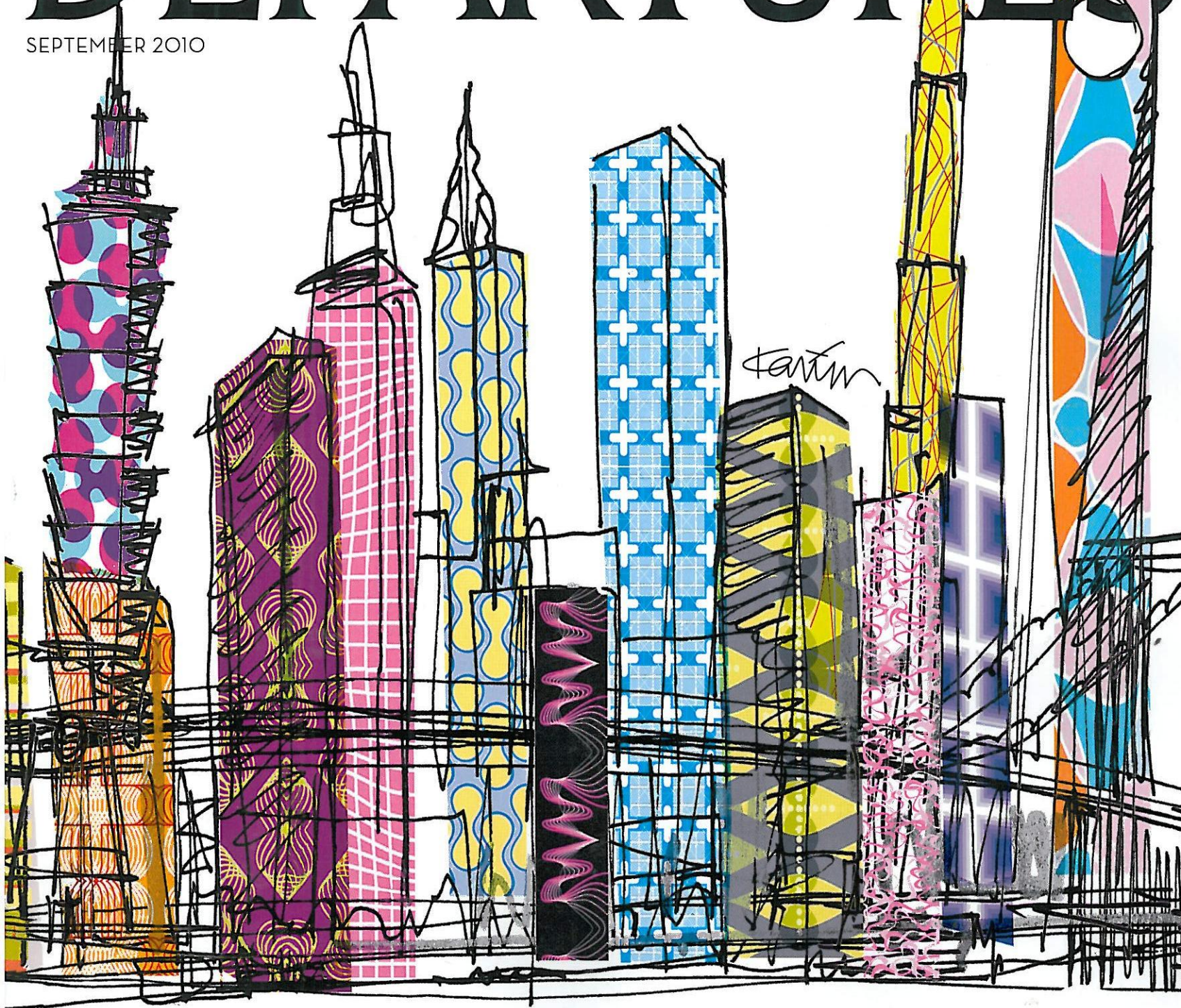


# DEPARTURES

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## THE STYLE ISSUE

A GLOBAL GUIDE TO TRAVEL AND DESIGN

ANTWERP • CHICAGO • VIEQUES • MILAN • ISTANBUL • DELHI • BERLIN...

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**Gilded Age**

## PAINT GURU

New York-based **Lillian Heard** is something of a modern-day da Vinci, with her airy frescoes and silver-leaf columns adorning some of the country's most important homes. After training at the Art Institute of Chicago, specializing in Venetian plaster, gilding, and floor-stenciling, she soon received commissions from New York decorators like Mary Burnham and Kevin Roberts. "Her work is fresh and upbeat instead of heavy and historical," says Roberts. Heard recently did a gilded music room and door panels in Italianate arabesques at a chateau in Champagne-Ardenne, in France. *lillianheard.com.* —M.F.



Stephen Alesch and Robin Standerfer in the Ace Hotel lobby



**Q&A with...**

## ROMAN & WILLIAMS

Robin Standerfer and Stephen Alesch, the couple better known by the name of their design firm, Roman & Williams, work in a lower Manhattan office that's a love letter to dusty old New York, with opaque-glass dividers (one area is marked "Tombs"), electric fans that seem to date to the Coolidge administration, and no end of curious objects that express both utilitarianism and an unabashedly poetic approach to form and

materials. Forget blobs and photovoltaics and asymptotes, those staples of starchitect-speak—the emphasis here is on wool and lead, shanks and flanges, memory and beauty. Yet there's nothing anachronistic about Standerfer and Alesch's flair for pushing in bold new directions with projects like the Ace and Standard hotels, which have made these onetime Hollywood set designers the design team of the moment. Up

next: a book for Rizzoli, various product lines (including one for Waterworks), a restaurant with chef Andrew Carmellini, a Cole Haan store, and a hotel tower in Midtown Manhattan. The busy duo recently sat down with **MARK ROZZO** and **DEPARTURES**.

**Your projects are typically high-end. What's your take on luxury now?**

**RS:** To be honest, whenever I use the word, I bristle. It's

come to mean things so far outside what is truly valuable. In 2010 the economic-status-driven, crystal-chandelier concept of luxury is antiquated. We believe this about luxury: There's always something quite simple about it, the beauty of an object that took someone time to make from rare and special materials. Or an incredible seashell, found on the beach, can be luxurious and doesn't cost anything.

**Do you view architecture and design as art?**

**SA:** To do so is obnoxious and silly. I love architecture because there's a science part to it. I love drafting

and construction. It's the highest form of trade. I never want to be known as a visionary, dream-weaver architect. What I'd like to be known as is the world's best draftsman, and I think I have a strong chance of holding that title in my lifetime.

**There's a big trend toward craft, with things being billed as bespoke, handmade. Your work is often put into that category.**

**RS:** Yes, but the idea has become oppressive. It's been co-opted as an idea of sincerity: "Hey look, this is how Gepetto does it every day in his little workshop! Let us become more human for you!" It's a difficult quagmire, and I have to admit we fall smack in the center of that branding trend. So we try to be inventive and a little more punk rock than this whole mom-and-pop heritage movement.

**Designing a 57th Street hotel from the ground up gives you an opportunity to put your mark on the city's storied skyline.**

**SA:** And to break out of this cheap-looking—I don't even call it "glass-box"—plastic-box problem that's so prevalent in New York.

**How did the years of working on Hollywood sets influence how you design buildings?**

**RS:** It's not too different from hotel work, actually. They're both extremely theatrical. You're trying to heighten people's experiences, to capture their imagination. You want to go to the Standard or Ace and feel like you've been transported.

**Do you have a dream project?**

**RS:** I want to build a water treatment plant. **SA:** An observatory. I love astronomy, and if I wasn't an architect I'd be an astronomer.