Opposite: "Feuille D'Automne" for the second edition of India Mahdavi's "Project Room" exhibition. The room showcases design work centered around the Flowers collection India designed for French paint company Mériguet-Carrère. Photo by Simone Bossi

Above: An armchair from Wendy Andreu's Dragon Chairs series, covered with a colored Regen textile skin with organic patterns. Photo by Vanni Bassetti

India Mahdavi is an Iranian-French architect and designer based in Paris, known for her vibrant and innovative approach to interior design and scenography. Since founding her studio in 2000 India has made her mark in various fields including architecture, furniture design, and interiors. Her work reflects a joyful aesthetic that combines modern comfort with playful elegance. She has designed many places, bars, restaurants, retail concepts, clubs, and hotels including Hôtel du Cloître in Arles, France. Her design work for The Gallery at Sketch restaurant in London also cemented the trend of "millennial pink" and became one of the most shared restaurants on social media.

Wendy Andreu is a French artist and designer whose work emphasizes experimentation with materials, particularly in crafting functional design pieces that bridge the gap between matter, people, and space. Her ongoing "Regen" initiative creatively uses textiles by gluing rather than stitching, resulting in unusual textures and forms. She works from her atelier in the 19th arrondissement of Paris where she develops personal projects as well as commissioned works.

The two recently discussed the upcoming debut of The Tiny Room, a dedicated exhibition space in Paris created by India to host a new generation of designers. The space allows emerging talents to showcase their work freely and creatively. In September, India invited Wendy to inaugurate The Tiny Room during Paris Design Week. Their conversation explores early iterations of the project, eventually culminating in Wendy's "Mechanical Garden" exhibition. —*Gianna Annunzio*

India Mahdavi: My son Miles, who is part of my team, suggested we do something with you, Wendy. He's a huge fan of your work and I thought it was a fantastic idea. Your approach to materiality is incredible—especially your recent work with glass.

I know you've been working with glass for a while in collaboration with Cirva, a glass research center in Marseille, France, where you had a residency. That's why I felt that the timing and the format of The Tiny Room was perfect.

Wendy Andreu: Thank you very much for inviting me into The Tiny Room and for this conversation. I've been doing this residency for about a year-and-a-half now at Cirva. It's a very special place. The director invites designers or artists who have never worked with glass before, so I had no clue about glass when I started.

I've been experimenting based on my own education and vision of design, which is deeply rooted in materiality and craftsmanship. I was trained as a metal craftswoman, and then I went to design school. For me it's crucial to be in the workshop, experimenting with materials and trying things out.

Cirva is like a dream come true for me. It's mesmerizing. Working with glass is incredibly challenging because it requires equipment that's not easily accessible—things like electricity, gas, heat, and of course, the skill of the glassblowers. They are just so, so skilled.

For my work at Cirva I design metal shapes and components on my computer, have everything laser-cut in metal, and bring the metal pieces in. That's when I weld everything together to create these metal cages, and then

The Chamber of the Muses, one of six rooms redesigned by India in Rome's 16th-century Villa Medici. "Before I became an architect, my fantasy was to be a filmmaker," India says. "I spent a year watching three movies a day, so I've trained my eye like a camera. I know what works and doesn't work in an image and how to create a strong visual." Photo by François Halard

I ask the blowers to blow glass inside them.

This gives a very distinctive shape to your objects. They are mostly vases, if we can call them that. They're containers, but they're also sculptures at the same time. What's interesting is the way you create these cages in a very specific manner, and the use of color is quite intuitive.

When you work with glass, you have to deal with the availability of certain colors. One day you might have certain colors available, and the next day, different ones. You really have to work with the pace of the firing. Is that correct?

Yes, but it's also a matter of compatibility between colors. Originally these vases weren't even intended to be vases—they were meant to be a sort of color scheme or an experiment in colors, like a color palette. Many of them actually broke because the colors weren't compatible. The ones that survived are the ones where the colors worked well together. It's like a love story of colors.

They represent unique encounters shaped by you. I also asked you to do your own scenography of the space. To take over the space as if it was your own room and think of it as a whole and not just objects within a space. I liked that we had a back-and-forth conversation on that.

I tried to create a cohesive story with these objects and expand them into the space. I'm not a spatial designer, but I had great support from you; I'm really happy with the choices we made. To give a little insight into the exhibition, the main theme is a "mechanical garden." It's a reflection on what is "free" versus what is controlled. This idea ties into the glassblowing process—the glass expands when it's very hot, but then it's constrained by the metal framework, representing the contrast between what's natural and what's artificial. We'll have these stainless steel flowers that will function as tables and hold glass vases.

We also made some fun choices, like using synthetic grass for the ground—a sort of fake lawn.

The concept of a mechanical garden is really intriguing to me. I think we all dream of having a garden; we need to surround ourselves with anything organic and natural. You have created a surreal garden where the vases become the flowers, the grass is red, the sky is orange, and the clouds are textile flowers. Your work brings a poetic element that resonates with the idea of a garden.

When you first showed me your vases, they were smaller in scale. I advised you to make them larger to give them more presence and amplitude. I felt that a larger scale would help them have more impact visually. A beautiful small object can be harder to find an audience for than something more sculptural. The outcome is just incredible—they have such a wonderful presence.

Each one is different, and it's really interesting because you question materiality in such a unique way. That's what I love about your work—you recognize the glass, of course, but you're not entirely sure if it's an object that's been blown. You end up questioning it.

It's definitely something you learn by being there and seeing how everything is made. Even if you have experience with glass, it's still a mystery—things break, and you don't always understand why. It's a constant learning process. Cirva is a place for experimentation so we try all sorts of crazy things.

Now I feel quite comfortable in that environment. My residency ends at the end of the year, but I'd love to continue working there somehow. I'm not sure how, but I'll try to go back often. Glass is magic to me—it can be anything.

You're a trained designer and you're part of a new generation of designers that questions the materiality of a product. I trained as an architect, so my approach is very different. My relationship to furniture and objects is rooted in space. What I design is very contextual—objects or furniture for specific spaces. We come from different backgrounds.

Of course, I work with craft. All my furniture is made in France whenever possible. I work with artisans and craftsmanship but I don't make the objects myself. You are much more hands-on. It's a very different way of approaching the work.

What's interesting is that in design, there are no strict rules; there are so many ways to approach a design practice today.

What I admire about your work is your ability to turn everything into an image. Whether it's a space or a 3D object, you're really good at creating a strong, memorable image.

It's something that sticks with you.
I'm more focused on the workshop side of things, like a bit of a geek in my atelier. You on the other hand have this broad, visionary perspective that I really admire. It's beautiful to see everything you've done.

Well, thank you. It's true that I've always trained my eye. Before I became an architect my fantasy was to be a filmmaker. I spent a year watching three movies a day, so I've trained my eye like a camera. I know what works and doesn't work in an image and how to create a strong visual. But for me an image alone isn't sufficient. Especially today with digital manipulation being so prevalent, you can easily trick an image.

What's really important now is not just the image but also how something is made. Is it sustainable? What's the purpose of the object? And then there's the experience around it. What interests me about the "Mechanical Garden" is that it's not just an object; it's part of a human experience. It's about connecting with a community, interacting, and being together. It's not just about creating a visual.

I completely agree. An image isn't necessarily empty. It's like a voice, or an eye-catcher that draws you in. If you're attracted to an image, you become interested. If you're interested, you're more willing to dig deeper and see what's behind it. Without that initial image nothing happens.

I also do a lot of models. That's how I work on my spaces and how I approach my projects in general. I always test things to ensure the scale is right. I experiment with different aspects, but my approach is more about an intuitive reaction to materials and materiality.

When I was working in Siwa, which is in the desert in Egypt, I experimented a lot with salt. I created a whole collection of objects in salt, and that was a form of experimentation. On an everyday basis I experiment with

Wendy's Modhera series for Aequō Contemporary Design Gallery Mumbai. The series blends Wendy's design aesthetic with the gloss and rivets of traditional Indian tiffin boxes and trunks. Next spread: India's Lili Boulanger room within the Villa Medici. Photo courtesy of Aequō

scale, drawing things full-scale and making models to proportion things.

It's about working with physical elements—cutting things out, moving from paper to something tangible, and printing things out to get a sense of distance. I really need to transition from paper to the physical as soon as possible.

I spend most of my time in the workshop. Interestingly, my textile practice stems from a mistake—a kind of failure, really. I was trained as a metal craftswoman, and then I attended a conceptual design school in the Netherlands, where they encouraged us to step out of our comfort zones and try new things.

I wanted to work with soft materials to do something different since I already knew metal well and had some experience with wood. But I was terrible at it. The textile teacher was not happy with me at all. She told me I'd never be a textile designer. I was constantly breaking needles on the sewing machine, and the knitting machine was an absolute enigma to me. I just didn't get it.

Still I wanted to create something, so I decided to glue the rope instead of sewing it. I made a sample about 10 years ago. It wasn't anything special at first. I just wound some thread around a coffee pot creating a cylinder shape, and then I covered it with latex. When I tried to remove it from the cylinder, I couldn't. I thought, "Oh, that's a pity."

So I had to cut it.

When I did, it unfolded into a rectangle. I liked that. From there I just kept taking one step after another. Now 10 years later, I've developed a whole new craftsmanship for textiles from that initial experiment.

I think that's where the intelligence of the hand comes in. Often your hand leads your mind and you end up doing things you wouldn't have thought of in a 3D model. It's like your hand knows something your mind doesn't, and it brings you new ideas. That's so important. I love that story—it's wonderful.

Exactly, and then I started making textiles with metal molds. I'd create shapes in metal and then wind the textile around them to create molds that could be unfolded and reused. I still use my metalworking skills in my textile process. The glass molds and textile molds are quite similar, so I experiment, but I always return to what I love—working with molds.

The way glassblowers use them is fascinating; one blow and bam, the shape is there. It's amazing. The same goes for textiles; you can create a series, but each piece is unique. This method also minimizes material waste because the shape is confined by the mold. It's very different from carving something from a woodblock.

For this exhibition we've also prepared some flower-shaped textiles as tapestries. They're made from leftovers from a factory in the southwest of France. The threads come from a big machine, so again there's that mechanical element. Originally they were meant to be woven in a strict pattern, but now they've become fluffy and resemble flower petals.

That's what I really like about your work. Your metalwork is minimal and architectural, but then your fabric work becomes so organic. This duality in your work is really beautiful. Your chairs that were inspired by the Château de la Faucille have a landscape of their own. They're like little worlds.

When I work with materials I'm always thinking about their potential. I don't just think of them as they are, but as what they can become; I follow where the material leads me.

Exactly. There's no research for being tasteful; it's more about the research process and how you arrive at the final result. My approach to color is very emotional. I'm always trying to create a vibration that brings light and depth—something I often miss in Paris where the sky is gray.

I really don't have a lot of taste, so...

Taste doesn't mean anything! But your relationship to color is very different. I'm known for being a colorist, but it's all very intuitive for me. I like to have colors that have a conversation with each other. I like them to swear at each other. It's not about them matching perfectly but about how they interact—like in a real conversation, where opposing opinions create dialogue.

My colors are close enough to interact but not perfectly aligned, creating an intriguing tension. The conversation happens because they're close but not identical. It's what makes them interesting.

I really liked your color proposition in the rooms in Villa Medici. The relationship with the pattern and the colors was beautiful.

It wasn't easy because it was all made of wood marquetry, so we had to work with pre-tinted, preset colors. The patterns were inspired by typical perspective motifs from the Italian Renaissance. One of the bedrooms was colored in response to Debussy's music, which I find very acidic. I translated that acidity into the colors, creating a certain vibration.

The other bedroom was based on Galileo who also stayed at the Villa Medici and was supported by the Medici family. My vision was of a celestial field—the sky, the colors of the night. That's how I assembled the colors.

Now I find myself thinking more in this way because I've grown into this approach. I have access to all these colors now, so with that foundation I've started to think about it more. I've never really put it into words before today, but I'm trying to explain it. I think I'm practicing this more and more in phases.

It's not always easy to explain. I find colors difficult to describe. They're so subjective. You feel that some colors belong, and others don't but it's hard to define why. Some spaces just call for a certain color if you really listen to them. For example, here in my house in the south of France, it felt like the house was calling for red. I can't explain why, but I ended up creating a red room. Normally I wouldn't use red, but in this case the house felt like it had a sadness to it. I thought it needed some warmth, some fire.

Now I have one room upstairs, a library, that's completely red lacquer. The ceiling is red, the walls are red, everything is red except for the sofa, which is a bit of a purple.

I've been called the "queen of color," but I've never really acknowledged that because it's so intuitive for me. It doesn't have any special value—it's just natural. Some people have a great ear, some have a great sense of smell, and some have a fantastic palate. I just happen to have a good eye for colors.

Wendy's Dragon Armchair. The textile here is not woven or knitted, but glued. The cotton's fibers get stuck in the silicone creating a composite material. The textile volume of this piece is constructed in a single shape, without any loss of material and without any sewing. Photo by Pim Top