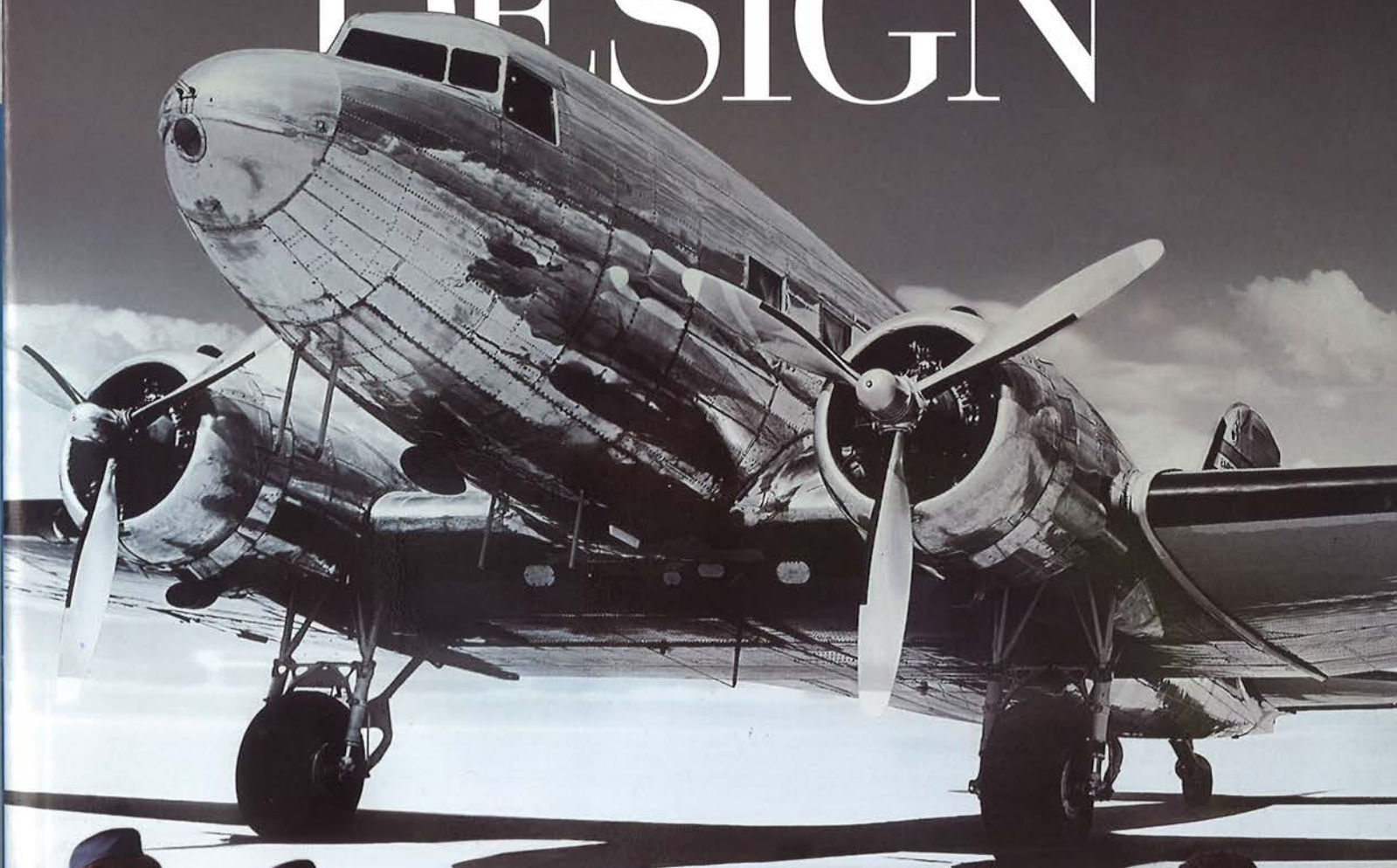


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As Easy as ABC

It's clear to see that supergraphics are back—in a big way

Before Paula Scher was asked to create an identity for the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 13 years ago, she says she "didn't even know how to read a blueprint." But she quickly discovered that,

by painting words over the facade of the Newark building, she could give it a strong presence—on a budget. Suddenly, she had become an "environmental designer." As the project picked up award after award, more and more clients hired her to transform spaces with typography.

Now a partner at Pentagram, Scher just received the National Design Award for communication design, recognizing her prowess at creating spaces that send powerful messages. In her opinion, buildings ought to speak: "A person who comes into a place should understand its mission and spirit." Some architects can accomplish that without the help of an environmental designer—she cites

Herzog & de Meuron Basel. Others, she says, "create volumes that may function very well, that may be in perfect taste, but look just like other volumes." If that happens, the architect shouldn't be surprised if the client calls on someone else to make the walls talk.

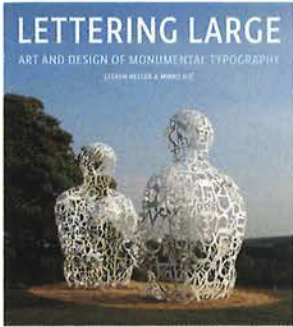
Renovating the undistinguished New York office of Sony/ATV Music Publishing, Stephen Yablon Architect was faced with a massive blank elevator and service core. So Stephen Yablon hit on the idea of camouflaging this unwanted element with lyrics published by Sony—notably lines from Beatles songs—and brought in the firm 2x4 to develop and implement the plan. Founding partner and creative director Georgianna Stout wrapped the core in wall covering on which the lyrics run vertically. She calls it a "waterfall" of words. It also produces a kind of syncopation consistent with a music company's mission.

The role of jumbo typography in architecture and art is the subject of the new book *Lettering Large*,

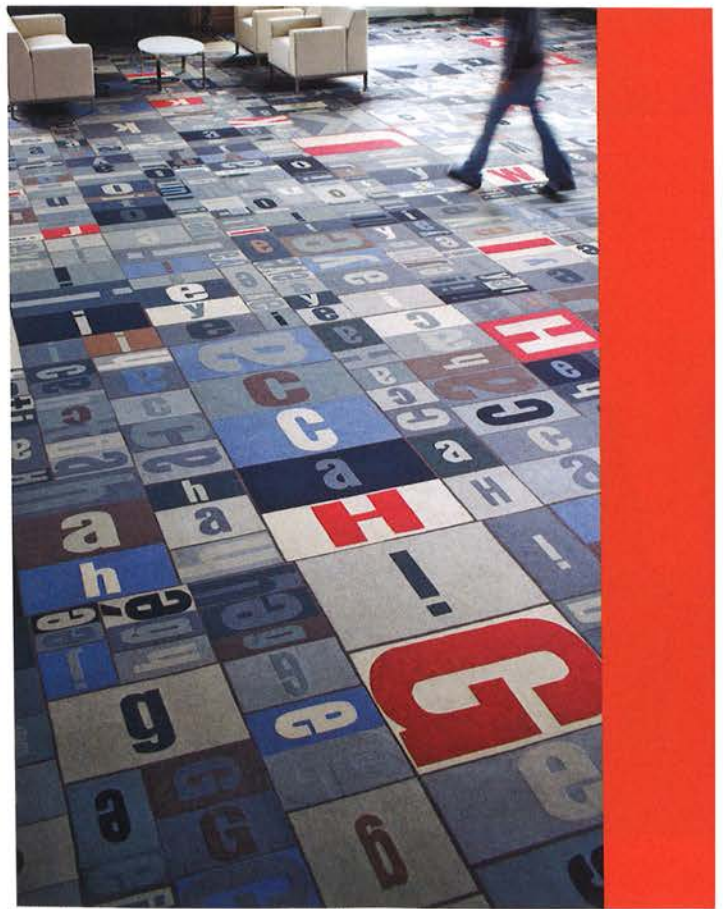
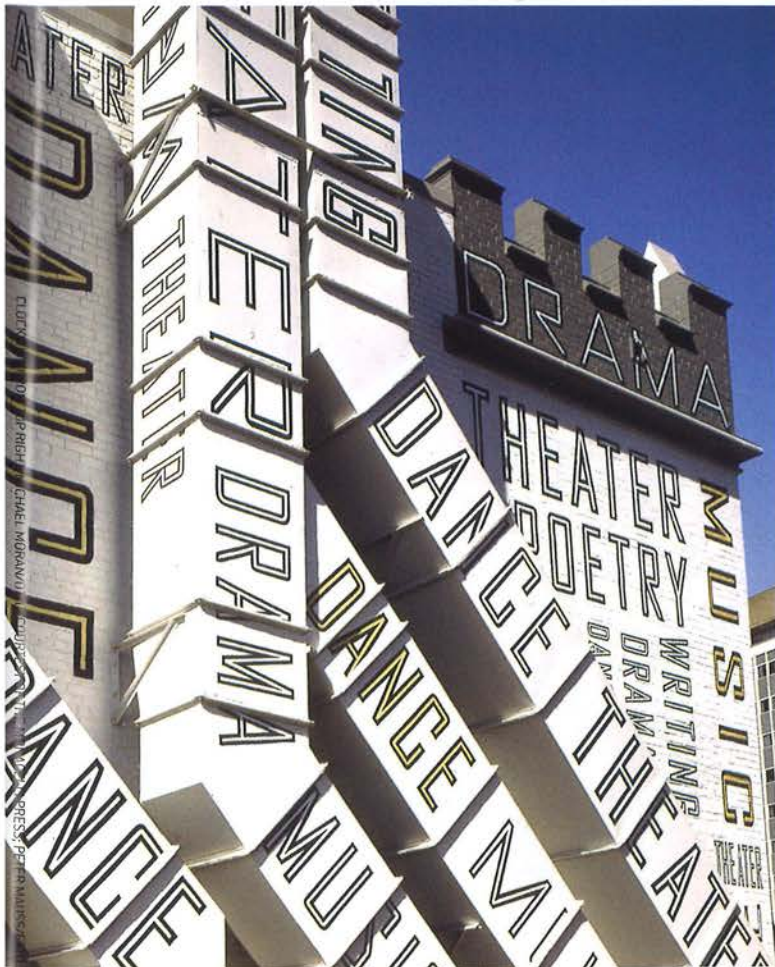
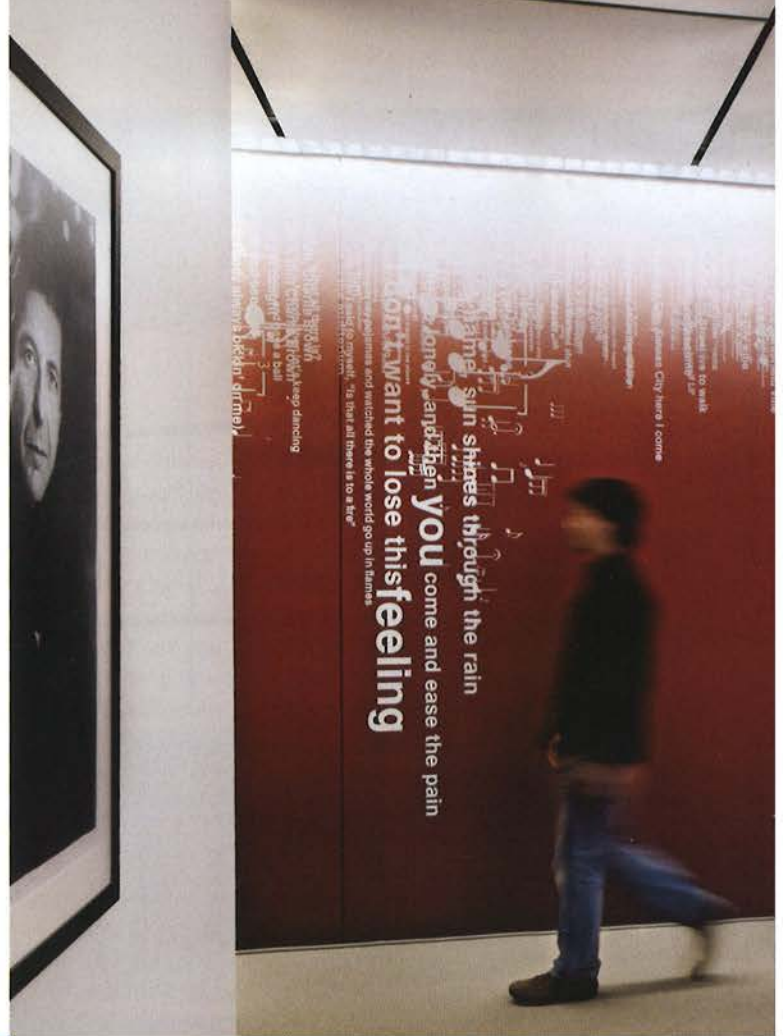
in which Steven Heller credits Scher's performing-arts center, in fact, as a "trigger" for the renewed interest worldwide. He proves the point with projects ranging from a playful apartment-turned-office by Croatia's Branimir Sabljic to Ann Hamilton Studio's mesmerizing alphabet carpet for a Brown University building where courses on the relationship between language and culture are taught.

The alphabet fabric patterns that Alexander Girard designed for Herman Miller in the 1950's are again available, as a textile or wall covering from Maharam. In the '60's and '70's, buildings were often emblazoned with pop-art supergraphics. Today's typographical treatments are more stylistically diverse, and interest in them continues to grow, partly thanks to the development of technology allowing words and numbers to be more than paint on a wall. When the Melrose Georgetown Hotel in Washington was looking to convey a sense of history and place, *Interior Design* Giants firm Leo A Daly proposed putting a mural reproducing the U.S. Constitution in ▶

Clockwise from top left: Pentagram partner Paula Scher's painted graphics for Achievement First Endeavor Middle School in Brooklyn, New York. An October book from the Monacelli Press. Lyrics from the Bangles on 2x4 founding partner and creative director Georgianna Stout's wall covering for Sony/ATV Music Publishing, New York. At Brown



University in Rhode Island, Ann Hamilton Studio's felted carpet celebrating the invention of movable type. Scher's painted exterior for the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Newark.



each guest room, then had the image custom-printed on vinyl by Wolf-Gordon. That company's chief creative officer for design and marketing, Marybeth Shaw, enlivened the interior of the U.S. Green Building Council, also in Washington, with a quote from *Silent Spring* author Rachel Carson. Most of the words are on wall covering, but two in the middle, *mysteries* and *beauties*, stand out in powder-coated aluminum letters.

It's helpful for environmental designers if the client is an institution with a strong message. While Rogers Marvel Architects was renovating and expanding a former chocolate factory for Achievement First Endeavor Middle School in Brooklyn, New York, Scher came up with a proposal to turn school slogans into signs to hang on the walls. Then, with the school's encouragement, she went further, turning the walls themselves into signs with motivational phrases such as Education = Choice and Whatever It Takes in white capital letters on a multicolored striped background.

Jonathan Marvel says he appreciates the painted graphics not just for drawing students' attention to the school's goals but also for giving a huge space "a pedestrian scale."

To get a sense of how far environmental graphics have come, consider Scher's ongoing relationship with New York's Public Theater. When its lobby was redesigned in the 1990's, on a tight budget, her posters for Shakespeare in the Park and other productions were framed and hung, and that was that. Now, Ennead Architects has redone the lobby again, and her longtime red-and-black lettering for the theater has become three-dimensional—some pushing out of the walls, some pushing in.

Having collaborated with many of the best architects in the world, Scher and her Pentagram partners pride themselves on their collaborative approach. Still, asked if architects should be afraid that her work could overwhelm theirs, she doesn't shrink from answering, "Sometimes it's my job to do that. Sometimes they're lucky that I do." —Fred A. Bernstein

From top: At the U.S. Green Building Council in Washington, a planter with part of a Rachel Carson quote in powder-coated aluminum letters by Wolf-Gordon's chief creative officer for design and marketing, Marybeth Shaw. Washington's Melrose Georgetown Hotel, where Leo A Daly installed custom-printed vinyl wall covering. Alexander Girard's 1952 alphabet pattern, now available as wall covering from Maharam. The printed part of the Carson quote, surrounding the planters. Painted graphics at Branimir Sabljic's office for Pokobar in Zagreb, Croatia.

