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Out of this world

Uncovered! The sci-fi house that fell to earth



The Interior architects

The days when an interior designer's duties stretched to scattering a few cushions, screwing in rococo pelmets and slapping up Cole & Son paper are long gone. Creating a divine dwelling demands structural thinking and structural intervention; you need an architect. Luckily there is a wave of young architects who spend more time re-imagining the mechanics of residential interiors than dreaming of corporate spires and statement buildings. Here is our international top 12



Stephen Roberts US

With more than 18 years' international design experience, ranging from architectural design and furniture to industrial design and graphics, New York-based designer Stephen Roberts now works on just one or two projects a year, providing clients with a level of personal service rarely offered elsewhere. 'I do every drawing myself and have every conversation with each contractor and engineer,' says Roberts, citing fellow Australian architect Glenn Murcutt as a key influence.

'The White Loft project started with the client's small Scandinavian furniture collection and we worked forward from there, eventually flying to Copenhagen to find the finishing touches,' he says of the 3,200 sq ft Manhattan loft. Renowned for his use of light, Roberts explored ways to light up from the floors and walls, and also used backlit white glass panels to transform the space into a 'giant lightbox', while retaining its clean, concrete structure. 'You should be able to answer all a client's needs with one simple design,' says Roberts, whose projects include a 20,000 sq ft office for MAC in SoHo. 'Clients look to me not to confuse matters by offering 20 options when I think one will do.' Lakshmi Bhaskaran
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Ippolito Fleitz Group GER

'There always used to be fantastic interior architects, but maybe now the ability to cover all aspects of a project is becoming important again,' says Gunter Fleitz, one half of Stuttgart's Ippolito Fleitz Group. IFG are Fleitz, a former project manager for Leipzig's Federal Supreme Court, and his partner Peter Ippolito, who counts a spell working at the Studio Daniel Libeskind as part of his training. The pair's diverse backgrounds and a readiness to handle any aspect of a residential or commercial project, from interior design to architecture, product design to communication, are what mark the Ippolito Fleitz Group out.

'No one job is like another,' says Fleitz. 'We always try to think about new projects in new ways.' And their projects stretch from House Genc (below), a remodelling of a cramped town house into a lounge-like family home, to a new store design for Timberland. Such an attitude has earned IFG more outside commissions, from the landscape design project in Shanghai's Bund, where it erected sixty 30m-tall 'light sticks', that sway in the wind, to the 5,000 sq m luxury villa it is currently designing for a private client, again in China. **Josh Sims**
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Moriko Kira Netherlands

Moriko Kira always looks for 'a clear answer to every question'. If there's a problem, she'll solve it. Take the Amsterdam-based architect's renovation of this classic 1930s apartment (right) in her adopted city. Sound insulation was a priority in converting the apartment into a family home. Once the concrete floor had been poured and ceiling insulation installed, trying to retain the existing interior features was hopeless. So Kira started afresh, but without altering the internal configuration. 'We thought we could strengthen the spatial and visual connections between the rooms around the hall, making the apartment a contemporary and spatially dynamic abode,' she says.

All window and door frames were removed, sliding doors inserted and openings onto the hallway widened to enhance a sense of connection without jeopardising the independence of individual rooms. Use of strong elemental colours in particular areas strengthens the effect.

Kira believes that architecture should never overwhelm; instead, it is 'space which offers'. Such a philosophy underpins her role as an architect at the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment in The Hague. Her own studio is currently developing further residential and office projects in the Netherlands, as well as various private and social housing projects in Japan. It's worth noting that Kira was also responsible for the renovation and extension of the Dutch prime minister's latest pied-à-terre. Bethan Ryder
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