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## in living color

**Step inside the colorful mind of designer Markus Benesch.**

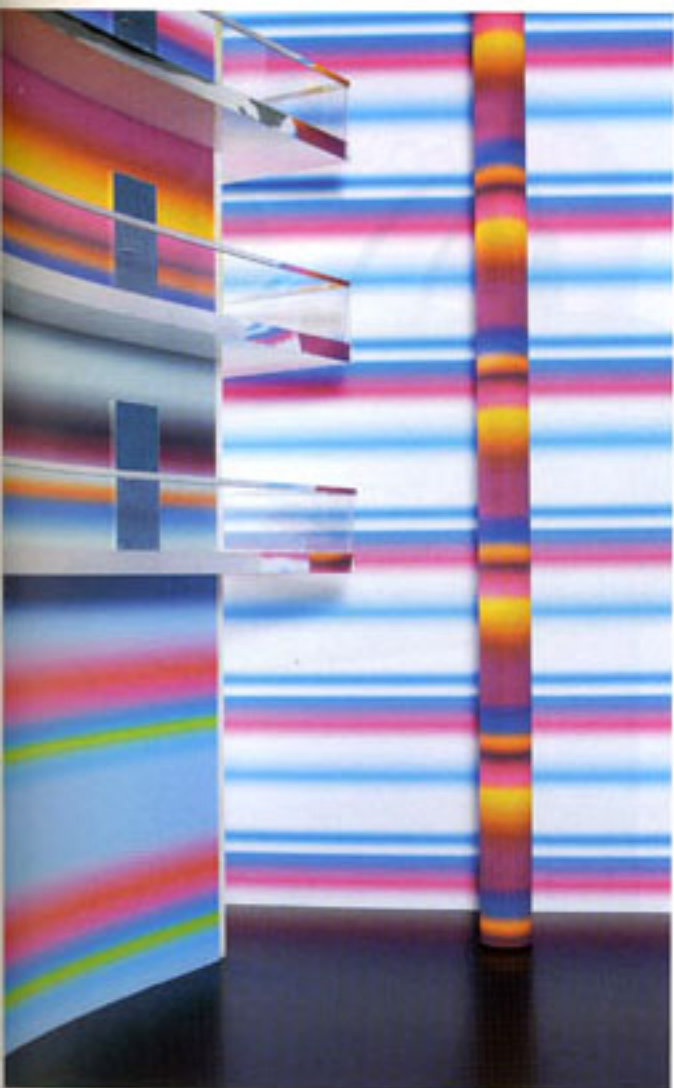
Frankly, the décor of your average home, restaurant or office is, well, god awful. Dull paint peeling from sheetrock, ugly wallpaper reminiscent of that scene from *Garden State*, and lots and lots of Ikea furniture. While this might sound bleak, there is hope. Designer Markus Benesch is out to spice up your boring, old space with the innovative design elements of Colorflage.

"It's about unifying space with its interior," explains Benesch, 36. "It creates a uniform atmosphere and also absorbs all these aspects like furniture, space for lost objects, and art." The result is something out of Willy Wonka's summer home, where there are "little surprises around every corner, but nothing dangerous."

"In Europe, people usually have small flats and houses, and they are afraid of colors and patterns," Benesch says. "I feel the opposite way — use more colors and patterns. My patterns are so dominant you don't even see the architecture anymore." And if you have ever lived in an apartment that has seen better days, you'll know just how key this disguising technique can be.

According to Benesch, Colorflage contains three major themes: 1) circles, which "fan out like radar to create a uniformity of space, sending out and receiving signals"; 2) waltz, the basic principle behind the creation of fabrics — "like dreams and experiences, this pattern is endless and holds itself together," and finally, 3) dancing dots, which "spread randomly over the surfaces, changing the appearance regardless of their shapes," Benesch explains. "I intended this as a tool to use for everybody, one you can play with and not just have to be someone from the field of art and architecture. It's a way to experiment and achieve, in an easy way, some interesting spaces."

"The principles behind these ideas are very old, nothing new," Benesch adds modestly. "These are tricks to influence living space."



Colorflage is proving most popular in Italy and France, where it's been adopted with the same fervor as Angelina Jolie's selecting a new kid, along with such unlikely locales as Russia and Japan, where he's already put on two shows.

"Japan especially liked this kind of visual quality," he says. "I'd never been before and didn't know what they were attracted to, but they were all screaming and laughing and had a lot of fun. Russia's really into it, as well. They seem to love the color and the power of the color." However, Germany proved to be a much different story. The German-born Benesch, who lives and works in Munich and Milan, points out that his countrymen are very cautious when it comes to such concepts. "They're getting used to it, but there's a cowardice about things like that. They're very afraid of color, or change in general."

Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of U.S. interest in Benesch's brainchild comes from New York City. "We're in contact with some people there," he says. "We've licensed to a very big wallpaper manufacturer, who distributes collections worldwide. We'll start in the states in September." At present, one can find Colorflage mostly in commercial spaces — shops and fairs — while residential interest is currently limited to some art collectors and architects. "The residential people are quite special — not a normal customer," says Benesch. "That part of my business is just beginning. Right now I'm looking into shops, bars and hotels."

But Benesch has other plans for spreading the Colorflage ethos. "There's the possibility of a book of the collection; we also do brochures that depict what kind of effects you can create in your space, and how to influence rhythm of corridor and atmosphere and spaces, flat spaces. They are not made to be a decoration tool for a wall, which is the usual concept of wallpaper; the primary purpose is to change the appearance of architecture entirely." Despite its success, Benesch stops short of declaring Colorflage a design trend: "I'm the wrong person to ask — it's my baby." **STEPHEN ROBINSON**