

INTERIOR DESIGN



JANUARY
2006

brilliant inspirations

crosslines



gathers no moss

Harry Allen has progressed from cosmetics display to imaginative objects and some of the funkiest retail interiors around

HARRY ALLEN IS CAPTIVATED by systems. For his industrial designs and interiors, he's always pondering how to organize diverse elements as complex wholes. His New York firm, Harry Allen & Associates, buzzes with varied endeavors, all somehow feeding one another. In the recent mix are a cosmetics display for La Mer, additions to his pop art-y Reality line of polyester-resin



decorative objects, a sample case for Corian, and retail interiors for Hush Hush and Supreme.

Allen worked exclusively as a cosmetics-display designer before opening his studio in 1993. That's the year he introduced Living Systems, a collection of modular tables and shelving units in the style of

Charles and Ray Eames, at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair. Out of the fanfare that followed came several retail commissions, including one for Moss in New York. Visit the shop today, and the objects for sale in his minimalist vitrines include Reality hooks, cast in the shape of his own hands.

How did Reality come about?

I'm fascinated both by art and by humble functionality, and I started thinking about how the two could exist together—how an object sitting on a plain table could be artwork. At that time, I inherited a pair of ornate silver candlesticks. They never would have worked in a contemporary environment, so I made molds of them and cast reproductions in bright red resin. From that came other ideas for reality-based resin objects, like a piggy bank cast from the silicone mold of an actual piglet.

Clockwise from center left: The president and chief designer of Harry Allen & Associates. A rendering of his new sample kit for Corian. New York's location of Supreme with a floor of decking material, a milled composite of recycled wood and plastic. The Los Angeles store, featuring a skateboard bowl that he lit with fluorescents. A polyester-resin Banana bowl from his Reality line.

What are your latest additions?

Two bowls, one cast from a bunch of bananas and the other from assorted fruit. Both sprang from artistic experiences, re-examining forms and materials, but the objects themselves aren't art. They're commercial and affordable, mass-produced in China.

What are you doing for Corian?

Here's this company appealing to architects and designers, and they had this very generic sample box. So they asked if I could do something about it. We've redesigned the box as a series of trays that stack to form a little

plastic briefcase. Then, in the middle of that project, they hired me to design a Corian vase for an advertising campaign.

You've also been working for retail chains.

Yes, I've done 100 stores in Japan for Hush Hush women's and children's clothing. For Supreme skateboards and skate-wear, there are four locations, one in New York, one in Los Angeles, and two in Japan.

Supreme's demographic is a dream—young, mostly men. When they called, I thought they were just a bunch of kids. But it's a serious fashion brand. The question was: How can we make it simple



and cool and appropriate and avoid being Prada? It's been an exercise in restraint. We kept debating: Is it this cement finish or that, this plywood or that? We took humble materials and built very precisely with them.

How do you determine what kids think is cool?

You have to be respectful. You can't make what you think they think is cool, because most likely it won't be. You have to give them what you think is cool.

And what is that?

The Supreme in L.A., for example, has a plywood skateboard bowl by Simpaarch. I lit it with a fluorescent system that forms a halo over the bowl.

Do you miss making furniture?

I do think of the good old days when I was hacking out modular systems, furniture, and lighting in my studio, and I'm still interested in functional stuff that's not as edgy as the Reality line. This spring, I plan to open Harry Allen Studio in the storefront of the building where my of-

office is and eventually find a manufacturing space. It's hard to do something like that in New York, because everything is so expensive—it was successful for me originally, but I didn't have a business plan. Now I'm going to approach it as an adult.

—Marisa Bartolucci

From top: Colored plastic laminates animating the Hush Hush women's and children's clothing store in Ogaki, Japan. Vitrines at the Moss store in New York.

