World of Wanders

Internationally renowned for his furniture and interiors, Marcel Wanders is used to travelling the globe. We catch up with him in New York. “I have nothing to lose. I was also very happy when I was 20.”

Text: Hanneke Seesing
Photography: Paul Bellant
The first thing that strikes me about Marcel Wanders(3), as we shake hands on a sunny winter's day in downtown New York, is his boundless energy. The internationally successful designer flies in from Milan the day before our interview, where he presented his Lounge Chair for Louis Vuitton, as part of the Dutch Design Week collection, during Design Miami. After having spent a long day posing for photos on the streets of New York, he asks if he can make calls to fill up the two spare hours in his busy afternoon schedule. "I'll be there between here and there; and I would like to meet him." And: "Does the hotel gym also have weight-training facilities?" Before energetically making his way to the end of The Standard hotel in the East Village for the final shot. "My thesis pretty out of control," he says. "There's always a lot going on. And if there isn't, I'll make something happen. If you're in such an intense way, there are more important things than sleep. I can easily get by on ten hours a night. For some reason another, I have a great deal of energy. Not only for work, but also - and especially - for living. I used to be a tremendous workaholic. Today, I use my energy more holistically. However, this energy is unsustainable. I want to push things hard." 

"Perfectionists spend too much time on irrelevant details"

These are definitely not empty words. After settling down on a huge couch in his MoMa showroom, which Wanders opened in New York in the spring of 2016, he enthusiastically talks about becoming the Mendelssohn Hotel in Doha, three projects he is working on with Louis Vuitton, his latest exhibition Permeets display at New York's Friedman Benda gallery until April, his line of sunglasses for Balenciaga in 2014, and his impressive art publications in Time, Museum of the Moving Image. The 15-kg Iron Time tribute to the 17th century French masterpieces in the Gallery of Honour of Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, and more the latest materials, the most innovative techniques and individual testimonials from experts across a variety of fields. "The book focuses on how the great masterpieces of the past shape the way we look at the world today. To meet the future, the past is sometimes forgotten, yet it is essential. Without it, whatever we make today won't be important tomorrow," Wanders diligently worked on the book for three years, but he is far from being a perfectionist, he stresses. "Perfectionism is not the same as aiming for very high quality. Perfectionism is something for insecure people. I think you should allow yourself the opportunity to work out what truly matters. You shouldn't cling to irrelevant matters due to insecurity. Perfectionism doesn't exist. Perfectionists spend too much time on irrelevant details, that's just boring, leading to horrible design." 

Nothing to lose
Since Wanders broke through in 1996 with his Knotted Chair – a chair made of hand-knotted rope – the international design world has been at his feet. The New York Times praised him as the "Lady Gaga of the design world", and Fast Company proclaimed him one of the 25 Leaders of Change. He attributes his success...
“This energy is unstoppable. I want to push things hard.”


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Marvel Wanders

“I never worry about running out of inspiration; ideas will always come the next day”

with learning. I must have quite a few. I often continue to refresh myself and keep trying to understand the world. One way is by recently completing an MFA in Hollywood to develop his business skills, “I want to take my creativity to a different level. Some of the ideas I have will not help me achieve that. So I look for other ways. During the MBA, I met a totally different group of people, which was fantastic, and helped me to grow as a person.” In his long career, he’s never have experience of designers - block. As an designer, I have every day’s job, I’m not a performer, giving him all on stage every night. I never worry about running out of inspiration; ideas will always come the next day.

Wanders’ impeccable sense of style extends to his wardrobe, too. “It’s quite a lot. It’s a shame not having to be dressed nicely. It’s great to dress yourself. Why not. It’s not about you. Your sense of personal attraction and taste.” When I was 30, I suddenly realized myself. I wasn’t all over the place, and I thought to myself: “How could I have been so busy working not to notice? Why didn’t I find something enough to fix this?” I felt that I had been dishonest to myself. So I called the school for an interview. It was a day and chose the easiest working method, because I felt that I had to earn the time to get my teeth right. It took three and a half years, and the weekly visits really felt like ‘me-time’. It was around this time that I also started giving more attention to how I look. Fashion isn’t important to Wanders; but clothes are, although he admits he is a little more relaxed than before, when it comes to his clothing.

In a nutshell

Marcel Wanders was born on 12 July 1963 in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. He graduated with honours from the Academy of Art in Amsterdam and is now among the world’s top five leading interior and product designers. His international breakthrough came in 1994 with, amongst other designs, his Stacked Chair, a hand-formed chair purchased by prominent museums such as the MOMA in New York. He is co-founder and creative director of Moooi, with showrooms in London, Amsterdam and New York. Wanders is today located in Milan and has a seven-year-old daughter, who lives in Amsterdam.

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