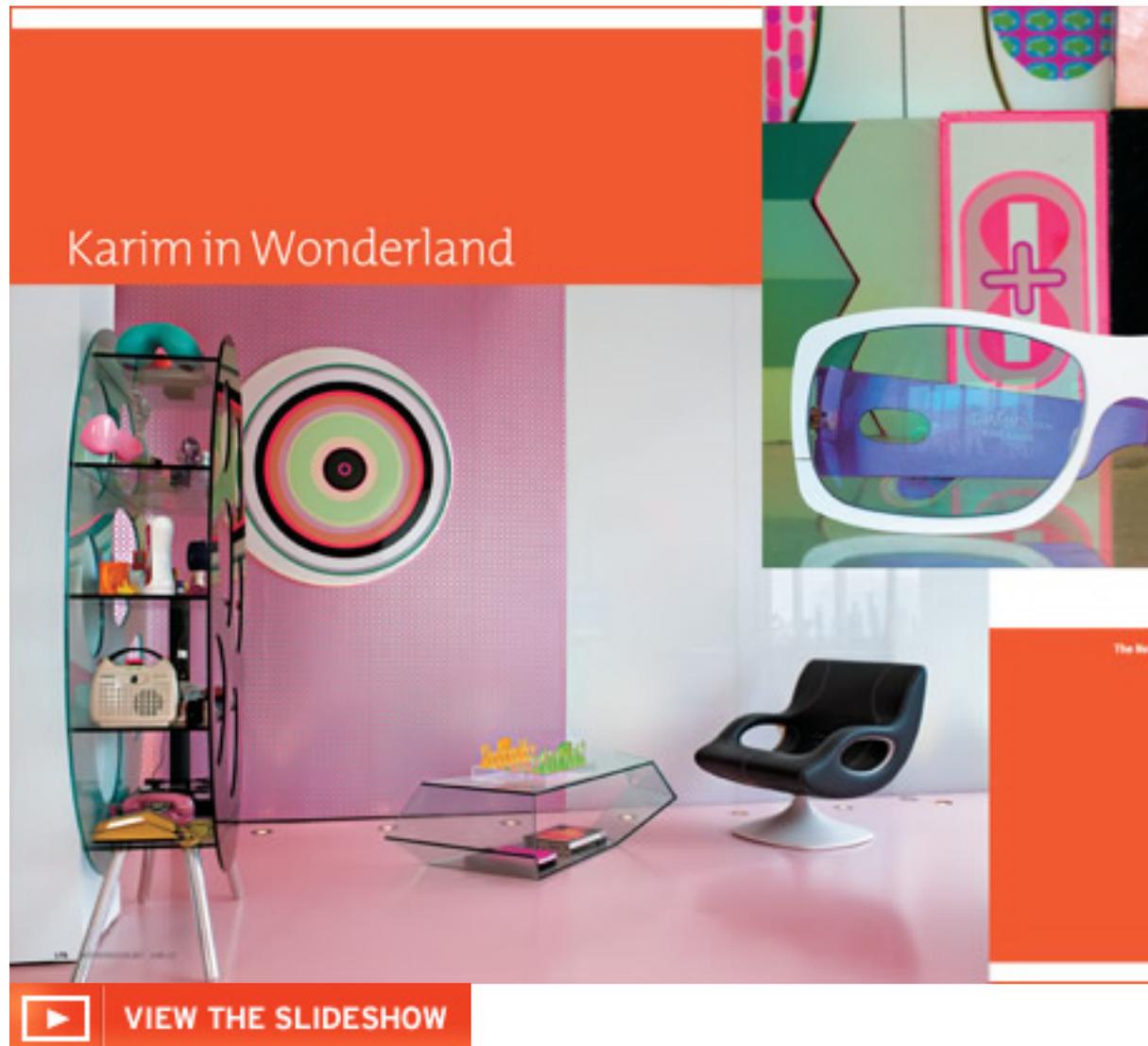


Karim in Wonderland

Craig Kellogg -- Interior Design, 6/1/2010 12:00:00 AM



"I'm wearing purple for the first time in 10 years. Can you believe it?" Karim Rashid's skintight Japanese Levi's are indeed a color too vivid for the average American man to even consider. Purple does not seem at all far-fetched, however, on this svelte designer as he gives a tour of the New York loft he shares with his Serbian wife, chemical engineer Ivana Rashid.

Most of the walls are as white as the impeccable suits he's better known for wearing, but the wall-to-wall carpet in the bedroom is fuchsia. In his opinion, all colors go together: "I don't think there are rules anymore." Aside from the bedroom carpet, flooring is sheet vinyl in his signature shade of baby pink. "That's the only controversial color we still have," he says, touting its positive energy and power as a youth magnet. "If I'm wearing pink in an airport, you should see how many children come up and talk to me."

Rashid spends plenty of time in airports as he shuttles between projects in 39 countries, but New York is still the place he calls home. After meeting his wife at a speaking engagement in Belgrade, he begged her for a first date that ultimately took place in Seoul, South Korea. The couple moved to this loft in deference to her. "We decided to find a new space to start our life together," he says. His previous apartment, right upstairs from the studio where his namesake firm designs products and interiors, "wasn't very private," he admits, what with clients always popping in. The new place benefits from being a short walk-and a world-away.

The couple must have looked at 50 options before discovering this 1,600-square-foot apartment in a brick industrial building with 10 ½-foot ceilings, higher than most. Essentially no square footage is lost to corridors, and lots of windows face south and west. Interior architecture was largely in place, from the new kitchen to the gallery-style baseboard reveals. The only change to the windows was cosmetic: the installation of simple solar shades. "In the past eight years, I've done over 50 interiors, and I've noticed that I'm getting more and more rigorous," he says. He also reconfigured the master bedroom's walk-in closet and jazzed up the en suite bathroom with his own biomorphic pink sinks and psychedelic glazed ceramic tiles.

For the living-dining room, he blew up a photograph of his wife's face, snapped while she was showering at home in Belgrade. She was the one who curated the furniture selection now under her portrait's gaze, because, he says, he loves design almost too much and wouldn't have been able to edit. "Six months ago, we had a different sofa," he adds, pointing to a wildly patterned sectional with an integral table. "In a year or two, we'll change it again." He's holding court in the dining area, sitting on one of his polycarbonate stacking chairs at a Parsons-style table clad in two completely different swirling patterns of plastic laminate—a one-off piece.

He's sold tens of thousands of his flocked Garbo waste bins, one of which sits in the guest bathroom. If you stop to think about it, he and his wife practically live in a

Karim Rashid museum. "People criticize me for being egocentric, surrounding myself with my work," he admits. But he feels that living beyond the reach of outside influences not only makes his new designs stronger but also allows him to examine finished products for any mistakes. It can prove to be something of a parlor game for first-time visitors to scan the apartment for furnishings that are not his designs. On modular shelving, also his, are objects by mentors and friends: Michele De Lucchi, Ettore Sottsass, Alessandro Mendini, Matteo Thun. There is also, among the accumulation on a Rashid-designed credenza, a stylized Aldo Londi cat figurine next to a chic Piero Fornasetti vase. Rashid's own display cabinet, a glass lozenge shape on four splayed legs, contains a Rubik's Cube, a Sony Walkman, and examples of every generation of iPod, though he did design many of the other toys and accessories inside.

As our time together ends, Rashid darts into the kitchen for a souvenir of the visit. From the counter, he plucks one of his new bubble-wrapped Bobble bottles. The design-which purifies tap water in an attempt to reduce the proliferation of discarded plastic bottles-features a reusable squeeze bottle fitted with a compact carbon filter in one of six colors. "Of course, you don't have to have a pink one," he says. That's true enough. It's closer to fuchsia.

Photography by Karim Rashid.