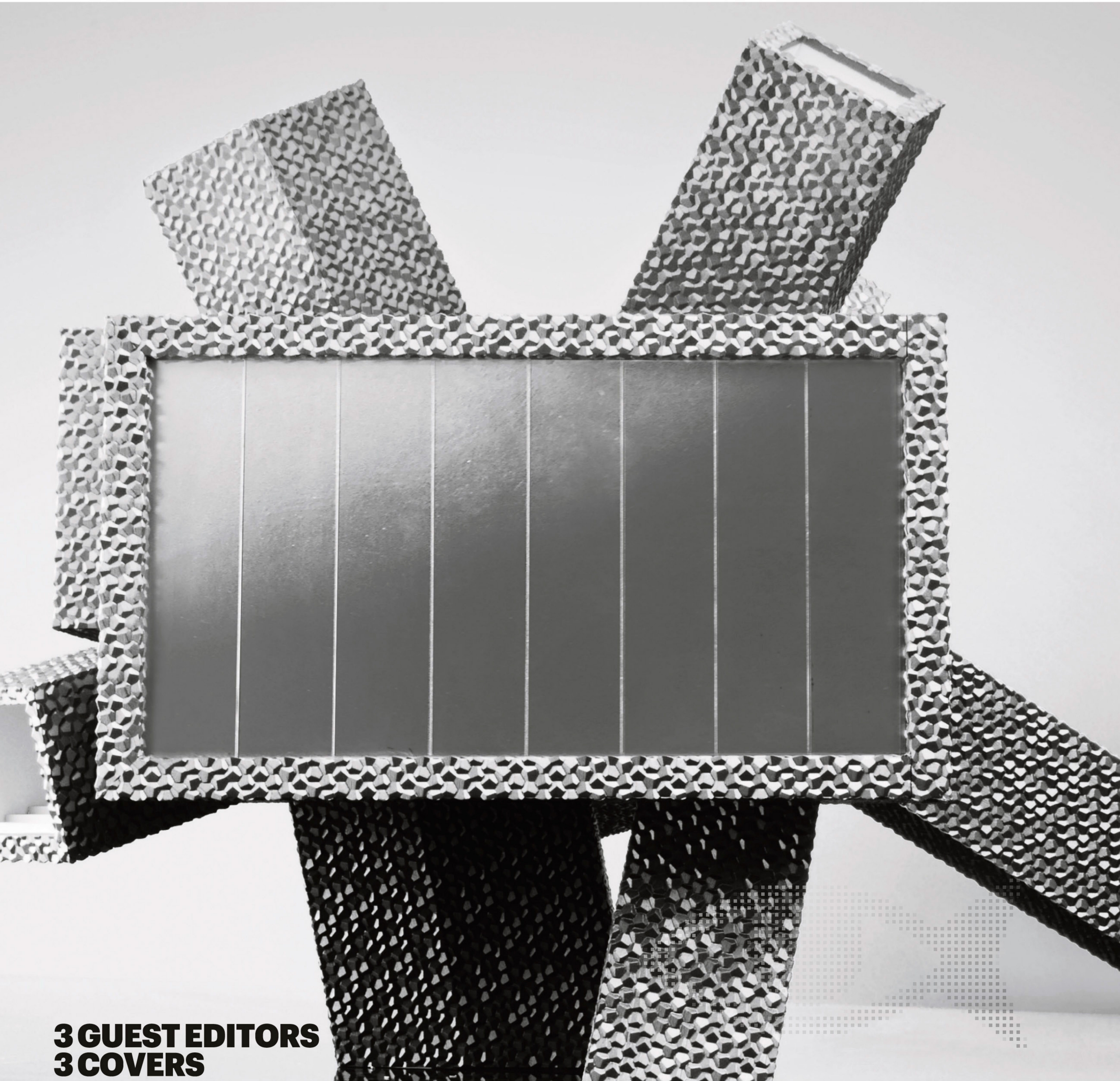


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OCTOBER 2012

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**IN A SPIN**

Anton Alvarez with his Thread Wrapping Machine. A cross between a spinning wheel and an artist's easel, it binds wood, plastic or steel into sculptural furniture by wrapping them in threads of glue

See Alvarez's machine in action on Wallpaper.com, or download our iPad edition, free to subscribers (see Wallpaper.com/iPad) or available to buy at the App Store



# Wrap artist

One of the new designers to feature in Swarovski's upcoming exhibition with London's Design Museum, Anton Alvarez puts a new spin on crystal-studded yarn with his cocooned creations

If designers were superheroes, Anton Alvarez would be Spiderman. He might have only moved into his East London studio a few weeks ago, but the space already feels as though nature has taken over – strange bundles and looming forms occupy every corner, lining the shelves up to the vertiginous ceiling, all of them bound in a fine wrap of thread, and of varying degrees of stickiness. But Alvarez

isn't, as far as we know, a superhero. Rather, the Swede is a recent graduate of the Royal College of Art, who only finished his Design Products MA this summer.

He does seem to be on track to join the super-designer ranks though, having already made significant waves and been chosen as one to watch by the glittering megacorp Swarovski. He features in the company's collaboration with London's

Design Museum for its autumn exhibition, 'Digital Crystal', alongside 14 other designers, including Ron Arad, Maarten Baas, and Yves Behar. The exhibition revisits Swarovski's Crystal Palace concept of contemporary chandeliers from the past decade, exploring memory in a digital age. The newer names, including Alvarez, Hye-Yeon Park and Hilda Hellström, are all designing entirely new works. >>

**CATCH THE THREAD**

For the 'Digital Crystal' exhibition at London's Design Museum, Alvarez loaded his spinning machine with Swarovski crystal-studded yarn, binding joints into colourful works of art



Alvarez was selected for the line-up because of his astonishing project, the Thread Wrapping Machine, developed for his degree show in June. A wooden contraption that looks like a spinning wheel (if spinning wheels featured in *Blade Runner*) crossed with an ad-hoc artist's easel, it binds pieces of wood, plastic, or steel, into sculptural furniture by wrapping them tightly in gluey thread. The PVA glue dries clear, and the results resemble gigantic cocoons.

Katherine Cocke, designer relations manager at Swarovski, says the brand set out to give young designers a chance to shine. 'Nadja Swarovski has always been looking for rising talents since the early days of the Crystal Palace project – look at Paul Cockledge. Although he is well established now, his Crystallize chandelier was first commissioned in 2005 when he was just graduating. The "Digital Crystal" exhibition shows how, over the past

**SHINE OF THE TIMES**

Now in its eighth year, the Swarovski Crystal Palace project has thrown up some real shining lights

**Salone del Mobile, Milan, 2002**

The inaugural show featured pieces by the likes of Hella Jongerius, Nigel Coates and Paola Navone

**Salone del Mobile, Milan, 2005**

Yves Behar produced a crystal loop, *Voyage*, while Ron Arad designed an LED flying carpet, *Miss Haze*

**London Design Festival, 2007**

Prived Oca, a hairy chandelier by the Campana brothers, stole the show – which was curated by Phillips de Pury

**Light & Building Fair, Frankfurt, 2008**

Tord Boontje's romantic Blossom branch/light shared the spotlight with Tom Dixon's geometric Ball pendant

**Design Miami, 2011**

Fredrikson Stallard used gold leaf, corten and some 600 hand-cut crystals to create the eye-shaped *Iris*

[www.swarovskicrystalpalace.com](http://www.swarovskicrystalpalace.com)

decade, our commissions have served as an experimental platform for designers.'

Designed by architects Carmody Groarke, the exhibition comprises a series of antechambers extending off a central area, giving each designer their own space to play with. Visitors will first encounter the *Sunlight Video*, a film installation by Random International, which projects a journey of light in a digital age. The centrepiece of the gallery is Fredrikson Stallard's Pandora chandelier. Originally designed in 2007, the piece literally explodes, breaking and reforming in a chaos of light and crystal. Ron Arad is particularly pleased to see his iconic Lolita chandelier updated for the show. Made in 2004, the giant pixel-board of crystals and LEDs received and displayed text messages along its spiralling form. Now with smartphone technology incorporated, Lolita is on Twitter, too.

Other contributions include Arik Levy's Osmosis film, Marcus Tremonto's 3D Lenticular installation, and Philippe Malouin's *Blur*. The inclusion of historical pieces is much more than a retrospective of chandelier highlights of the decade, says Design Museum director Deyan Sudjic. Rather it questions the changing nature of our relationship with objects and time, 'as we move ever faster to a digital age, where memory and personal possessions we once held so highly are now online or gone in an instant'.

Alvarez watches his spinning machine loaded up with Swarovski crystal-studded yarn. Passing joints to be bound through the centre of the machine, they're as good as mummified in the colourful thread. According to Cocke, the thread is usually only used by Swarovski's fashion arm. 'One of the best outcomes of these collaborations for us is when designers use our products in ways that we've never thought about before,' she says.

Alvarez trained as a cabinetmaker in Sweden before moving to London and says he developed the process as an alternative to more traditional joinery. 'I see it as a new craft. I first made the machine last December and am still experimenting with different materials and ideas,' he says. 'It still needs a lot of work and I'm waiting to see where it will go.'

While his studio is filled with these 3D thread sketches, it's still a case of 'one part at a time'. Alvarez will generally work to a pace of one piece per day, whether that's a particularly detailed join or a bench. Designers are deftly creating work that tells ever richer stories, and Swarovski is investing in that craft, while also adding its own creative sparkle. For now, however – and this is particularly true for Alvarez – it's a wrap. ★

'Digital Crystal', until 13 January 2013. [www.designmuseum.org](http://www.designmuseum.org)