EARN HIS STRIPES
Belgian designer Maarten De Ceulaer with a piece from his Design Miami 2012 work, *Transformations*, inspired by Fendi's graphic 'Pequin' motif

RIGHT ANGLE

For the fourth year running, Fendi's Design Miami collaboration is a sharp piece of work

The idea of a long-term collaborative commitment in the fashion world, or indeed anything beyond the shortest short term or seasonal alliance, might sound like a paradox. But Fendi's 'Design Performance' tie-up with the Design Miami fair just celebrated its fourth birthday. And neither the idea nor the relationship show signs of exhaustion.

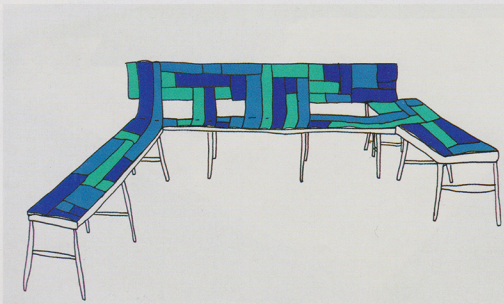
The project was initiated by Fendi creative director Silvia Fendi in 2009. And as the name suggests, it encourages a performative spin on the design process. At each edition of the fair an emerging designer, well versed in contemporary craft, takes an aspect of Fendi's history and craft and explores it, creating something new. The emphasis is on the process as much as the final product, on making and mechanics rather than simply marketing. And for last December's fair, Fendi turned to Belgian designer Maarten de Ceulaer to do the brand proud.

De Ceulaer first came to our attention with his fantastical wardrobe 'A Pile of Suitcases' in 2008, a design that was snapped up for production by La Galeria Nilufar in Milan. For Fendi, De Ceulaer went back into the company's design archives and pulled out one recurring motif – a bold, blocky stripe known as the 'Pequin'.

The design – inspired by Josef Hofmann and the Wiener Werkstätte – can be traced back to 1983 and is the work of a certain Karl Lagerfeld, who is still very much part of the house's DNA (Fendi has form when it comes to long-term relationships).

De Ceulaer's *Transformations* installation adds a whole new dimension to Lagerfeld's design, creating an encompassing space covered in 'Pequin'-esque leather floorboards. Blurring »

SHAPE UP
Transformations in situ at Design Miami last December
Below, one of De Ceulaer's early sketches for the installation



the lines between the hard and the soft, the natural and the manmade, De Ceulaer's handcrafted leather planks adorned trees stumps, logs and furniture in signature Fendi colours.

'I wanted to create something modular and the idea of turning this stripe into pieces that could be put together intrigued me,' says De Ceulaer. 'There were also all these great classic Fendi colour combinations – black and tobacco; lemon, powder blue and mint – that leant themselves to the different pieces.'

The Miami design fair is now seen as a very useful platform for fashion brands looking to polish up their design credentials, but Fendi was there early and with serious intent. 'We were essentially the first. It all started just as a chat between friends,' Silvia Fendi says of the partnership. 'Ambra [Medda, a co-founder of Design Miami] and I were working out how to collaborate and the idea evolved very organically.'

The free, whimsical thinking that underlines De Ceulaer's work is proof of the amount of trust that the patron puts in the designer year after year. Fendi has done far more than simply work its way through the designer A-list. Under the guidance of first Medda (she left in 2010, see profile on page 133), and then the fair's current director Marianne Goebl, Fendi has called on emerging designers with strong and sometimes radical ideas, including collectives such as Studio Formafantasma and Aranda\Lasch, and designers Moritz Waldemeyer, Elisa Strozyk and Sebastian Neeb.

'The relationship we have with Fendi is really based on shared values,' explains Goebl. 'It's this idea of celebrating and shedding light on the process that is something we both want to highlight. The intention is to give access to the process behind the final product. It's really been a beautiful collaboration that has taken a completely different turn over the years.'

Fendi's commitment to supporting emerging design talent and new ideas is nothing new. Lagerfeld first worked for the brand in 1965. Its shift towards soft, unstructured bags in the 1970s led to the creation of the brand's iconic 'Baguette' bag by Silvia Fendi in 1997.

Given that much of the fashion industry is seemingly engaged in an endless game of creative musical chairs, Fendi's stand against professional promiscuity looks admirably old-fashioned or plain admirable. As for De Ceulaer's *Transformations*, his vibrant alternative world has joined its Design Miami predecessors in Fendi's extensive archive, while we're placing bets on who this year's golden ticket will be. ✱
www.maartendeceulaer.com, www.fendi.com