

The Year of the 'Ultras' and 50 Shades of the Same Color

An interview with Alain Gilles



Portrait of Alain Gilles, Photo by Mathilde Hiley

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This year's Commerce Design Awards finalists pushed design to its limits, with jury president Alain Gilles highlighting the honesty in material use and the sustainable, recycling-based solutions of the participating commercial spaces.

WHAT CHARACTERISTIC DESIGN FEATURES OR STYLISTIC TRENDS DID YOU NOTICE THIS YEAR AMONG THE COMMERCIAL SPACES AND RESTAURANTS — IN TERMS OF INTERIOR DESIGN, MATERIALS, FURNISHINGS, COLORS ?

In general, but not always of course, there was a real honesty in the different propositions with the use of a lot of wood, metal, bare concrete or bare aluminium. In general, the logic of each space had been pushed pretty far in its own logic.

More and more places are integrating recycled / reclaimed materials in either their construction or their furniture and using them to in a way make a statement about the kind of world they want to live in. Sometimes the walls had been left untouched showing their past history and decrepitude.

ARE THERE ANY DEFINING ELEMENTS YOU WOULD CLASSIFY AS TRENDS ?

The type of places and their designs varied a great deal, I would say it went from the ultra-cosy, to the ultra-ecological, to the ultra-instagramable... So a lot of different option for people to chose from in the same city!



Rambo, Photo by Laetizia Bazzoni



Boaboa

DID YOU SEE ANYTHING SURPRISING, EXCITING, UNIQUE, OR INNOVATIVE THAT CAUGHT YOUR ATTENTION ?

That's very personal, so without revealing the categories of any of the winners, which will be announced on September 30th, I have to say I fell in love with some of the venues and the work of certain architects.

A hidden cafe that you have to know about, like a small hidden gem in the city. The workshop that turns into an ultra-graphic shop with vibrant colors and material that just scream to be framed and have its propositions on offering eaten. The last surprise was a monochrome space that seemed to be played with the 50 shades of the same color through variety of textures and material that gave it its bold richness and strong architectural presence.

CONSIDERING THE JUDGING CRITERIA, WHAT MADE THIS YEAR'S WINNERS STAND OUT (THE TEN WINNING SPACES)? FOR EXAMPLE, ABOUT CONCEPT COHERENCE, VISUAL QUALITY, AND HOW THESE ASPECTS COMPLEMENT USABILITY, ERGONOMICS, AND THE OVERALL USER EXPERIENCE ?

What really made the difference was the overall experience, the fact that the place offered a global experience while paying attention to the details as well. We were judging projects with very different budgets so what really pattered was those who pushed the envelope, that pushed the boundaries in their own specific logic or sector.

ALL AND ALL : WHAT MAKES A COMMERCIAL SPACE STAND OUT FROM A DESIGN PERSPECTIVE ?

There is a lot of different ways to stand out as a commercial space from a design perspective. So, there is not one answer. In my opinion the best is to push the logic of your concept all the way, be readable or understandable if you want, and make sure that the space remains functional.



Swookies



Portrait of Alain Gilles at MILLA & MILLI Factory



La Petit Bon Bon, at Corinthia Brussels