



FLIGHT OF FANCY

Shell shock and mushroom magic at Atelier MVM's Los Angeles showroom

PHOTOGRAPHY: STEPHEN KENT JOHNSON PRODUCER: MICHAEL REYNOLDS WRITER: ALEXANDRA PECHMAN

Walking into Atelier MVM feels like going down the rabbit hole: the gem-like space contains a potpourri of objects, themselves rendered in shapes and configurations with a decidedly baroque sensibility. In one corner, a pink onyx table seems to have erupted out of a spray of pastel corals and shells; at the other end of the small room, a towering 1950s plaster-and-wood floor lamp in the shape of a giant mushroom stands against a 1980s Portuguese tapestry of flora and fauna suggesting Jeff Koons in needlepoint. This dreamscape is the brainchild of creative polymath

MATTHIAS VRIENS-MCGRATH (ABOVE) HOLDING ONE OF HIS MUSHROOM LAMPS IN HIS LOS ANGELES SHOWROOM. OPPOSITE, ON SHOW ARE HIS 'DEBELLEYME' CHAIR AND VELVET SOFA, VINTAGE FABRIC LAMP SHADES, 'MIENTJE' VASES, AND SIGNATURE SEASHELL-STUDDED OBJECTS, INCLUDING A CORAL CHANDELIER, CORAL VASE (ON TABLE, ALSO BY VRIENS-MCGRATH) AND A PAIR OF WALL MIRRORS

Matthias Vriens-McGrath, who recently shifted his focus from editorial projects to equally eccentric design pieces, available at his Los Angeles shop.

The West Hollywood store reflects Vriens-McGrath's impulse to put a maximalist stamp on treasures collected from around the world. A cobalt kidney bean-shaped velvet sofa riffs on a 1940s vintage piece he found years ago – which he enlarged for a 'more California style'. His covetable, handcrafted ceramic mushroom lamps are a take on a smaller, 'very ugly, very clunky' antique version. Vriens-McGrath »



Design



'I'm going to do what I want, as crazy as that might be'

of thinking along the lines of what people want. I'm going to do what I want, as crazy as that might be.'

Case in point: a massive rococo-style chandelier dangling above us, studded with rare raspberry-coloured shells and dripping with real white coral. 'It's not as if I can put an assistant on these, because when I start I have no idea where I'm going to end up,' he says.

Vriens-McGrath will soon launch a website where his growing international following will be able to find his objects. He is also about to completely rehaul the physical store for its one-year anniversary, setting it up like a boudoir, with a bed and various objects littered about, such as underwear and teacups. Meanwhile, he continues to wield the camera, recently for a follow-up to Taschen's *Big Penis Book*.

Vriens-McGrath has an almost intimate relationship with the precious objects he harbours at Atelier MVM. At one point, he calls himself 'a proud dad of the mushrooms'. Of the mushroom floor lamp, he admits, 'It's one of those pieces I wish I had not sold. So it's sort of like a love story. People say, "Oh, you should copy it." But it's not going to be the same magic.' ★

Atelier MVM, 8055 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles, ateliermvm.com; matthiasvriensmcgrath.com

ABOVE, A FLOOR LAMP WITH A CLASSIC ATELIER MVM TRIPOD BASE; HAND-BLOWN GLASS VASES AND A GIANT PINK GLASS SHELL SIT ON TOP OF A SHELL-ENCRUSTED SIDE TABLE; A PAIR OF 'PABLO' CHAIRS FRAME A GILDED COLUMN. VRIENS-MCGRATH ALSO CREATED THE TEXTURED WALLS AND GIRAFFE PATTERN FLOOR

RIGHT, THE 1950S MUSHROOM LAMP THAT VRIENS-MCGRATH REGRETS SELLING, WITH A 1980S PORTUGUESE TAPESTRY AS A BACKDROP

paints the lamps in deep shades, such as mottled jades and plums, which he deems 'almost art deco'; they're currently available exclusively in Los Angeles, and a selection sold out at a recent show.

Vriens-McGrath's career has taken several paths: a trained ballet dancer, he worked at the influential *Dutch* magazine in the 1990s, before holding top creative director positions at Giorgio Armani and Gucci Group. He later gained notoriety as a fashion photographer in New York for shooting celebrity portraits as well as explicit art images, ultimately settling in Los Angeles.

'I always said if everything goes to hell, I can always use my fingers to glue shells,' he says. As a child in the Netherlands, he amassed a large collection of rare shells. Several years ago, he began making shell-encrusted mirrors, embellished with uncommon materials such as antique rubber seals. These quickly caught the eye of the design world. Then came his 'Mientje' vases, named after his grandmother and based on a tramp art vase he'd had for several decades. To display his objects, he opened Atelier MVM a year ago in Los Angeles' Design District.

'This store was born out of the business of photography changing,' Vriens-McGrath says. 'I wanted to do something else. I do not want to fall into a trap

