

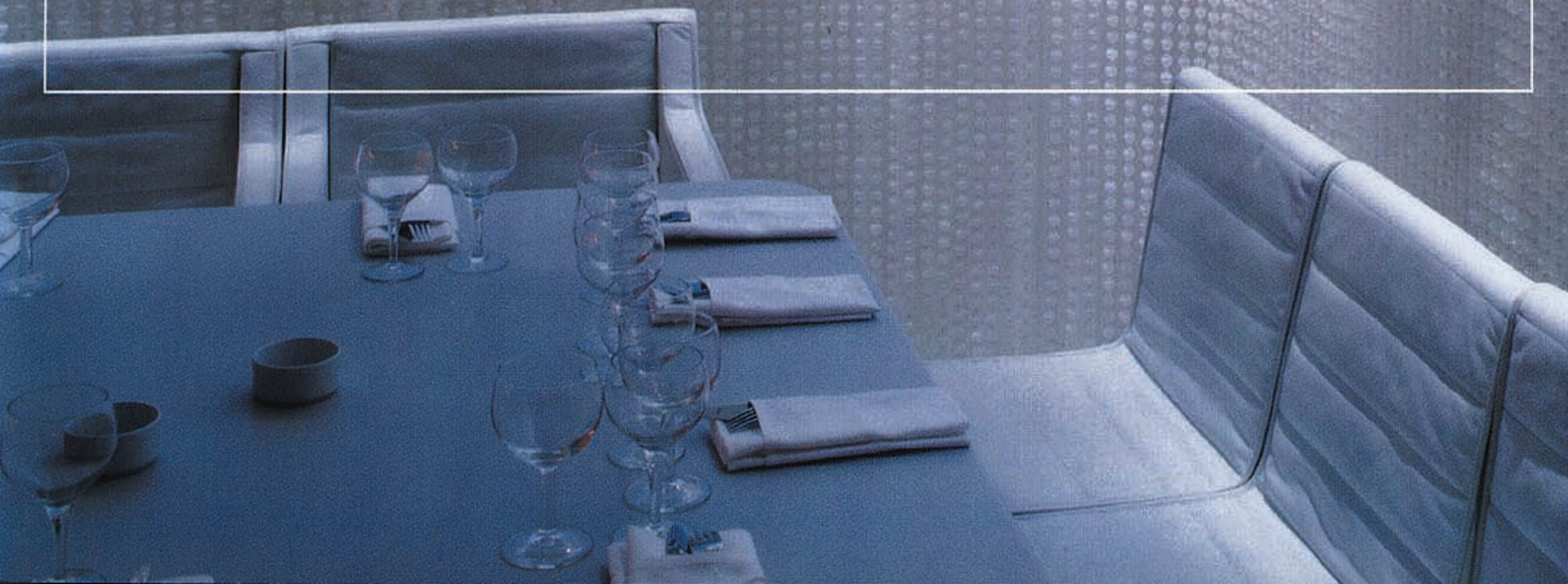
april 2001  
US \$7.00 | CAN \$9.00

# interiors

Japanese design in the modern world  
Sushi bars for Japanese real-estate offices  
Revolving a prefabricated house  
Architectural photographer balhazar horab

## beauty & the bistro

christian biecher's horova kisses the traditional paris eatery goodbye



113th Year of Publication  
Volume 160,  
Number 4, 2001

*Interiors* (USPS 266-040, ISSN 0164-8470) is published monthly by Bill Communications, Inc., 770 Broadway, New York, NY 10003-9595. Yearly subscription price in U.S. \$42; Canada \$63 (U.S. dollars); \$84 elsewhere for surface delivery. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Printed in the U.S.A.  
POSTMASTER:  
Send address changes to *Interiors*, P.O. Box 1993, Marion, OH 43306-8093.

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April: Enlightened Design

# interiors



**cover:**

Franco-style: a corner table at Korova restaurant in Paris.

photo: Jimmy Cohrszen

**below:**

Ground floor of Japanese real-estate firm LW's Osaka offices, designed by Riccardo Tossani.

photo: Seiichi Hatakeyama

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Designing for the desk set: Offices by Steven Holl, Doug Garofalo, Shubin+ Donaldson, WalkerGroup, Beige Design, and more.

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Two Japanese real-estate offices face up to the needs of a stylish generation.







# rent destabilized

two japanese real-estate  
offices face up to the needs  
of a stylish generation.  
by jennifer purvis

Since the postwar era of chronic housing shortages, Japan's cities have been littered with dingy, hole-in-the-wall real-estate offices, where renters go to survey the invariably cramped offerings. Typically these are storefront establishments whose windows are plastered with floor plans. Inside they offer symposia of mismatched furniture, dirty ashtrays, and brutal fluorescent lighting.

But in the last few years, the Japanese rental market has been infiltrated by a new demographic of design-conscious 18-to-30-year-olds who, weaned on MTV, are most at home in the overtly styled, image-suffused landscape of popular culture. This global-minded generation inspired Leopalace World 21 (LW), one of the largest real-estate operations in Japan, to change the look of its facilities.

In 1997 the company hired Australian-born, Harvard-trained architect Riccardo Tossani, who'd designed projects in America, Europe, and Asia—including a resort in Guam for the company 10 years before—and charged him with developing a fresh approach for the emerging market. After LW decided to consolidate its several rental facilities in each of three cities—Tokyo, Fukuoka, and Osaka—Tossani's first step was to persuade the company to expand its services. "It was completely experimental," says the designer, who claims the university student union as his inspiration. "I applied the idea of a youthful multipurpose gathering spot—a hip place with meeting areas, eateries, Internet access." In Osaka and Fukuoka, where LW recently rolled out the new designs, Tossani sought to captivate visitors with unusual surfacing materials, supergraphics, loud rock music, plentiful monitors, and full-size mock-ups of typical LW apartment rooms furnished with designer products.

To draw attention and foot traffic to the Osaka LW, a nine-story office building totaling 18,900 square feet, which is set back from the street, Tossani paved the ground-level space with glossy blond terrazzo tiles and installed numerous ceiling spotlights, ensuring a bright white interior. The only color in the gallery-like shell comes from an eight-foot-high partition featuring enormous, close-cropped young faces and a massive multipanel screen playing music videos. Tossani chose Ron Arad's rippled Tom Vac chairs to reiterate the horizontal banding of custom-designed molded wood surrounding the screen. And the jagged edge of his freestanding staircase makes a strong visual impact emerging from a triangular ceiling cutout.

Tossani's variations on the leopard, the company's logo, is a key aspect of the Osaka facility. Small metal leopards protrude through portions of the street-level façade, and as visitors climb the narrowing stairs to the second floor, they again encounter the motif, reduced to its streamlined essence in black wood. The second floor is where contracts are signed, so Tossani created a darker, more serious environment there,

by introducing rosewood as the dominant surfacing material. A half-moon rosewood-and-leather couch of his own design breaks up the void and divides the space. Freestanding illuminated computer podiums endow it with a calm, museum-like atmosphere.

Reflecting the hierarchical nature of Japanese society, the Osaka LW's upper levels are increasingly formal. The third floor houses a VIP lounge, where the elevator doors open onto rosewood-paneled walls exhibiting photographic portraits of major investors. A remodeled spiral stair on the eighth floor leads to the VIP dining area on the ninth, a bright space with alternating panels of white stained wood and terrazzo that continue up the walls, morphing into display panels.

For LW's Fukuoka location, completed three months after Osaka's, Tossani exploited the district's busy street traffic by erecting a one-story-high mosaic leopard sculpture of his own design at the entrance. The sculpture functions not only as a marker for the LW office but also as a monument where people meet.

Inside, the designer accommodated multiple activities in a 10,400-square-foot two-story facility, while maintaining the LW corporate identity he'd developed for Osaka. With strategic modifications, he repeated the wall-sized supergraphics representing typical LW clients, the multipanel video screen, and clusters of jewel-colored monitors. But in contrast to Osaka's first-floor white-out, Tossani used bold black-and-white terrazzo in Fukuoka to delineate the meeting area from the carpeted computer-browsing zone, both of which he set off from the leasing tables by a custom-made synthetic fabric wall, backlit to silhouette the staff.

Wall panels of purplewood—a tropical hardwood with natural white striations—add graphic interest to Fukuoka's main floor. And Tossani designed an airy tubular lattice frame for the staircase, which allows continuous sight lines. When viewed from below, the structure's mirrored underside reflects the webbed truss, making the stairs disappear altogether.

On Fukuoka's second floor, in another deft transformation of limited space, Tossani installed sliding glass doors, electric curtains, and a screen to create a presentation room that dissolves back into the public area once the doors and curtains are retracted.

A great deal of technological hardware is installed throughout both the Osaka and Fukuoka facilities, but it is seamlessly incorporated into the furnishings, many of which are original Tossani designs. The architect introduced such whimsical details as a pack of computer mice running up the wall in one corner of the Fukuoka facility.

While much of the surfacing materials and technology he used appears expensive, Tossani kept remodeling costs low by working closely with contractors and subcontractors. Osaka's 106,000 yen per square meter (\$80 per square foot, including all mechanical and electrical costs) is markedly cheaper than the country's average commercial design budget of between 150,000 and 240,000 yen per square meter (\$113 to \$181 per square foot). And Fukuoka's bargain basement 95,000 yen per square meter (\$72 per square foot) was a direct result of Tossani's discovery of a cache of the magical purplewood on a warehouse shelf, abandoned because the very white stripes that caught his eye were considered flaws by other designers.

To be sure, no other leasing office looks comparable in Japan's real estate industry. But LW's post-renovation success indicates that similar facilities will become spiffier. Even Japanese realtors have to watch their MTV if they want to stay competitive in the real world.

Jennifer Purvis is a freelance writer and independent curator based in Tokyo.

## LW OSAKA

*previous spread* Ground floor of LW Osaka, one version of Riccardo Tossani's MTV-inspired concept for the new Japanese real-estate office.

*left* Blond terrazzo tiles and spot lighting create a gallery-like ambience; the wall of monitors displays both realtors' presentations and music videos.

*far left* A narrowing staircase leads to the second floor, where contracts are signed.

*below* Ron Arad's Tom Vac chairs cluster around a workstation whose triangular shape roughly echos the ceiling installation above.

*below, right* Rosewood-paneled presentation room on the third floor.



### PROJECT CREDITS

[LW OSAKA & FUKUOKA]

Architect and interior designer:

Riccardo Tossani,

Architecture | design team:

Riccardo Tossani ARAIA,

Atsuko Itoda | project architect:

Momoko Higuchi | interior

design team: Reiko Terada,

Nathan Armstrong, Anne

Scheou | general contractor:

Sumitomo Construction

Co. | lighting consultant:

Koizumi | graphics

consultant: Fumiko Okada |

A/V consultant: Unico Japan |

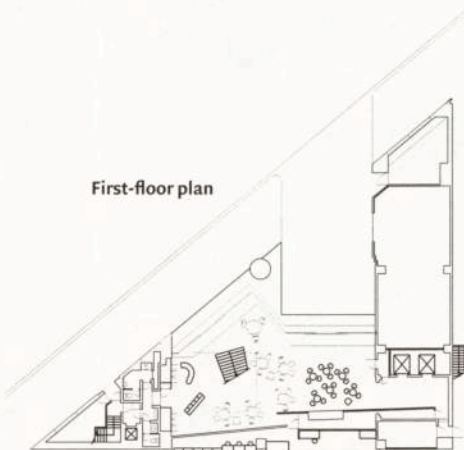
photography: Seiichi

Hatakeyama.

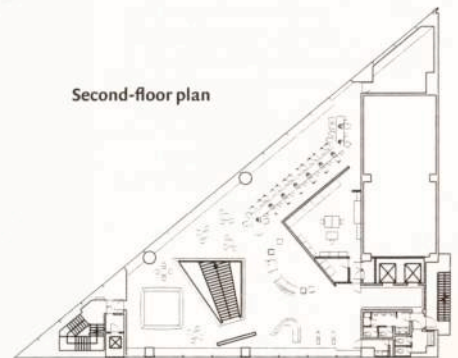


**MANUFACTURING CREDITS**

Café chairs: Inter.office | office chair: Uchida Yoko | seating fabric: Sincol Exceed | café tables, seating, table: Cassina | desk, custom profiles, windows, stair handrail, steel frame, lectern, workstations, profile painted wood, table, ceiling sculpture, windows: design: Riccardo Tossani, Architecture | carpet: Ueda Shikimono, Shaw, Selcom | acoustic wall panels: Paramount | flooring: Advan, Hachimantai-Mokuzai | lighting fixtures: Koizumi, Flos | cabinets: Hashimoto | doors and adjacent panels: Hashimoto | display monitor: Pioneer | photographic wallcovering: art director: Atsuko Itoda; photographer: Seiichi Hatakeyama; manufacturer: Fuji Film | wall tiles: Kenzan Ceramics | fabric wall panels: Woven Image, Australia | paint: Benjamin Moore | flying leopards: design: Atsuko Itoda | stainless steel logo: design: Sayuri Shoji; manufacturer: Goto-Kogei | computers: Apple | projector system: Unico Japan | fabricator for custom furnishings: Inex Corporation



First-floor plan



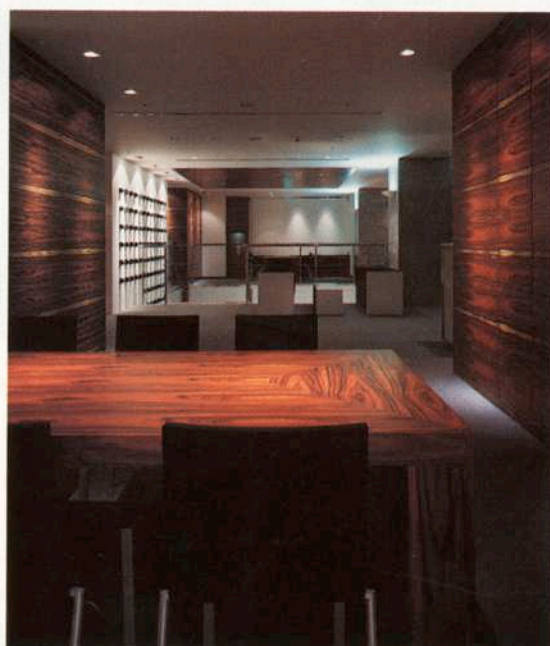
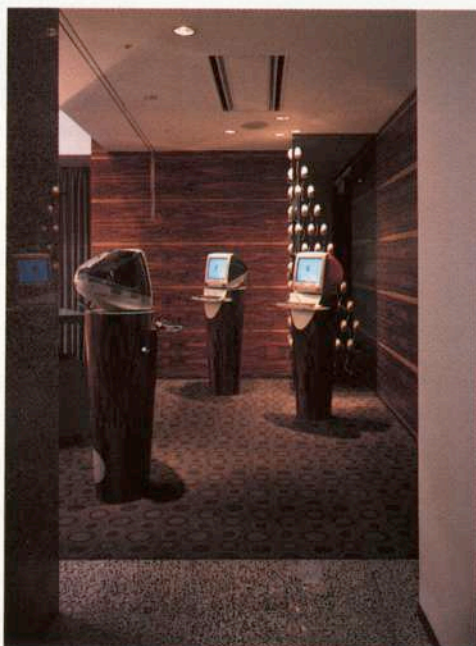
Second-floor plan

right Ground floor of the two-level Fukuoka office. opposite Though the facility's supergraphics and monitor wall resemble those of the Osaka location, varying floor treatments uniquely delineate zones of activity. bottom left First-floor browsing area. bottom middle and right Exotic purplewood gives the office much of its textural character while concealing extensive high-tech hardware.

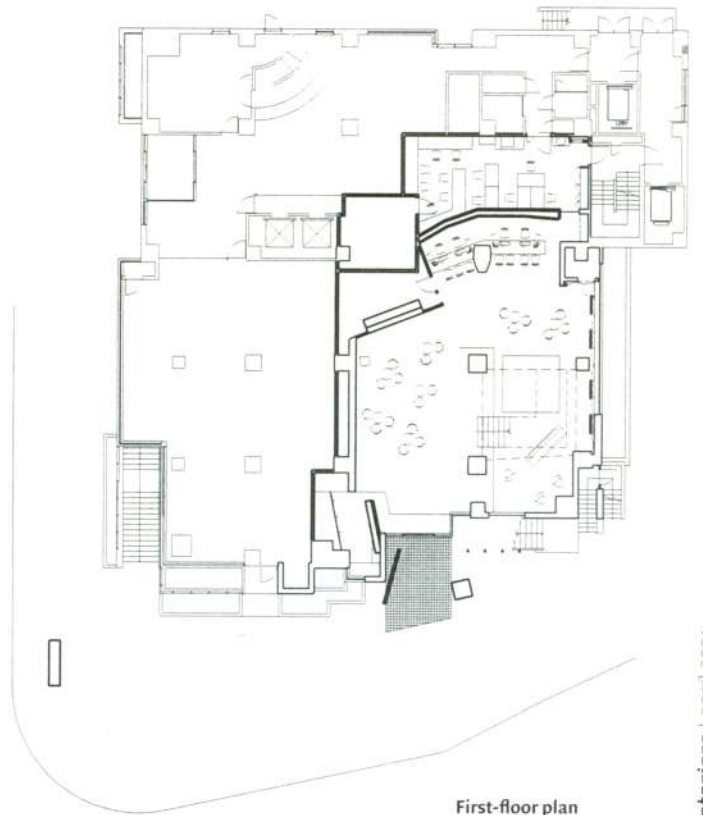


**MANUFACTURING CREDITS**  
 Seating: Vitra, Cassina, Idee | pedestals, lectern, reception desk, tables, leopard-head buttons, black mirror sculpture: design: Riccardo Tossani, Architecture | carpet: Durkan, DuPont, Ueda Shikimono | flooring, flooring tiles, terrazzo on columns: Advan | computer mice on sculpture: Logitech | sliding doors: Rimadesio | paint: Benjamin Moore | lighting fixtures: Koizumi, Hydrel | photographic wallcovering: art director: Atsuko Itoda; photographer: Seiichi Hatakeyama; manufacturer: Fuji Film | exhibition platform: Idee | wall tiles: Tajima | backlit panels: Nittobo | projection wall tiles: Tajima | projector system: Unico Japan | ceramic tile mosaic: Iwao Ceramics | stainless steel logo: design: Sayuri Shoji | computers: Apple | fabricator for custom furnishings: Inex Corporation

the architect claims the university student union as his inspiration: "i applied the idea of a youthful multipurpose gathering spot—a hip place with meeting areas, eateries, internet access," he says.







First-floor plan