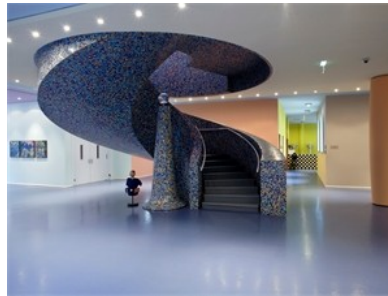


## 28<sup>th</sup> Jan 2011 | Groninger Revitalised

In a bid to compete with a global groundswell of inspiring museum spaces, the Groninger Museum of Modern Art in Holland commissioned a major three-way interior design project by Maarten Baas, Jaime Hayon and Studio Job that's attracting as much attention to the building as its exhibitions.



### Defining the Modern Museum

As museums and galleries vie for attention in cities with multiple cultural offerings, questions regarding exactly what these institutions should provide in terms of the visitor experience are becoming increasingly pertinent.

To fully engage visitors, it is now becoming imperative to complement the artworks, artefacts and information displayed with spaces that provide a secondary level of contemplation, research and/or entertainment.



### The Groninger: a Patchwork of Design

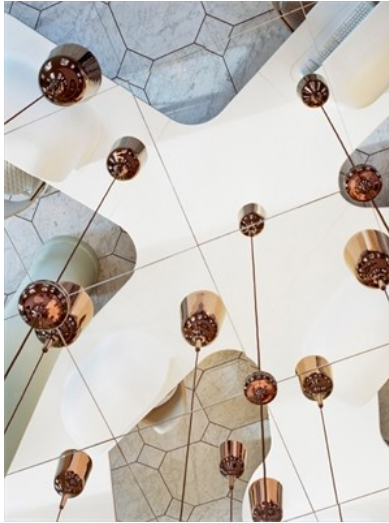
The Groninger's façade was a brave amalgamation of three designs, created in 1994 by Philippe Starck, Alessandro Mendini and Himmelb(l)au. The eclectic juxtaposition of styles vying for attention could have resulted in somewhat of an identity crisis, but instead the Groninger manages to exude a character and wit that sets it apart as a unique cultural destination.

Directly echoing the façade, the Groninger has selected three new designers for the reinterpretation of its interior spaces: Antwerp-based Dutch designers Studio Job, Dutch designer Maarten Baas, and Spanish artist and designer Jaime Hayon.

# Stylus

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All three have created rooms true to their signature styles, producing an interlinking patchwork of spaces within the Groninger. In order not to dilute their unique styles, each project was conceived entirely independently of the others, with museum curator Mark Wilson being the sole link between them.



## The Mendini Restaurant, by Maarten Baas

Maarten Baas' design for the Groninger's restaurant, inspired primarily by his Clay furniture collection (launched in 2006 at Salone del Mobile) provides an elegant dining space for the museum. This kind of venue has become a significant asset for the world's leading cultural institutions, as exemplified by the newly opened dining space The Restaurant at London's Royal Academy of Arts, designed by Tom Dixon, or the more established Restaurant Georges at Paris' Pompidou Centre designed by French architects Dominique Jakob and Brendan McFarlane. Both provide an extra incentive to visit their host buildings.

Named after Alessandro Mendini, the Italian architect of the yellow tower at the Groninger, the restaurant uses sustainable and locally sourced food wherever possible. To reflect this, Baas created bespoke, handcrafted furniture for the space made from steel and industrial clay.

Being set in such an iconic, but somewhat chaotic building, the challenge for Baas was to make the restaurant distinct in its own right. He told Stylus: "By choosing a basic tone of greyish colours, and a straight grid in the tables, I think it's a kind of 'island' of relative quietness within the many impressions one could get in the museum."



## The Info Centre, by Jaime Hayon

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The visitors' information centre is a staple of any museum, laying down a reinvention gauntlet for Jaime Hayon. "The idea was to come up with a new approach for this sort of space, which is traditionally cold and impersonal," he explains.

While technology was obviously integral to the space, Hayon was keen to keep it discreet, believing the centre should "retain a homely feel and be functional as well as flexible". This combination of flexibility and intimacy has been achieved through the integration of bespoke furnishings, including curved tables that appear to be 'growing' over each computer station like living organisms; a giant handmade vase in tribute to the Netherlands that forms the centrepiece; copper lights; custom cinemas; and specially designed display cases. Hayon says these features "collectively create a warm atmosphere, filled with light and energy".

This handcrafted approach to the design of the Info Centre reflects Hayon's respect for the Groninger and recognition of its inimitable architecture. "The concept had to be as special and different as the museum," he says.



## Job Lounge, by Studio Job

Studio Job was tasked with creating an imposing reception space. Well-known for straddling the boundary between fine art and design, Studio Job applied its trademark mischievous irreverence to the opulent Job Lounge, a space inspired by the interiors of 19<sup>th</sup> century private gentlemen's clubs.

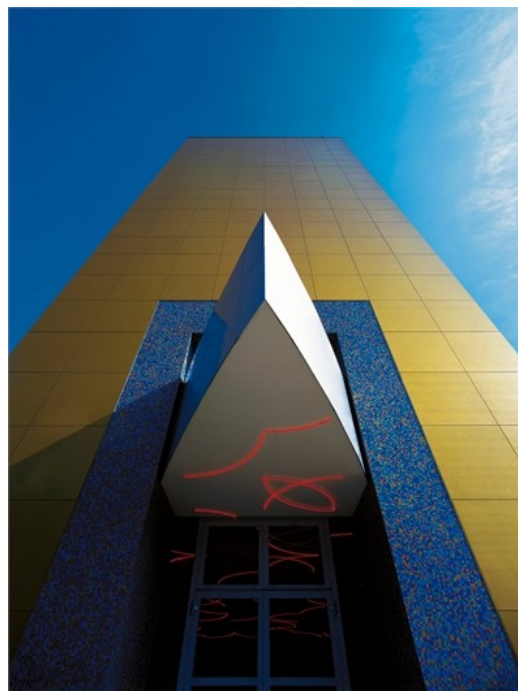
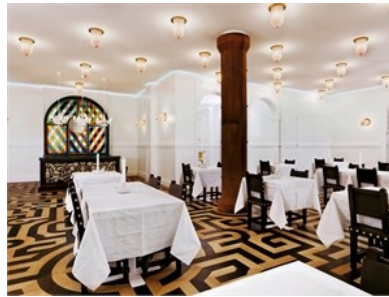
The overall ambience invokes luxury and tradition. However, if visitors take a closer look, they will notice, for example, that amid the trompe l'oeil wall coverings the glass wall and ceiling lights are shaped like female breasts, while the gothic-style chairs are made of plastic and, instead of a fountain, a cast bronze tap drips water into a bucket.

Co-founder of Studio Job, Job Smeets, said the aim was "making it interesting without it being a big aesthetic show-off". Despite this desire to avoid ostentation and visual gimmickry, Studio Job has created an extravagant lobby that will immediately and vividly capture the imagination of the museum's visitors. However, by keeping much of the excitement in the detail, it is elevated from a being a one-trick, wow-factor wonder, to one of exploration and discovery.

As the space with one of the most important roles, welcoming visitors, the Job Lounge succeeds in establishing the Groninger's internal language – no easy feat for a museum with so many separate identities.

"We involved the architecture and tried to design the opposite," says Smeets, embracing the rebellious attitude intrinsic to the museum's historically diverse aesthetic.

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[Groningermuseum.nl](http://Groningermuseum.nl)

[Hayonstudio.com](http://Hayonstudio.com)

[Studiojob.nl](http://Studiojob.nl)

[Maartenbaas.com](http://Maartenbaas.com)