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Marc Clemenceau Bailly (left)
and Mark Foster Gage.
Photo [Evan Joseph](#)

Gage Clemenceau Architects sees computers as communication tools that break down barriers between disciplines.

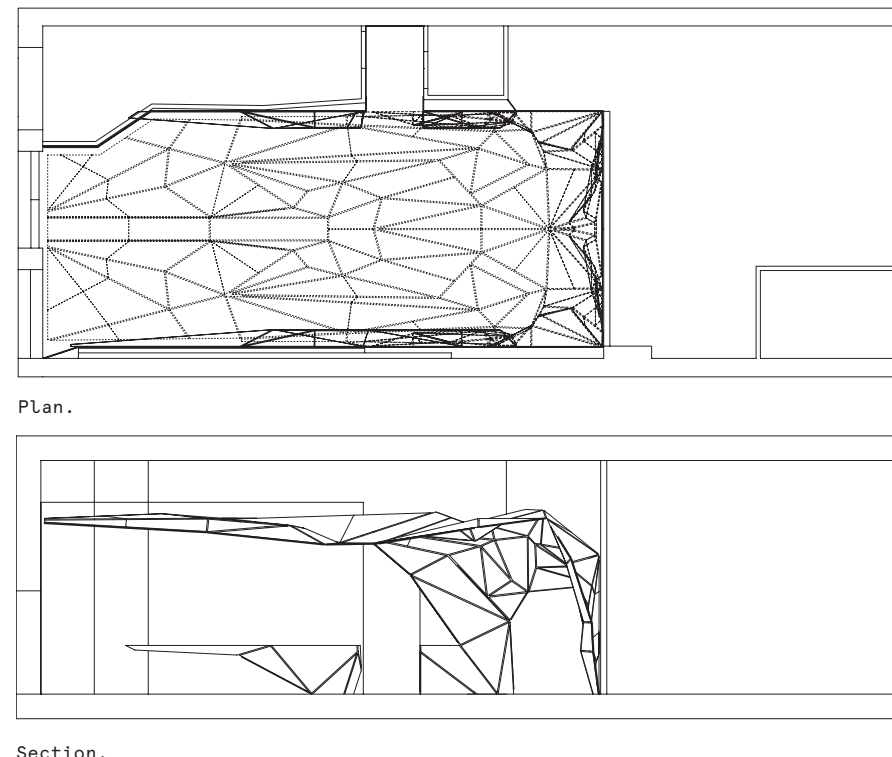
Text [Terri Peters](#)





The architects collaborated with four lighting consultants, including concert-lighting specialists.

'We're fusing the physical and digital worlds in a way that proposes new models for the future of retail'



Plan.

Section.

Nicola Formichetti Store

New York / NY / USA
2011

For New York Fashion Week in September 2011, Gage Clemenceau Architects realized a pop-up shop for fashion designer and frequent Lady Gaga collaborator Nicola Formichetti. The temporary store, which doubled as a performance space, was the work of designers from a wide range of disciplines, whose aim was an environment where anything could happen.

Photos [Evan Joseph](#)

In a café beneath the canals of the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas, Mark Foster Gage, cofounder of New York design studio Gage Clemenceau Architects, is preparing for his 'cage match'. He has been told boxing gloves will be provided for dramatic effect and some of the 'competitors' will be in warrior costumes. Foster Gage, who is also acting assistant dean at Yale School of Architecture and editor of a forthcoming book on the history of beauty, is busy rehearsing his arguments about innovation, creativity and aesthetics as he goes before the crowd to participate in an 'Innovation Forum Cage Match'. This unconventional evening lecture is part of the annual Autodesk University event, a four-day conference that attracts more than 9,000 CAD users.

Foster Gage is no stranger to drama, stage lighting and celebrity. As heads of a nine-person studio, he and his creative partner, architect Marc Clemenceau Bailly, have built a handful of interesting house extensions, but it is their high-profile unbuilt competition entries and select interior projects that the office is known for.

In September 2011 they completed a 120-m² pop-up shop for fashion designer and frequent Lady Gaga collaborator Nicola Formichetti. Welcoming visitors during New York Fashion Week, the store was designed to display some of Lady Gaga's original costumes and merchandise. The main objective was maximum visual impact. 'We're fusing the physical and digital worlds in a way that proposes new models for the future of retail and fashion,' says Foster Gage. 'Walking in, people were totally shocked.' Images of the super-publicized interior –

think shattered disco ball – were immediately online in various fashion, design, music and art magazines and blogs.

The designers came up with numerous detailed simulations of mirror placement and reflections. The spectacular result was a dynamic and immersive environment. 'We kept testing the concepts, figuring out how to create the exact effect that we wanted. The mirrors were all calculated to reflect back to one point, so if there was nothing there, then it all disappeared,' says Foster Gage. The location was a historical building in Tribeca. 'All the walls were original plaster,' he says. 'We had to build a new structure inside: walls, floor, roof.'

The idea was to bring in designers from as many disciplines as possible and have them create a space where anything could happen. 'One day a florist did these surreal floral arrangements that opened and closed with zippers; another day we filled the space with our Robotic Tulip lights.' Fellow collaborator CCP developed a digital version of the controversial fashion model known as Zombie Boy, whose entire body is covered with gruesome skeleton tattoos. They also produced what was probably the world's first virtual fashion show. Customers watching the show could buy the leather outfit worn by the model for their characters to wear in Eve Online, a massive role-playing game site. 'The store had video gaming, fashion, merchandise, flowers, advertising, all these digital-content feeds – we kept piling on stuff to see what would stick.' The success of the pop-up >



The interior - resembling a shattered disco ball - was designed to display some of Lady Gaga's original costumes and merchandise.





are really dull – put a sphere here, put a line there – the digital tools for a lot of these other industries are really good,’ he continues. ‘So I started reaching out and grabbing other opportunities. Now, during conversations with people in Hollywood, for instance, I look at film, at media, at the automotive industry. I’m getting access to actual people. The collaboration is richer than what we’d have by just using different tools. Ours is definitely not a conventional architectural model, but it works for us.’

Foster Gage argues that graphic designers are not simply learning to use graphic-design software and that architects need to learn more than how to use architecture software. He sees computers as potential communication tools that should be about breaking down barriers between disciplines. ‘The computer enables me to speak to an automotive designer. Because we often use the same software, it’s easier for us to collaborate and communicate – as opposed to a couple of architects standing around like monkeys, saying, “No, it should be more like this” and “No, more like that”.’

He believes that ‘people are realizing they can go to architects for things other than architecture. We have new ways of thinking, new ranges of tools. The regular distinctions are breaking down.’ The office’s competition entry for the Estonian Academy of Art (2008) is an example of how these architects use new tools and skills to communicate beyond their discipline. One of their key



visualizations features a lacy, decorative façade, perforated with delicate holes and tears. It looks carved, smooth and impossible to build. ‘We used this automotive-design software, called ALIAS. It normally costs about US\$60,000 for a single licence, making it inaccessible to most architects.’ The studio struck a deal with the software company and got permission to experiment with the tools that Foster Gage hoped would help them to better describe their ideas. ‘This software allowed us to treat surfaces differently than typical architectural software does. With it, we designed the delicate scoops and vents that let air go into the courtyards.’ The façade of the building is composed of three vertical pieces, and the designers experimented with the software’s ability to split reflections between ground and sky; ▶

◀ shop has led to more work with the same client, fusing fashion, product design and architecture. The office is currently working on a new version for Tokyo Forum. ‘We are coming up with designs for a sequel to this story,’ says Foster Gage. ‘Whereas the New York store was immersive and contained in a single volume, the Tokyo project will be more of a network of interconnected environments. It will be bigger, better, faster ...’ They were also invited to design part of a costume for Lady Gaga. Frank Gehry had designed a hat for her in 2009, so an architecturally designed dress was not out of the ordinary for the singer. ‘We took her face, digitized it, coloured it, 3D-printed it and made masks out of it. She wore one on her shoulder on stage: a tiny double Gaga.’

It was not Foster Gage’s and Clemenceau Bailly’s education that prepared them for such unconventional commissions. The two met during their undergraduate studies in architecture at the University of Notre Dame, which

Foster Gage describes as a school that provided him with an ultra-conservative classical education. The young men travelled to Rome, where they lived for a year. After graduating, they moved to New York City. Clemenceau Bailly gained experience working on high-end residential projects for clients like Cindy Crawford, and Foster Gage worked in the office of Robert A.M. Stern. ‘It was 1998, the beginning of the digital stuff, and once I had my master’s from Yale, Marc and I started collaborating. I had the experimental digital background, he had experience seeing projects through, and our roles are more or less that way today. Using his project experience, Marc does the building, the planning, the contracts.’ Despite the fact that they are just as likely to be fabricating masks for pop stars as to be sketching plans for loft extensions, Foster Gage laughs while assuring me that they ‘are both totally insured, totally licensed architects, believe it or not’.

‘When I was studying, I realized that while computers for architecture

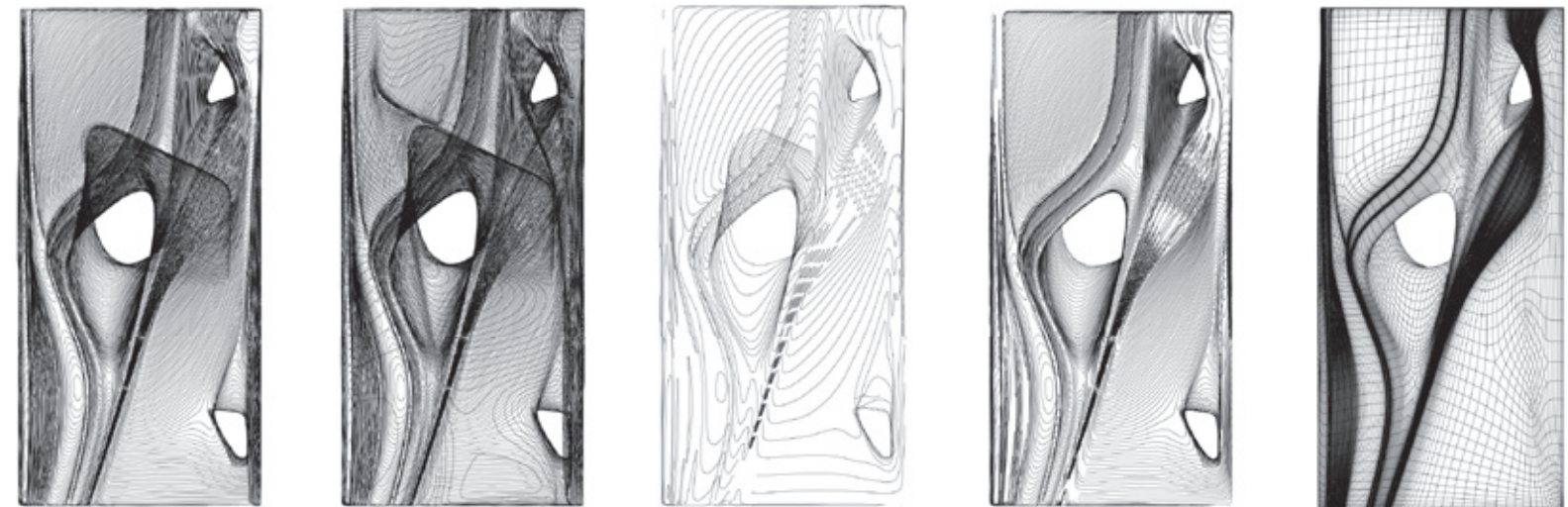
Estonian Academy of Art

Tallinn / Estonia
2008

The architects’ Estonian Academy of Art competition entry relied in part on ALIAS, a brand of automotive-design software that enabled them to treat surfaces differently than they could have done with architectural software.

Images Gage Clemenceau Architects

Façade studies.





When opened, the pods expose their solar cells to the sun.

< known as automotive 'break lines', these occur in the folds of car panels. Foster Gage was aiming for extremely high-resolution surfaces: 'Architects never really think of things like that - low- or high-quality resolution - but automotive designers use software that lets them make super-intricate things.' Satisfied with their progress to that point, they set about building panels and prototypes, 'trying to get it out of the computer, trying to show we could actually prototype it in different ways'.

The team used the same industrial-design software for its Solar Flowers project, translating sketches into contours and robotic 'pods' that integrate solar technology. 'Rather than basically sticking a bunch of solar cells onto the top of a building, we tried to come up with a unique language that



would make our design sexy. You can place these energy devices all over a city and they can open and close.' Solar Flowers began as an internal research project, with no particular client in mind. 'We used another industrial-design tool as well, a tool used to render car bodies, because it treats reflections differently than other automotive-design software. You can have highlights and ripples.'

A hint of Gage Clemenceau's dramatic design ideas seeps into the firm's rather conservative residential projects, creating a wobble in the minimalist, high-end loft designs. 'If a client wants to build a new house or add an extension, we try to take one part of it and really trick it out.' Chelsea Residence (2008) has a custom walnut feature wall: a textured 3D element that divides the 42-m² space, in which matching dining

'We are both totally insured, totally licensed architects, believe it or not'

Chelsea Residence

New York / NY / USA
2008

Chelsea Residence features a subtly bulging walnut space divider. Accompanying the wall are matching dining and coffee tables.

Photo [Lily Kesselman](#)

and coffee tables also have bulging, distorted forms. In an apartment in SoHo (2006), a sliding acrylic-resin screen dividing the large living area has a decorative etched design and moves along an illuminated channel in the floor. But Gage Clemenceau has its sights set on amplifying experimentation and moving up in scale. 'I think all technologies and new ways of working start out small,' says Foster Gage. 'There are a lot of innovations in the profession, but many are realized at the scale of installation first, rather than as buildings. I am willing to wait, to do different kinds of experiments in unconventional ways, to create new networks and collaborations. But really, a dream project would be a big museum, or a library.'

Back to the cage fight in Las Vegas. After the smoke literally clears, Mark 'Twelve Gauge' Foster Gage takes home the championship belt, having triumphed over rival Matt 'The Sea Monster' Daly of design production studio Leviathan. The theme of the debate was the origins of innovation: does it come from the designer's mind or from an interpretation of the client's wishes? During the three-round bout, Foster Gage argued that designers should collaborate with experts in various fields to come up with big ideas that clients don't even know they want. At the outset, for example, was Nicola Formichetti picturing a 'digital cave' filled with thousands of fragments of robotically cut mirror, lit with concert lighting and experienced in surround sound? Foster Gage believes architects need to inspire and lead clients towards a more multidisciplinary and visionary future. Together with a highly creative client willing to take risks, he stresses that 'we're rewriting the equation of what an experiential and interactive retail and display space can be by involving music, fashion, art, retail, video games, cosmetics, architecture, botany, et cetera'. Architecture will never be the same. <

gageclemenceau.com



Solar Flowers

Solar Flowers are robotic 'pods' that use solar technology to produce energy. The architects envision the blooms, which open and close in response to the sun, appearing 'all over a city'.

Images [Gage Clemenceau Architects](#)