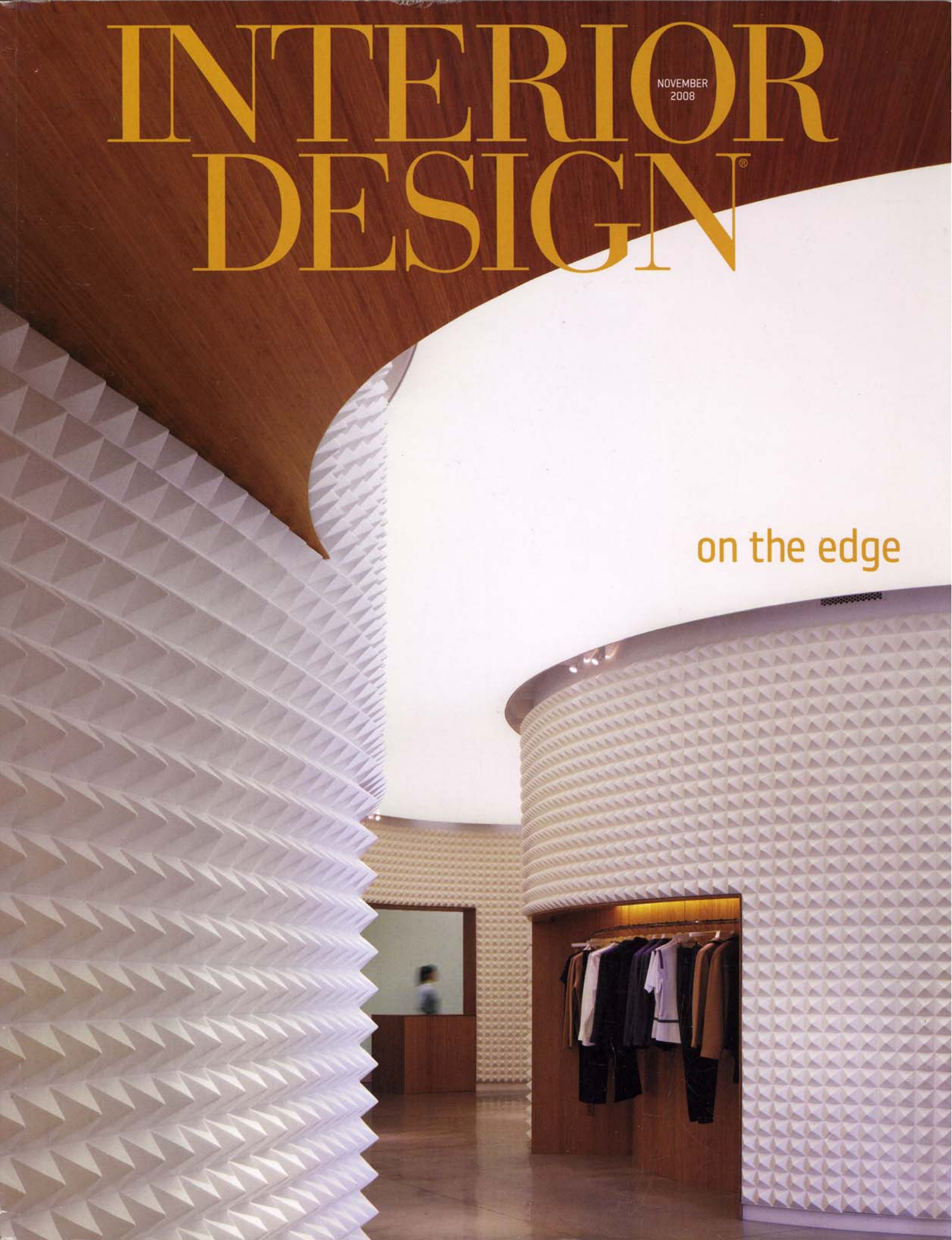


INTERIOR DESIGN[®]

NOVEMBER
2008

on the edge



centerfold

under the weather

Ball-Nogues Studio uses methodical minimalism to string up a fulgent sky

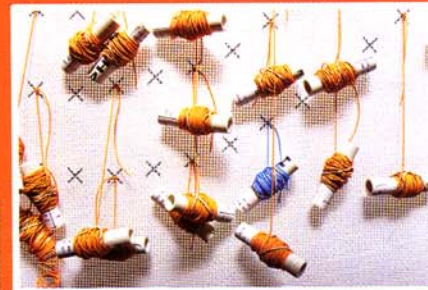
Smog has never looked so pretty. Inspired by an especially gorgeous Tinseltown sunset in which the sky turned from blue to burnt orange, Ball-Nogues Studio created "Unseen Current," an ethereal installation of

custom-colored nylon twine. "We kept thinking about the haze in Los Angeles and being enveloped in that atmosphere," says Benjamin Ball, principal of the unorthodox design practice that strung up the gauzy work in Chicago's Extension Gallery for Architecture. Since forming their studio in 2004, Ball, 40, and coprincipal Gaston Nogues, 41, former classmates at SCI-Arc, have earned a reputation for creating experiential environments. In 2007, the duo won the Young Architects Program competition at the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City, New York, for "Liquid Sky," an open-air pavilion of tinted Mylar, and an *Interior Design* Best of Year Installation Award for the 8-ton cardboard "Rip Curl Canyon" at the Rice Gallery in Houston; this year, another twine work appeared at the Biennale di Venezia. While conceiving the 425-square-foot piece for Extension's space, Ball-Nogues decided to use the least amount of material possible: Everything fit in one box. "You really can create architecture with almost nothing," Nogues states. In this case a whole lot of nothing: The 2,600 catenaries that compose "Unseen Current" use approximately 10 miles of twine. The piece was attached to the gallery walls by using 8-inch carpet needles to sew each length of string to the same mesh used for hook rugs. Artist advisor Sheila Pepe, known for her large crocheted installations, estimated one person could tie 500 knots a day; this installation contains 5,200 double knots. Ball-Nogues and volunteers worked nonstop for eight days. Measurements for the installation were mapped out with custom software. "We had to approach it methodically otherwise it became undoable," explains Ball, referring to the endeavor as "digitally aided handcraft." Computer models, physical maquettes, and several full-scale mockups helped get everything exactly right. On-site, an old-fashioned assembly line automated the cutting and measuring process of the 2,600 lengths. Viewed from the street, the finished piece appears comprehensible, but from inside, it becomes enigmatic. "It completely immerses you," Ball continues. The effect is dazzling—particularly when viewed at angles where the color density of the drooping string shifts. "It's as if pigment is pouring out of the wall, enveloping everything," says Nogues. Like an L.A. sunset, without the pollution. —*Ruth Lopez* ▶

THROUGHOUT CHRISTENSEN NETWORKS: STRING. BRITTEN: MESH.

Top, clockwise from top left: Ball-Nogues Studio used a custom computer program for the initial design of an installation at Chicago's Extension Gallery for Architecture. Panels of mesh are dusted and strung tight to the gallery's walls. Spooled string awaits cutting and placement. Tape measures extend the length of the gallery on an assembly line to cut each span of twine. The mesh is ink-jet-printed with the piece's pattern.

Bottom, clockwise from top right: Placed spools ready to be unwound. A volunteer unfurls a spool of thread and hands it off to be attached to the opposite wall. Gaston Nogues and Benjamin Ball stand beneath the nearly 14-foot height of their installation, "Unseen Current." The longest piece of twine in the finished installation measured 25 feet. Some of the 20 volunteers who helped with the installation.



UNFOLD