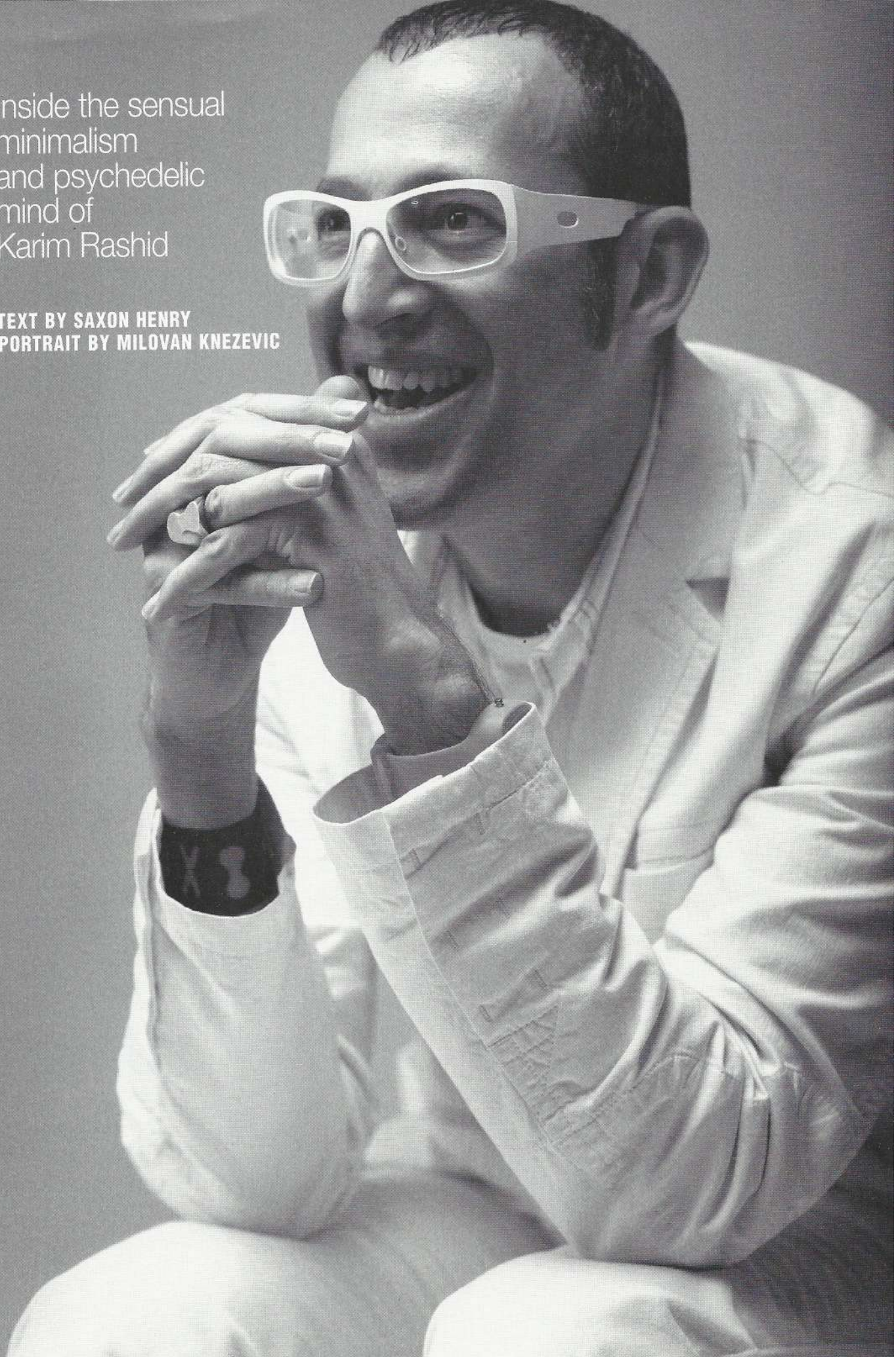


# POETIC JUSTICE

Inside the sensual  
minimalism  
and psychedelic  
mind of  
Karim Rashid

TEXT BY SAXON HENRY  
PORTRAIT BY MILOVAN KNEZEVIC





**Karim Rashid practices what he preaches. His guide for living, released last year, is fittingly titled *Design Your Self: Rethinking the Way You Live, Love, Work and Play*. In it, the designer advises, "do it with color."**

Having trumped the worlds of product, interior, fashion, furniture and lighting design, Rashid claims he knew his life's mission at the age of five. "I went sketching with my father in England drawing churches," explains Rashid. "He taught me to see; taught me that I could design anything and touch all aspects of our physical landscape."

Rashid's early memories include drawing a cathedral façade that dissatisfied him, so he redesigned the shape of the windows. "I also remember winning a drawing competition for children," he remarks. "I drew luggage, expressing my own ideas about how to travel." This experience could have served as a prophecy for his life, as the designer — who was born in Cairo of Egyptian and English parents, and raised in Canada — spends much of his time circling the globe.

Along with his work in the U.S., projects take him to Russia, Germany, Athens, France, Italy, Holland, Korea, Denmark, the UK, Sweden, Turkey and Japan. Current endeavors include a clothing store in Moscow, a hotel in Shanghai, a private house in Kuala Lumpur and a café in Serbia. Rashid is also well known for his product design, which currently includes objects as diverse as a vacuum cleaner and credit cards to a line of bath fixtures and chocolates.

Rashid thrives on the stimulation he gains from visiting different countries and he doesn't mind the time it takes to get from point A to point B. "Generally I am inspired when I am traveling," he explains. "I love being on planes where I can really focus on projects — I can fill a 100-page sketchpad on a single European flight."

Concerning the subject of inspiration, he has lots to say. In fact, nothing seems to escape his notice. "I am inspired by every project I have worked on, by every city I have traveled to, by every book I have read, by every art show I have seen, by every song I have heard, and by every smell, taste, sight, sound, and feeling," he proclaims.

If he is not inspired when he begins a project, he turns it down; if he is intrigued, he begins the design work immediately. "I sketch right after the meeting in a hotel, café, or office," he explains, "then I keep sketching over and over." Once he feels his ideas have evolved adequately, he turns them over to his senior >

Below: At the Dubai International Exhibition Centre, Rashid designed a "hotel room of the present-future" for The Hotel Show, a conference of over 700 exhibitors in the hospitality and leisure industry. Showing his flair for trickery, the designer congealed the functions of a hotel room — lounging, working and sleeping — into one piece of furniture made of high gloss blue fibreglass.

PHOTO: KARIM RASHID, INC.





Right: The tripped-out interiors of the Deutsche Bank VIP Lounge that Rashid designed for the 2006 Cologne Art Fair were achieved with a custom print film for the walls and a floating fluorescent lacquer desk — in bright pink, no less.

staff to develop digitally with 3D modeling programs.

The list of other visionaries who have influenced Rashid is long and diverse, ranging from Andy Warhol and David Bowie to DJs Felix da Housecat and Grandmaster Flash. Film directors Stanley Kubrick and Francis Ford Coppola are on his list, as are Saarinen, Niemeyer and Noguchi. He broadens his attention to such sweeping influences because he strives to find forms that have never existed. "My interest is to make form as sensual, human, evocative and sculptural as possible," he says.

Aside from a fascination for form, color is a particular aphrodisiac for the designer. He goes so far as to say it creates a spiritual euphoria in him. "Color is one of the most beautiful phenomena of our existence," he offers. "For me color is life; a way of dealing with and touching our emotions, our psyches, and our spiritual beings."

Though he claims he never begins a design with a material in mind, Lucite, acrylic and polyurethane show up so regularly in his repertoire that he has been dubbed "The Poet of Plastics." With nearly 12,000 polymers — some of which, he points out, can replace 70 percent of our body parts — it is no wonder the designer is so enamored. "This is an incredible phenomenon and obviously it is our destiny," he remarks. "Designers shape this world, and the open-mind sees and experiments with the fluidness of plastic."

A new culture demands new forms, materials and styles claims this self-declared modern thinker, who sees himself as someone who was born to create. "I believe that the new objects that shape our lives are transconceptual, multi-cultural hybrids — objects that can exist anywhere in different contexts," he says. "Our lives are elevated when we experience beauty, comfort, luxury, performance, and utility seamlessly together."

In Rashid's world, a clever design is enough to make him swoon, and it appears that the proverbial box shunned by others when dazzling inspiration strikes never existed in his imagination. "I do not believe that objects should be obstacles in life, but raptures of experience," he declares. "They lend hope to reshaping our lives." □

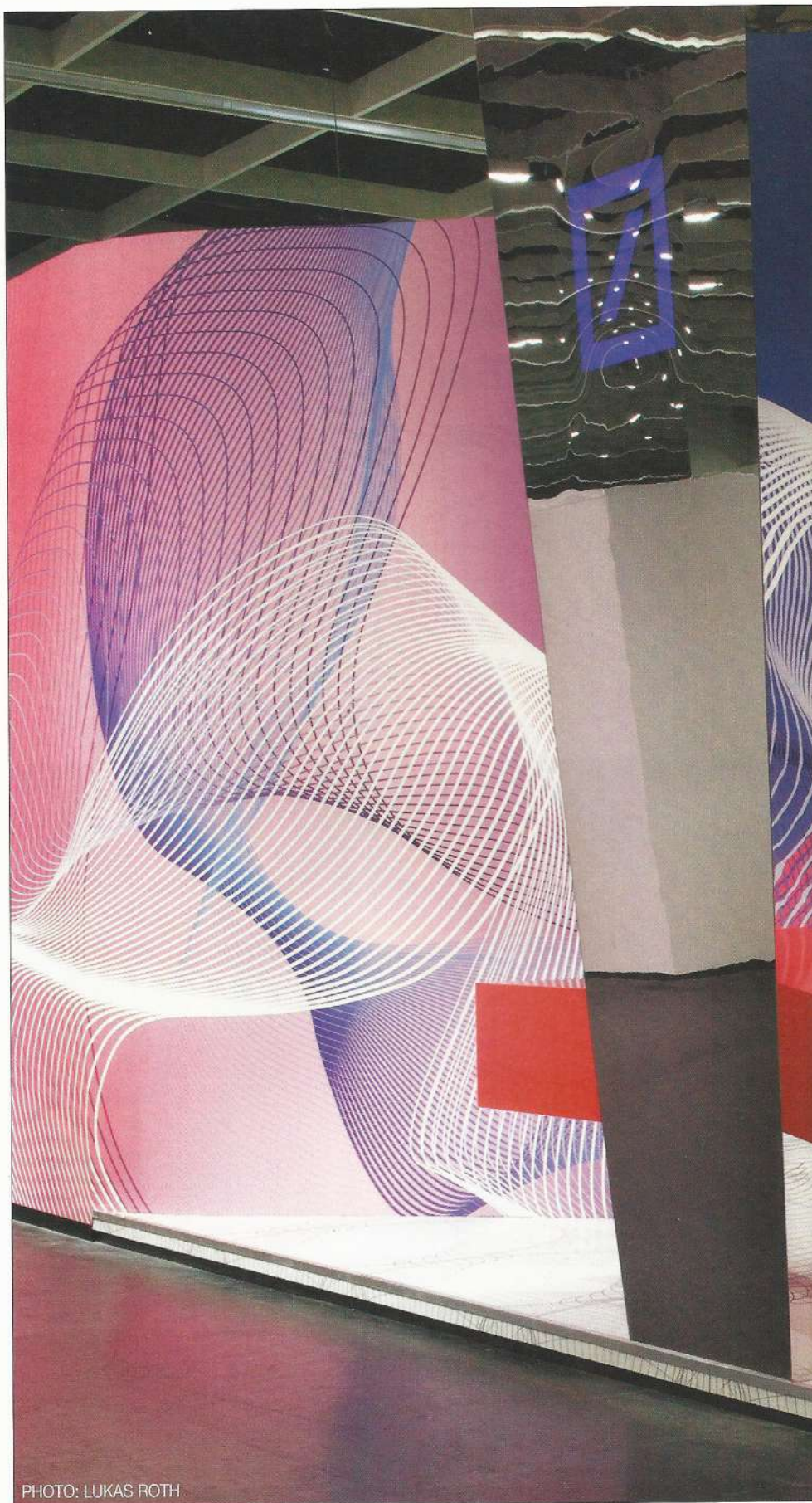


PHOTO: LUKAS ROTH





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