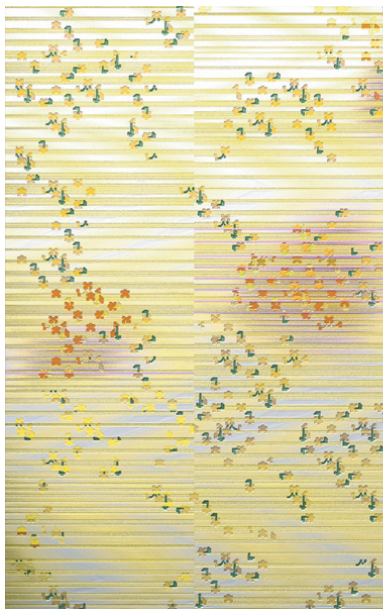


Sandro Alberti, organizer of fen-om, has just unveiled his new design for hospitality wallpaper, 'Flor en Flor, Digital' ['Flower in Flower, Digital']. The design obtained 1st-place category as part of a contest sponsored by *Wallcovering Source* and *Interior Design* magazine. In this interview, Sandro shares his experiences in the design process, from concept to development of a market sample that will form part of the *Source One* offerings [a product category of *Wallcovering Source*].



Laura Jacott- Hi, Sandro. It's nice to have you back in Guadalajara, as always.

Sandro Alberti- Sure. Always back. Always returning from Southern California, where I spend time collecting knowledge, technology, 'little things' to bring back to our home town.

LJ- Although this time there was a slight change of plans; a modification brought about by good design...

SA- And maybe even a career change. Indeed, the recent award, presented by *Wallcovering Source* and *Interior Design* magazine, brought me all the way to Las Vegas. It's all desert, you know, from Nevada to coastal California, and even transportation and communication networks connect LA and Las Vegas (LV?) intimately, but that thematic city [Las Vegas] is quite a particular case.

LJ- Interesting; I have a few questions about the wallpaper, but tell me, what seems so 'particular' about that place?



SA- Well, primarily, it is a big diagram of confusion, within which conspire mechanisms of scale, divergence, juxtaposition... It's almost as if it had emerged as a physical-architectural representations of linguistic games (metaphor, analogy, or any of the rhetorical tools, etc.). And, well, without digressing too much, this 'quality' of Las Vegas was a fundamental part of the presentation of this award that I received. In the first place, the award was presented at the enormous HD-2006 conference ['Hospitality Design'], in the midst of all the activities and flows associated with such a context. Furthermore, the presentation already formed part of the award itself, which included a weekend stay at the Venetian hotel. Thus, the first day was structured by activities that were 'professional' (presentation and explanation of the design), 'leisure' (massages, gym, walks, relax-time by the pool), and 'hybrid' (receptions, parties, dinner; moments of social interaction with the event organizers). And all of these occurred in places quite removed/isolated from each other.

LJ- Well, I hope this was only on the first day, so that you could enjoy your weekend getaway. Although I feel that this type of accelerated rhythm is almost a necessary part of a trip to Las Vegas, as opposed to a period of rest in Bali.

SA- Of course. I enjoyed all of it, especially knowing that I can always return easily, from Los Angeles.

LJ- And, would you go back?

SA- Well, I hadn't been in Las Vegas in several years. But, more and more, I think I have 'evolved' towards a sort of adaptation with Las Vegas. In the architectural professional field, in theory, we have the texts of Robert Venturi, about Las Vegas, about a 'thematic' architecture as well as issues of façade and surface, and in some sense, the 'metropolitan'. And having seen the 'original', the 'real' of Egypt, Paris, Hollywood, Venice, New York, since so many years ago, I felt quite comfortable with the funny, invented re-presentations in Las Vegas. And, in several cases, much of this 'falseness' is very well produced. And I think that much appreciation of the 'modified-real' was important in the design that I presented for wallpaper production.

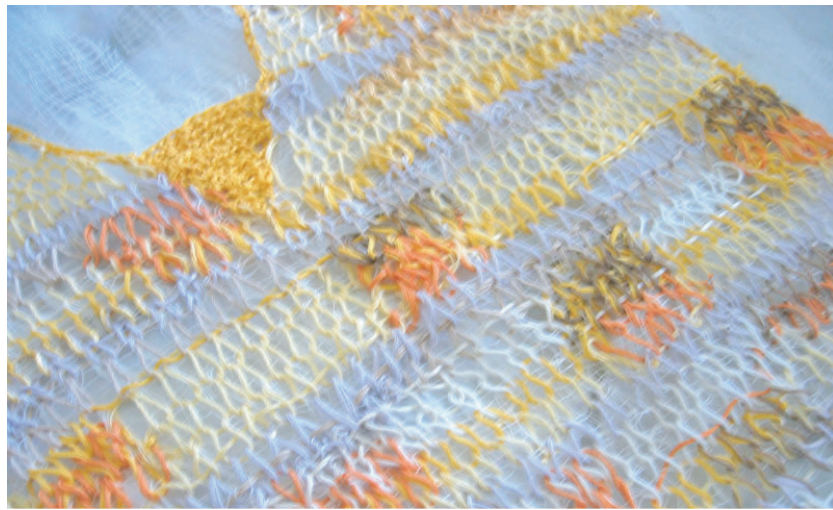
LJ- Ah, yes, the design. You know, I always liked it, since you first showed it to me a few months ago. Elegant, somewhat exotic. You had shared with me that some people find it 'oriental', although its origins lie in the British Victorian.

SA- Yes. I was surprised by much of this, by the various individual perceptions. I have already produced a brief summary, as I'm fond of doing, that hints at the various reasons for the design. And maybe I will never really know them all, but today I would say the following: there was always a mathematical aspect, and a mythical/poetic aspect. These are 2 that I tend to combine, because they allow me to remain 'clean', contemporary, but also interesting (and interested). In this case, the mathematical develops in a deep analysis of repeating patterns (necessary in the design of wallpaper), and optical illusions (mechanisms that are both structured and anti-structural). The 'poetic' emerges from the origin-myth of 'granny' wallpaper designs developed at the end of the 19th century. From these I extracted texture and 2 types of 'florid' elements (one, typical, of enormous flowers with shapely leaves, and the other a field of tiny flowers, also well known). These 2 I combined in a manner inspired by Salvador Dalí's 'Lincoln'(close-up one can appreciate the mini-flowers, and from afar these blend together to form flowers at a larger scale). And, well, 'Lincoln's Portrait' is already a pixelated work, and this may have influenced my decision to arrive, at the smallest scale, to an effect of flowers composed by square pixels (although, in my case, as a digital designer, it was logical to consider the

super-magnified image, as in any Photoshop case, as an agglomeration of these small squares). In the end, the pixels help to connect the 'naturalistic' images with the necessary orthogonal matrix of the wallpaper, and they provide a contemporary aesthetic. This connection, between the 'natural' and the 'mathematical' is something that our friend Susana Masso noted, at that lunch we shared a month ago. She reminded me that I had already done something similar, years ago, in the design of a pattern of flowers that formed part of a Web page; those flowers had been designed to form part of the 'mathematical' matrix of their digital context. And regarding the Asian look, I think I see it too, although it was not intentional. At the final moment of detailing, perhaps fascinated by the 'golden' quality of recent hotels in Las Vegas, I decided to incorporate a certain glow and color, and silky texture, and certain depth. These, in their particular combination, provide a certain 'elegant' quality reminiscent of Asian screens and furniture, gold-leafed and lacquered.

LJ- And I suppose that every judge would have had personal reasons for their selection. Did you have a chance to meet jurors in Las Vegas?

SA- Yes, some were there. All in all, the jury panel had been made up of university professors, editors of international magazines, and vice-presidents of various companies involved with hotels (Gettys Group, Disney, etc.). It was a good group. And it seems that the decision was unanimous, a fact that made me feel good. What they mostly liked was the balance they saw in the design, between 'richness' and 'formality'. And although my intentions regarding scale had been underlying in the design, many of them already saw a potential for presenting the design at various scales ('enormous halls', versus 'bathrooms', for example).



LJ- I think you get to that balance from your architectural background. I know that in so many other projects, you either arrive at that balance in the work itself, as in the case of furniture or building design. But I also love those moments in which you complement a design of a certain type, with another that tends to be much more playful... Which is, well, what happened also in this design, with the design of a sweater-vest to wear at the award ceremony.

SA- Sure you had to mention that. And, yes, that type of thing is my thing, something that I want people to know, although I'm always a bit embarrassed. Just about a week ago I participated in a discussion panel in LA, on 'the creative professional future'. At that time I explained to the audience that it is important to take risks, and feel a bit embarrassed. Which is the reason why I bring my artistic production to very public places (airports, coffee shops, etc.), where that type of activity is unexpected. The sweater, which was based on a technique of 'virtual knitting' that was new to me, I produced during several visits to Starbucks in Santa Monica, where people looked at me thinking "how odd!" And, of course, the product itself, like the sweater-vest, is conceived to produce a certain effect, to bring people's focus to the creative process, beyond the easily-consumed product-image. And it turned out pretty well, I think. There you see me wearing it, at the presentation.

LJ- And it's quite 'ad hoc', since that piece, in its knitted materiality, is also part of other recent investigations of yours, regarding the origins of architectural walls (as per Gottfried Semper's texts) in the primitive knotted screens that would hang from branches, and which in themselves included what eventually became removed from the wall: the wallpaper.

SA- Something that always interested me in regards to someone like Adolf Loos, within the modernist 'game'. But that is a topic for another time. At this time, as an architect, I console myself by knowing that, although for a while I may be known as a designer of wallpaper, I maintain myself close to architectural considerations.



A more complete description of 'Flor en Flor, Digital' is available at:  
<http://data.fen-om.com/wallpaper>

Inquiries: Stacey Tarkington, TRI-KES: [s.tarkington@tri-kes.com](mailto:s.tarkington@tri-kes.com)

Laura Jacott is graphic designer and integral collaborator of fen-om, collaborative organization devoted to non-profit diffusion of information. Contact: [laura@fen-om.com](mailto:laura@fen-om.com)