

CEREAL
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HÔTEL NATIONAL DES ARTS ET MÉTIERS: AN INTERVIEW WITH RAPHAEL NAVOT

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Israeli designer, architect, and creative director Raphael Navot is a rising star on the Paris design scene. Known for his predilection for raw materials, pure modern form, and mineral color schemes, his aesthetic palette finds its apogee in the moody interiors of David Lynch's infamous late-night haunt *Silencio*, and the newly opened *Hôtel National des Arts et Métiers*. Though his eye is resolutely modern, the classicism of the Paris cityscape never ceases to inspire.

CEREAL: Raphael, how did you come to live in Paris?

RAPHAEL NAVOT: After I completed my military service in Israel, I came to Europe in search of a school and stumbled upon the design academy in Eindhoven. I loved the way in which trend forecaster Lidewij Edelkoort, who was then the chairwoman of the academy, divided the creative disciplines, and after graduating, I came to Paris to do an internship at the Edelkoort studio.

CEREAL: What were your initial impressions of the city, and how have these feelings shifted over the years?

RN: My arrival in Paris began on a very high note, and as I settled into everyday life, it became even more pleasant and inspiring. I was introduced to a very exclusive circle of creatives, some from the Edelkoort studio, and their counterparts in the fields of fashion, art, and photography. I found it all quite overwhelming. My experience

See page 26 for *Hôtel National des Arts et Métiers* information

of the city was split between this whole new world and what I could actually afford as a recently graduated student.

CEREAL: We know you've moved around a lot. Tell us about all the neighborhoods you have called home.

RN: I've lived practically everywhere, from a shoebox near Gare de l'Est to a duplex in Vavin, and an open space in Montreuil to a bourgeois apartment in Bastille. . . . These days I live at the very heart of the Marais. After living outside the real center of the city for a long time, I felt I needed its energy; the lively hum of people and all that motion. I like that proximity and the fact that I can walk everywhere and anywhere I want to. Paris is great for walking because there is no suspension in the urban architecture—the rhythm of the buildings is constant, there are cafés everywhere, and the light is sharp and dry during every season. Its attention to detail, the delicate architecture, the preservation of its heritage, its elegance; the city still overwhelms me today.

CEREAL: Aside from its architecture, how does the city feed your inspiration?

RN: As I often work on public spaces, most recently the Hôtel National des Arts et Métiers, the city is an essential part of my work because it provides the context. I like to delve into the history of a location, as it often leads to exciting revelations that eventually manifest in the new design. For example, the building where Silencio is situated was once a left-wing publishing house—in 1898, the L'Aurore newspaper printed Émile Zola's famous manifesto *J'ACCUSE* there. In 1914, the famous French socialist leader Jean Jaurès was assassinated just across the street. All these events give the space an energetic charge, and it made perfect sense for it to become an underground platform where new artists could express and exchange ideas.

CEREAL: You usually work alone. Do you think Paris has helped to foster that approach?



RN: I think Paris is a city in which you have to learn to be independent. It is perfect for self-reflection, yet it lacks a mood of encouragement. On a long trip away, I miss the freedom the city offers—the ability to choose to be either anonymous or social. In regard to the conceptual part of my work, I like to create alone. I miss the time I spend drawing. I am a bit of a strange animal in my field because I have no studio team or steady staff that I work with. For each new project, I pull together a team that is best suited to that particular task.

CEREAL: Do you follow a strict routine with your work? How do you structure your time?

RN: Over the past two decades, I have tried to create some routine, but I am slowly coming to terms with the possibility that routine is not for me! I tend to avoid going to exhibitions or events on the weekends, and I cherish the fact that the flexibility of my professional life allows me to look after my well-being during the week. I have a weird guilty pleasure of spending time in the hardware department of the BHV department store—all the screws, bolts, bells, tubes, paint, tools, and endless objects arranged category by category across thousands of square feet! I feel a strange pleasure there, something to do with the sense of possibility. Just spending time there makes me want to create.

CEREAL: Are there still things that surprise you about Paris?

RN: I'm still surprised by the need to get dressed up! Unlike in Tel Aviv, London, or Barcelona, in Paris it still matters what you wear. The city reacts to you differently when you're in your gym clothes versus when you're well-groomed—there is an unwritten code for almost any activity here, and you're likely to get a different reaction depending on how you're dressed. It can either be really rewarding or really unforgiving. I like this aspect of Paris, but at times I miss the comfort of being able to leave the house dressed in whatever I want without having to worry about the consequences.

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