armani even commissioned Marino with the reconstruction of his private flat in Milan.

In terms of boosting sales, Peter Marino discovered architecture's potential long before retail design became chic for enterprising architects. He designed a ten-storey "Tower of Light" for the Chanel boutique in Tokyo where fibre optics light the façade in a network of irregular, horizontal and vertical shimmering lines. The pattern echoes the chunky tweed material used in Chanel's two-piece suits. By contrast, geometric lines dominate the interior of the boutique. The striking staircase is edged in black; reminiscent of the packaging for the legendary Chanel No. 5 perfume.

ARCHITECTURE, INTERIOR DESIGN, FURNITURE Questioned about his working methods, Marino answers: "I always try to find a central concept or primary idea. However, a great deal just develops organically. Sometimes a sample of material lying around triggers a new idea. On the other hand, a concept which sounds great may not turn out well in reality." Louis Vuitton opened a boutique in Fifth Avenue, New York in 2004, and Peter Marino created a wall in the middle of the four-storey building comprising internally-lit glass blocks, laid out like a chessboard. A wooden staircase climbs through the four storeys along the wall and offers a extensive view of the floors below. The luxury bags and cases are arranged in uniform shelving with rectangular openings. There are antique Louis Vuitton trunks

hanging in the air in front of the wall above the shelves. The staggered arrangement complements the bright, centrally-positioned wall and can best be seen when customers climb the stairs between the floors. It also creates a seamless link between the different storeys.

The term to describe the most important element of Marino's work is integration. He integrates furnishings such as shelves and doors so that they become parts of the wall. But he also integrates art in his designs. He recommends to his clients where to hang or position works of art and which pieces by which artists they should select. He does this not only for private houses or offices but also for luxury boutiques. After all, Marino also designs a great deal of furniture himself.

WORKING WITH RÖTHLISBERGER Offices for a private bank on the thirty-eighth floor of the New York Seagram Buildings are an example of such a Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art) carried out in 2003. Built by Mies van der Rohe in 1958, the Seagram Buildings are listed buildings and that is part of the challenge. It means that the windows and radiators located in front of them may not be altered in any way and the ceiling raster must remain unchanged. The regulations are an attempt to retain uniformity in the building's exterior appearance. The client's precise concept created further challenges: he did not want any visible door handles, buttons or other fittings. Nor did he want any rails on the floor or ceiling.

Marino designed the foyer, an open-plan office, an office for the secretary and the director, and a conference room. Wood elements, which are in some cases mobile but uniform in appearance, provide the partitions. He engaged Röthlisberger, who manufactured the wall cladding, partition walls, doors, fitted cupboards and sideboards and also helped solve technical problems. Marino used one of his favoured material mixes: wooden doors bordered with aluminium and pillars in a metal casing. The elements had to fit in with the existing ceiling raster. Roland Keller from Röthlisberger explains that "In order to achieve this, we produced a metal skeleton as sub-assembly for the partition walls and provided the workers with precise specifications for their work on site."

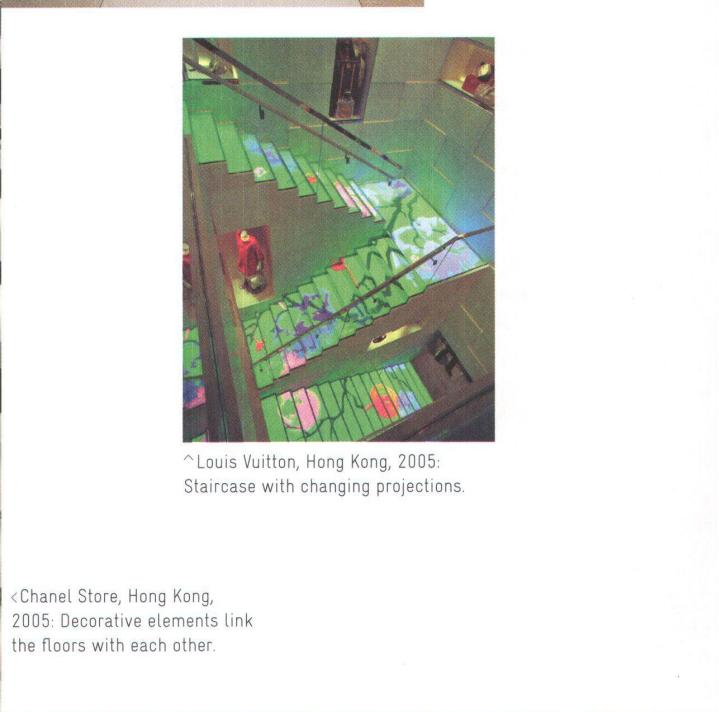
Another challenge was presented by the sliding glass doors which separate the conference room and the director's office. They are operated by pressing a button and are almost invisible as they do not have a rail or metal frame. Peter Marino remarks that "Other carpenters do not want to work with glass because it is not their speciality and they do not want to take any risks. That is, of course, understandable but because Röthlisberger does not shy away from such tasks, it makes working with the company such a positive experience."





^Private bank, New York, 2003:
Waiting room, perfection to the last detail.
Photos: Manuel Vázquez Fernández, Madrid

<Private bank, New York, 2003:
The fittings are designed
to suit the ceiling raster in the
Seagram Building.



^Louis Vuitton, Hong Kong, 2005:
Staircase with changing projections.

<Chanel Store, Hong Kong,
2005: Decorative elements link
the floors with each other.