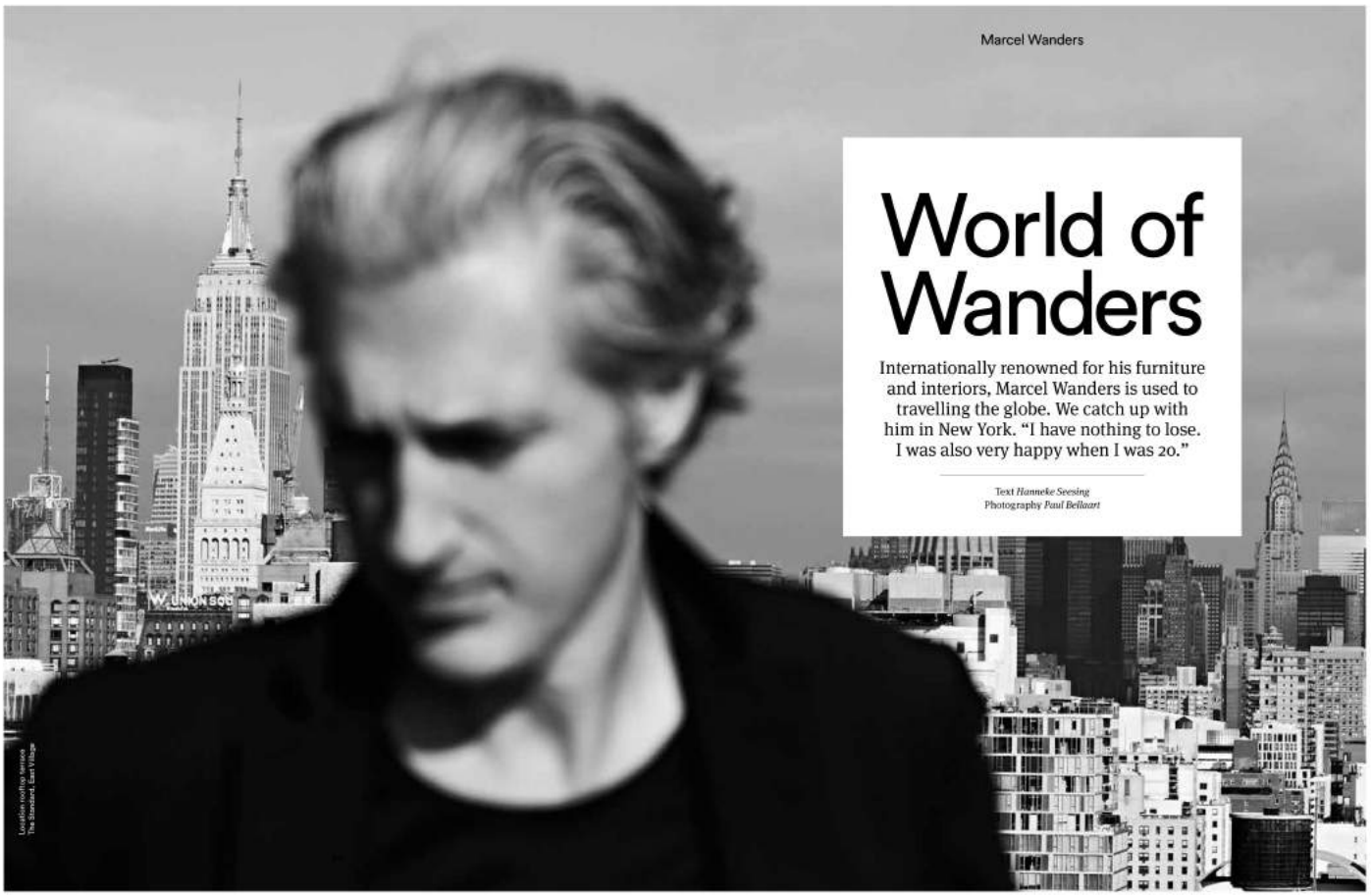


Location rooftop terrace The Standard, East Village

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 Bellaart*

Marcel Wanders

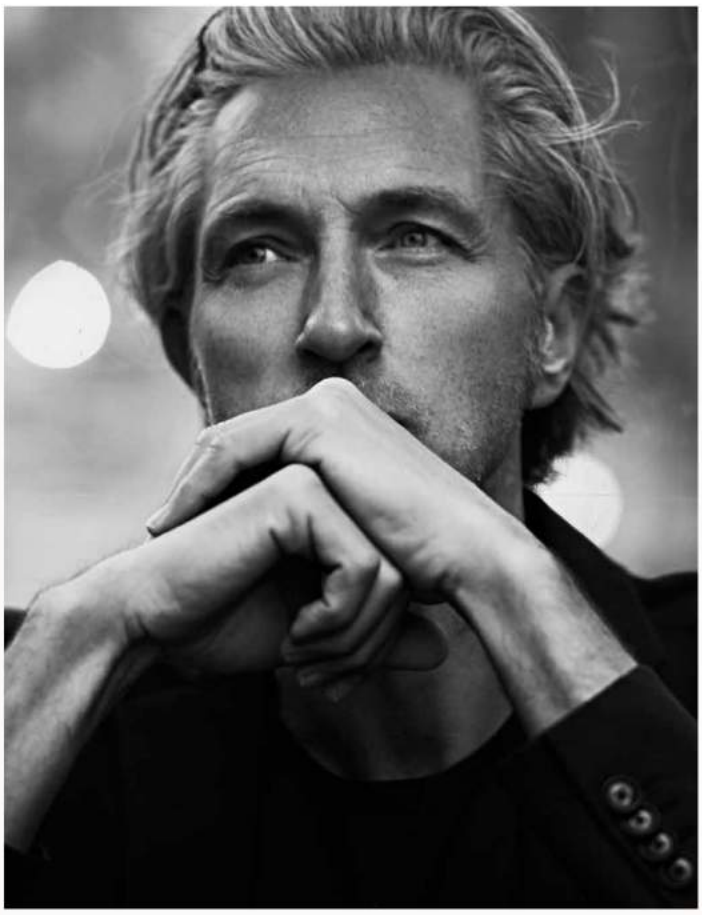
The first thing that strikes me about Marcel Wanders (52), as we shake hands on a sunny winter's day in downtown New York, is his boundless energy. The internationally successful designer flew in from Miami the day before our interview, where he presented his Lounge Chair for Louis Vuitton, as part of the Objets Nomades collection, during Design Miami. After having spent a long day posing for photos on the streets of New York, he sits in the taxi making calls to fill up the few spare hours in his busy afternoon schedule ("Will Ralph Pucci be at the gallery? I'll be there between three and four and would like to meet him." And: "Does the hotel gym also have weight-training facilities?") before energetically making his way to the roof of The Standard hotel in the East Village for the final shot. "My life is pretty out of control," he says. "There's always a lot going on. And if there isn't, I will make something happen. If you live in such an intense way, there are more important things than sleep. I can easily get by on five hours a night. For some reason or 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 unstoppable. 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 Moooi showroom, which Wanders opened in New York's upcoming NoMad district May last year, he enthusiastically talks about decorating the Mondrian Hotel in Doha, three projects he is working on with Louis Vuitton, his solo exhibition *Portraits* (on display at New York's Friedman Benda gallery until 9 April), his line of sunglasses for Safilo (available as of April) and his impressive art publication *Rijks, Masters of the Golden Age*. This 35-kg, limited-edition tome is a tribute to the 17th-century Dutch masterpieces in the Gallery of Honour of Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, and uses the finest 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. In creating 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. Perfection doesn't exist. Perfectionists spend too much time on irrelevant details; that's just insecurity, leading to inevitable failure."

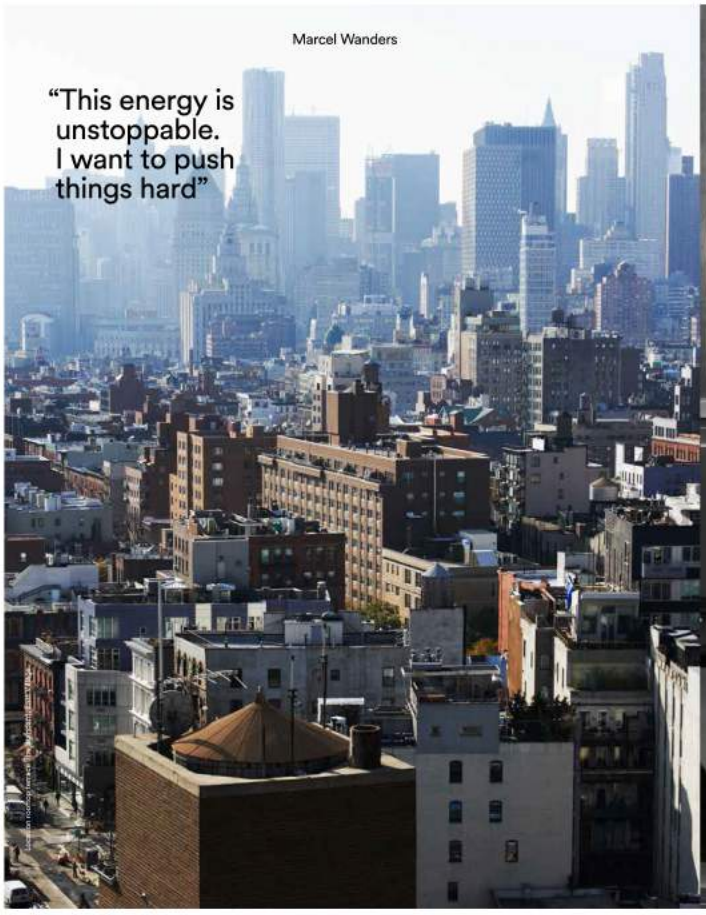
Nothing to lose

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 *Business Week* proclaimed him one of the 25 Leaders of Change. He attributes his success >



Location rooftop terrace The Standard, East Village. Suit Paul Smith at de Bijenkorf, T-shirt Filippa K, shoes Zadig & Voltaire (on both this and the opposite page)

Seesing, Hanneke. "World of Wanders." *iFly Magazine*, March 2016.
FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760



"This energy is unstoppable. I want to push things hard"

Exhibition: Portraits

Friedman Benda gallery in New York will be presenting Marcel Wanders' solo gallery exhibition, *Portraits*, until 9 April. While his uplifting designs are known for their optimism, this exhibition explores a more intimate side of his personality, featuring videos, unusually-shaped mirrors and Delft Blue vases. "Just like everyone else, I harbour certain doubts, anger and disappointment regarding my work and myself," says Wanders. "I wanted to do something with these feelings, because I think it is unfair not to share that side of myself with the public. If I never showed a blemish, I would feel as if I were not being true to myself."
friedmanbenda.com

Places to eat

Upland
California-inspired cuisine in the bustling heart of New York City. The stunning interior was designed by the famous duo Roman and Williams.
uplandnyc.com
345 Park Avenue South

Eataly
Mario Batali's massive Italian food Mecca features a unique combination of sandwich stands, market-style booths and fully-fledged restaurants. The products are made on the premises, which gives you the delight of looking at the food being prepared before you.
eataly.com
200 5th Avenue

Places to shop

Dover Street Market
Comme des Garçons has opened an artfully designed concept store here. And this seven-storey fashion emporium also houses brands such as Comme des Garçons, The Row and Simone Rocha.
newyork.doverstreetmarket.com
160 Lexington Avenue

Rizzoli
For nearly 50 years, Rizzoli has been one of America's leading independent booksellers, specialising in books on architecture, interior design, photography and fashion.
rizzolibookstore.com
1133 Broadway

Maison Kitsuné
Clear lines and sharp details are key with this French fashion brand. This is their first dedicated retail space in the US, and features brands such as Kitsuné and WANT Les Essentiels de la Vie.
thenomadhotel.com
1170 Broadway & 28th Street

Places to sleep

The NoMad Hotel
French designer Jacques Garcia is responsible for the elegant European interior, drawing inspiration from a flat he once owned in Paris. Don't forget to drop by the hotel's sumptuously decorated library, where you can enjoy delicious finger foods and drinks while devouring a classic novel.
thenomadhotel.com
1170 Broadway & 28th Street

Edition
This 41-storey clock tower was built in 1909 as the head office of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, but now hotel guests can enjoy the stunning 360-degree views from this iconic landmark of the city's skyline.
editionhotels.com
5 Madison Avenue

The Standard, East Village
A remarkable 21-storey tower in one of New York's most artistic neighbourhoods. Cosy, charming and eccentric, with astonishing views of Manhattan. Want to escape from the hustle and bustle of city life? Then take a nap, read a book or relax otherwise in the calm garden tucked away at street level. For food, you also don't have to leave the hotel as the renowned restaurant Narcissa, run by Michelin-starred chef John Fraser, makes sure you have plenty of delicious dishes to choose from.
standardhotels.com
25 Cooper Square

to the approachability of his designs. "I don't work for myself. I make things so I can be in contact with the world. It's my way of feeling a sense of value. After all, as a human being, you have an innate need to be of value, to be a part of the bigger picture. This is my language, my contribution." Celebrities are finding their way to his showroom, with singer Beyoncé and fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld amongst those who have Wanders' works in their homes. "It's nice to receive recognition from people that you value highly yourself. Take Lagerfeld, for instance. He has a fantastic track record, a great eye and real vision. Recognition doesn't mean winning prizes, or having a large showroom and world-renowned clients. Recognition can come from anyone who is enthusiastic about my work and tells me why. I sometimes receive drawings, letters or photos from people who have works of mine at home. The generosity of someone taking the time to share his or her thoughts is special to me."

When it comes to describing his approach to designing, Wanders uses a box of jigsaw puzzle pieces as a metaphor. "If I am assigned a job, or give myself a task, I am offered all kinds of possibilities," he says. "Someone might have a machine, project or a budget to take into account. All those possibilities go into a box. That represents 10,000 jigsaw pieces. They are not only complex but also completely white. I need to put together a new jigsaw puzzle right from scratch, with no pre-given map of what it should look like, and with only between 800 and 1,000 pieces, deleting many of the possible options along the way. If I can accomplish that, and put the last piece needed to complete the puzzle into place with ease, instead of having to hammer it in, I'm happy. I'm addicted to that sensation, it can bring tears to my eyes. That's, ultimately, why I do all this." However, it's not always that smooth, he confesses. "About eight years ago, I had to choose between laying off 12 people or taking on a project that I might not have accepted otherwise. It wasn't the best of my projects, but I did manage to keep 12 people in a job. The whole situation had a positive outcome in the end, both for the employees and also for the studio, as it ensured we are always aware of keeping the quality high."

Does he ever worry that his success may end one day? "No," he says decidedly. "When >

Location West 17th Street, Chelsea. Coat Acne at de Bijenkorf, visit Paul Smith at de Bijenkorf, shoes Zadig & Voltaire

Seesing, Hanneke. "World of Wanders." *iFly Magazine*, March 2016.
FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

In a nutshell

Marcel Wanders was born on 2 July 1963 in Boxtel, the Netherlands. He graduated with honours from the Academy of Arts in Arnhem and is now among the world's top five leading interior and product designers. His international breakthrough came in 1996 with, amongst other designs, his *Knotted Chair*, a hand-knotted chair purchased by prominent museums such as the MoMA in New York. He's the co-founder and creative director of international design label Moooi, with showrooms in London, Amsterdam and New York. Wanders is today located in Milan and has a 17-year-old daughter, who lives in Amsterdam.

Location 515 West 26th Street, Chelsea. *Coat* Acne, *shirt* Levi's, *at* de Bijenkorf, *trousers* Ralph Lauren, *shoes* Zadig & Voltaire

I was 20, I wasn't successful and had no money in the bank, but I was incredibly happy. I have nothing to lose. I would still be very happy without success."

Me-time

Wanders grew up in Boxtel, a small village in the south of the Netherlands, where his parents ran a shop selling household items. "We were a typical middle-class family," he says. "Not exactly the cultural elite." Still, as a young boy, Wanders was already fascinated by art and creativity. "I was six years old when a gallery suddenly opened in the village. I went there every Wednesday, after school. I remember seeing a brand new work there, the paint still wet: *Cut by grass* by Dutch artist Co Westerik. I stood there looking at it for hours. To the delight of the girls at the gallery, who found it quite funny that such a small kid would drop by every week. Sadly, the gallery disappeared almost as quickly as it had arrived."

Did he already know that Boxtel wasn't big enough for him then? "I never thought about it. Although it's not difficult to find that place small," he says, laughing. "You're not a megalomaniac if you think Boxtel might be too small for you. My father always encouraged ambition. He'd say: 'Boy, make something of your life. You're a Wanders after all.'" Initially, he didn't know exactly what he wanted to do, but he did know that it would have to be something creative. "I had lots of plants in my room, I enjoyed cutting and growing them, and thought of studying landscaping. However, at one of the Wageningen University's open days, I only saw people in green rubber boots. I knew I would not be spending my life wearing those; I didn't find them very stylish."

Eventually, Wanders went to the Design Academy in Eindhoven. His idiosyncratic experimentation, however, was a thorn in the sides of the rather traditionally-minded lecturers, so he was expelled after just one year. But that didn't put him off: "I thought to myself: 'I'll find my own way'," he explains. "Being an industrial designer wouldn't be a fun job if I wouldn't become very good, and I wanted to become the best possible version of myself." He took courses in Maastricht and Hasselt, and eventually graduated with honours from the Academy of Arts in Arnhem. The rest is history. Yet, Wanders is still not finished with learning. "I get bored quite quickly, so I continue to refresh myself and keep trying to understand the world." One way was by recently completing an INSEAD MBA to develop his business skills. "I want to take my creativity to a different level. A one-off drawing class 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 hasn't once experienced 'designer's block'. "As a designer, I have a very laid-back job. I'm not a performing artist, giving his all on stage every night. I never worry about running out of inspiration; ideas will always come the next day."

> "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. "I'm quite vain. It's a shame so many men can't be bothered. It's great to show yourself. Why not allow yourself a moment of personal attention and respect? When I was 35, I suddenly realised my teeth were all over the place, and I thought to myself: 'How could I have been so busy working not to notice? Why did I never get braces? Why don't I feel important enough to fix this?' I felt that I had been disrespectful to myself. So, I called the school for orthodontics that same day and chose the slowest-working method, because I felt that I had earned 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 paying more attention to how I look." Fashion isn't important to Wanders, but clothes are, although he admits he is a little more reserved than before, when it comes to his clothing. >

"For years, I wore a black suit with a white shirt and a necklace of beads. At one point, I noticed that my look had taken on a life of its own. Each publication mentioned it, and I basically had enough of looking like that. Since then, I've been dressing more casually. I have a new suit made once a year and my wardrobe is very modest. I've just returned from a year in San Francisco; I went there with one and a half suitcases, and came back with just one. I like to wear clothes in which I feel comfortable. Why should I wear something different on Tuesday than I did on Monday? I can wash my clothes in the evening, and wear them again the next day."

Being close to people

After years of flying around the world to work on a variety of international projects, such as the development of two artificial islands and several luxury hotels, and the expansion of his brand Moooi, Wanders now spends a lot of time in both Amsterdam and his current hometown of Milan. "My life had become disintegrated. If you travel a great deal, you come home and your life no longer feels like your own. At one point, I arrived in Amsterdam and realised that my bicycle had had a puncture for the past nine months. I'd apparently been unable to deal with something as simple as that, and I immediately decided to travel less. I want to lead a normal life, doing my own dishes or buying and chopping carrots during the weekends." When asked whether it is difficult to maintain relationships when travelling so much, he laughs: "I think relationships are difficult anyway! In a sense, it might actually be easier to sustain a relationship when you travel frequently; then you come back and every time it's great to see each other again."

After a year in San Francisco, Wanders moved to Milan last January, where he will now be staying for the next 12 months. "I had lived in Amsterdam half my life because I had to be in the studio and wanted to be with my daughter. The plan for the coming five years is to live in a different city each year. I think it is healthy to want to see more of the world, to find new angles. In San Francisco, for instance, I wanted to get close to the tech sector and launch a few start-ups. I have no specific plans after Milan, but it's great to just think: 'We'll see.' Wherever I go, I won't have to stay there forever. That was my attitude at school, too. I was always ready to leave and only wanted to stay if I felt there was no other place where I could learn even more."

Wanders flies to Amsterdam for a week once a month. He makes sure to spend his time on a plane effectively. "If I have a long overnight flight, I might try to sleep, but often I get carried away sketching. It's such a luxury to work undisturbed for eight hours on end. When I'm in that kind of flow, I'll really go for it. However, sometimes I'll just sit back to read or watch a movie. I find flying very relaxing."

After years at the top of the design world, does he still need to work for the money, or is he thinking about retirement? "My desire to work isn't financially motivated. If that had been the case, I would have started off doing something different years ago. Becoming a designer is not the easiest choice if you want to become rich. I've invested all of my money in my work. Of course, my work has a financial aspect, but the most important thing is that it allows me to combine professional and personal growth. We all have two legs, so to speak – one personal, one professional. You can rest on either, but I prefer to run. They need each other and must be in balance. In that respect, money is important. If you are unable to run a company well and to build a firm foundation, business and personal growth will not come. Any money I have is not in my bank account. It lives in the world. I have a suitcase with clothes, no car and no house. Don't get me wrong. I live a life of luxury. I fly anywhere I like, eat in any restaurant I want. But I'm not interested in a jet-setting lifestyle. I don't want a Rolex nor a Ferrari. Those sorts of things don't interest me and I don't need any of them." Instead of material things, Wanders finds happiness in personal relationships. "If I make a mistake and people forgive me, their generosity makes me happy. I want to forge deeper connections with other people, I like to feel what we have is valuable. Simply being close to people, is what I want. If I feel that, I am supremely happy." ■

Production Sanne Zwaan Styling Linda Gumus Gerritsen Assistant photography Sebastian Beckmann Assistant production Ross Singer Assistant styling Anne-Marie Janssen With special thanks to The Standard, High Line & East Village, Biazza New York, Moooi New York, Friedman Benda

✈ **Exclusive tableware**
Marcel Wanders designed an unique pieces of porcelain, cutlery, glassware and linen for KLM's World Business Class. Each was created to be environmentally friendly and to reduce cabine weight, resulting in less Co2 emissions.

Location rooftop terrace The Standard, High Line. *Coat* Acne at de Bijenkorf, *shirt* Levi's

Seesing, Hanneke. "World of Wanders." *iFly Magazine*, March 2016.
FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760