



# Record Interiors

**M**aterials matter—at least if this month's Record Interiors is any indication of the broad architectural view. Each project featured is notable for the design team's thoughtful and innovative use of products—a sensual light “ribbon” crafted from simple fluorescent tubes beneath tinted translucent sheets of cast polymer, artful backlit panels of resin and punctured steel, flashing LED fixtures, glass and poured acryl walls and shelves, sanded and waxed engineered plywood, rift-sawn oak, felt, and chartreuse powder-coated aluminum.

Indeed, it appears that architects are approaching interiors with a fresh perspective in terms of their choice and use of materials. “They’re starting to explore and experiment with them,” says Andrew Dent, vice president of library and materials research at Material Connexion, an industry resource center.

For some, this stems from intelligent mentoring. Kathryn Dean and Charles Wolf, principals at Dean/Wolf, which designed the Virtual Light Loft, acquired their interior design sensibility in the 1980s through the refined, light-filled spaces of Louis Kahn. “We were trained by people who worked for Kahn, and they were influenced by the way he understood materials, and how he used them,” notes Dean.

More recent students benefit from savvy educators who have a keen eye toward the past and the future. “We get a lot of colleges interested in trying to broaden their students’ minds in terms of materials,” claims Dent, whose office consults with administrators of architecture programs. Consequently, he adds, “Architects come out of their training knowing materials and what can be done with them.”

Nevertheless, Dent believes that it’s the profusion of

viable products—especially their availability on the Internet—that has generated the most curiosity and interest. “Over the past 20 years, there have been more materials produced than ever before,” he says. Moreover, he explains that advances in production processes are continually improving the performance of existing products, which allows for more application possibilities. For instance, he notes, “We have better and more intricate ways of curving plywoods.”

When asked about current trends for interiors, Dent is definitive on two counts: “Sustainability is a given, but what we have seen is a maturity of sustainability and a greater understanding of what sustainability is—that it doesn’t always mean natural materials.” The other, not unrelated, issue is honesty in materials. “If it’s plastic, use it as plastic and celebrate that fact. If you want it to look like wood, then use wood.”

This notion of honesty, a recurring theme throughout the projects that follow—along with an understanding of what something can and cannot do—is key to the integrity and successful application of a product. “What we do [at Material Connexion] is show architects new materials and what is possible,” says Dent. “We also help them understand what the limitations are.” This thoughtful intelligence, along with a greater respect for the materials themselves, he concludes, will ultimately result in more effective designs. *Linda C. Lentz*

**The firms featured are:**

1. Johnsen Schmalig Architects
2. CL3 Architects
3. Dean/Wolf Architects
4. Wonderwall
5. BAR/architecten Van Mourik
6. 3SIX0
7. Lyn Rice Architects

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