

I.D.

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COLUMN LAMPS

The jurors loved the contrast between these lyrically expressive lamps, designed by Gisela Stromeier and the highly engineered Escale office system, which also won a Best of Category award. These two projects epitomized the proverbial split between romance and reason, technology and craft, that live at opposite ends of the design world. Stromeier's Column Lamps, they agreed, span the disciplines of architecture, design and sculpture. "It's been done before, people have used this fabric before," remarked Kovacs, noting that Stromeier's work was similar in spirit to Noguchi's. What set the design apart for him, however, was its magnitude. "It's the size and scale that distinguish it, that makes it so strong," he offered. Hutton agreed: "It's so big that it becomes architectural; you can create a new space with it. It's about transforming a room."

Because they are made of Lycra, the lamps are washable. They hang from the ceiling and stretch to the floor with a minimal support structure—fiberglass rods shape the top, while weights stretch the fabric down to a wood foundation. The fabric is attached to the rim of the wood with Velcro. A halogen spotlight with a dimmer is centered in the base, throwing a spot of light up to the ceiling. Each lamp stretches from 8 to 10 feet. "A forest of these would be fabulous," Hunt enthused.



Gisela Stromeier.

Gisela Stromeier, a German-born architect, comes from a family of tent makers that goes back four generations. Her father, Peter Stromeier, was the partner of the renowned architect Frei Otto, who created tensile structures in buildings like the German Pavilion in Montreal and the Olympic Stadium in Munich. Stromeier studied the design and making of tents with her father and Otto from 1981 to 1984. After graduating from Pratt Institute with a degree in architecture in 1989, she opened her own design office. Her projects include designs for Donna Karan's fashion shows, Emanuel Ungaro's New York showroom, the Click Model Agency's offices, Tower Records, Equinox and Elizabeth Arden spas.

What specific need does this product address?

My concept was to create something using an existing structure. Everyone has ceilings and walls. The idea was to make a column of light so that it has an architectural, sculptural element. It provides a visually interesting shape as well as soft light; it's flexible, so it can work in smaller spaces; and it provides a strong vertical element.

How does this project distinguish itself from others of its kind?

It's different because it's an architectural element as well as a lamp. It hangs off the ceiling and collapses into a flat element. And you can wash it.

How is this project similar to or dissimilar from other projects you have designed?

It's my first product. Usually, I respond to spaces individually—all of my work is custom. This is different. Also, my projects are usually larger. In my other designs, I work with light but the light is a separate element. With these lamps, everything is unified into a whole. Now I'm thinking about doing more products. I have a screen in mind and a wall lamp with a spine that collapses.

What role, if any, did new technology or materials play in shaping this project?

None. Lycra Spandex has been around for quite some time. It's a very simple concept. It goes all the way back to tent making.

In retrospect, what would you change or add to this project?

I like it the way it is. I might add something to the foot. When you clean around it, the fabric tends to get dirty. But I am going to change the construction: I'm going from two seams to one.

To what extent did other designers influence you?

It goes to my history and my father's work with Frei Otto. Basically, it's the same idea I'm working with, but I work in stretch materials, and they didn't. Most of their work is outdoors so they needed a more rigid fabric.

CLIENT/COMPANY Gisela Stromeier Architectural Design, New York.

IN-HOUSE DESIGN Gisela Stromeier, president.

MATERIALS/FABRICATION Lycra fabric, fiberglass rods, wooden base.

