

Where are you, Edison...?, 1997



INGO MAURER

Light – Reaching for the Moon

A Vitra Design Museum Travelling Exhibition

conceived in cooperation with Ingo Maurer

Maurer's work is quite outside the conventional parameters of contemporary design. It is neither modern, nor postmodern. In fact it does not stand for any kind of 'ism'. Rather, Maurer's designs are the product of a highly visual and mechanical language.

Maurer is always unpredictable, always unexpected, always impossible to typecast. In pursuing a responsive, participatory version of technology, Maurer has gone to endless trouble to tame electricity, to do away with a distinction between power and structure.

Maurer is one of the few lighting designers who has been able to synthesize and keep pace with the advance of lighting technology, not by slavishly adopting its imagery but by taking it for granted.

**Deyan Sudjic
(Editor of DOMUS)**

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1. Concept

No other designer has shown as much commitment and devotion to the design of and with light as Ingo Maurer (b. 1932). To date he has produced more than 120 different lamps and lighting systems, graced countless exhibitions with his installations and artfully illuminated a multitude of public buildings and private homes. In recent years the poet of light has been inundated with prizes. In 2000, he received the Lucky Strike Designer Award from the Raymond Loewy Foundation, followed up the next year with a design prize from the City of Barcelona and in fall 2002 with an award from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Yet the starting point for the Vitra Design Museum's exhibition, giving a comprehensive overview of Maurer's nearly four decades of work, is a circumstance that sets Maurer clearly apart from nearly all his fellow designers: He is not only creator but also developer and producer rolled into one. Operating his own factory does not just give Maurer significant artistic freedom; the development department – internally called the "Designerei," or designery – and the team-based collaboration also allow him to be one of the first to explore the creative potential of new technologies and to even himself develop materials and technical components refined down to the last detail.

The initial trigger for the self-taught designer's career was his fascination with the light bulb as the "perfect union of technology and poetry," a fascination that has endured to the present day. Inspired by Pop Art, Maurer first designed Bulb (1966), a table lamp in the form of a giant light bulb and homage to Edison's ingenious invention that is now a classic in its own right. And with the hanging lamp No Fuss (1969), Maurer celebrated the simple beauty of the bare illuminant. Lucellino (1992), the bulb adorned with wings, has established itself as something of a trademark for the designer. Hence, a common thread running through Maurer's otherwise quite wide-ranging work that can be traced in the exhibition as well. For instance, up to Where are you, Edison,...? (1997) in which the light bulb is finally just a 360° hologram that is visible from all sides yet cannot be grasped with the hands. Something of an allegory for light itself, which is what allows us to visually perceive the objects in our environment yet is itself not physically tangible. A typographer by training, Maurer has long valued paper's properties as a light filter and reflector. Prominent examples of such in the exhibition are the table lamp Lampampe and the hanging lamp Floatation (1980) made of translucent Japanese paper. The triple-glued paper reflectors of Oh Mei Ma (1993) are



Installation at the Vitra Design Museum. In front: XXL Dome (1998).
Photo: Thomas Dix/Vitra Design Museum

hand-gilded. Years of development work went into the production of the paper lamp series MaMo Nouchies (1998). Designed by Maurer (Ma) in collaboration with Dagmar Mombacher (Mo), they are reminiscent of Isamu Noguchi's akari lamps (Nouchie) yet possess quite their own aura. Based on a traditional Japanese textile dyeing technique, the sculptural lampshades made from pleated paper are handcrafted in a process of up to eight production steps. Their pleasant warm glow does not give any hint of the time-consuming technique behind it, such as with the halogen reflectors and heat shields that were developed especially for the MaMo Nouchies. The section of the exhibition dedicated to paper finally also presents the hanging lamp Zettel'z (1997), a central lighting element encircled by numerous slips of white paper, some with pre-printed sayings, others left blank to be scribbled on and decorated as desired. The arrangement and positioning of the slips is also left to the owner.

Maurer frequently attempts to involve the user in the final appearance of his lamps, the consequence of his pursuit of "good light." For every occasion and every setting, he strives to create the ideal illumination, the perfect lighting conditions. For instance, flexible reflectors are integrated in many of his lamps so users can direct the light in whatever direction they wish. Yet most often the lamps themselves are tremendously mobile and versatile, such as the programmatic Max.Mover (2001). Its ingenious cable construction holds the wall and ceiling lamps in balance in any desired position. A telescope arm and the 360° pivoting lampshade enable a nearly infinite range of possibilities – as the exhibition illustrates with an array of models in various positions.

This lamp moreover reveals yet another typical characteristic of Maurer's designs, namely the reduction to the essentials. Not least to achieve this aim, a main focus since the early 1980s has been the work with halogen lamps, in most cases in conjunction with low-voltage technology. Two themes that are accorded a central position in the exhibition. First employed in residential interiors in the early 1970s, halogen lamps with their minimal size help achieve a reduced aesthetic. In addition, they are capable of generating sufficient light with low-voltage current. At 6, 8, 12 or 24 volts, such current is neither dangerous nor even perceptible to the touch and can be carried from the transformer to the illuminant without the need for insulation. This is the operating principle behind Maurer's lighting system YaYaHo (1984), in which halogen lamps are placed in any desired position and direction with two current collectors each along a pair of conductor cables stretched from wall to wall. The system thus offers a maximum of flexibility with a minimum of material.



Installation at the Vitra Design Museum. Light installation with YeYaHe (1985) and Symphonia Silenziosa.
Photo: Thomas Dix/Vitra Design Museum



Installation at the Vitra Design Museum. Left: Ingo Maurer's first collection (1966-72). Right: View of Ingo Maurer's workshop.
Photo: Thomas Dix/Vitra Design Museum



Left: Installation at the Vitra Design Museum.
In front: MaMo Nouchies (1998). In the background: Zettel'z (1997).
Photo: Thomas Dix/Vitra Design Museum

Middle: Installation at the Vitra Design Museum.
LED Bride and Groom Costume, 2000/2002.
Photo: Thomas Dix/Vitra Design Museum

Bottom: Installation at the Vitra Design Museum. Porca Miseria! (1994)
Photo: Thomas Dix/Vitra Design Museum



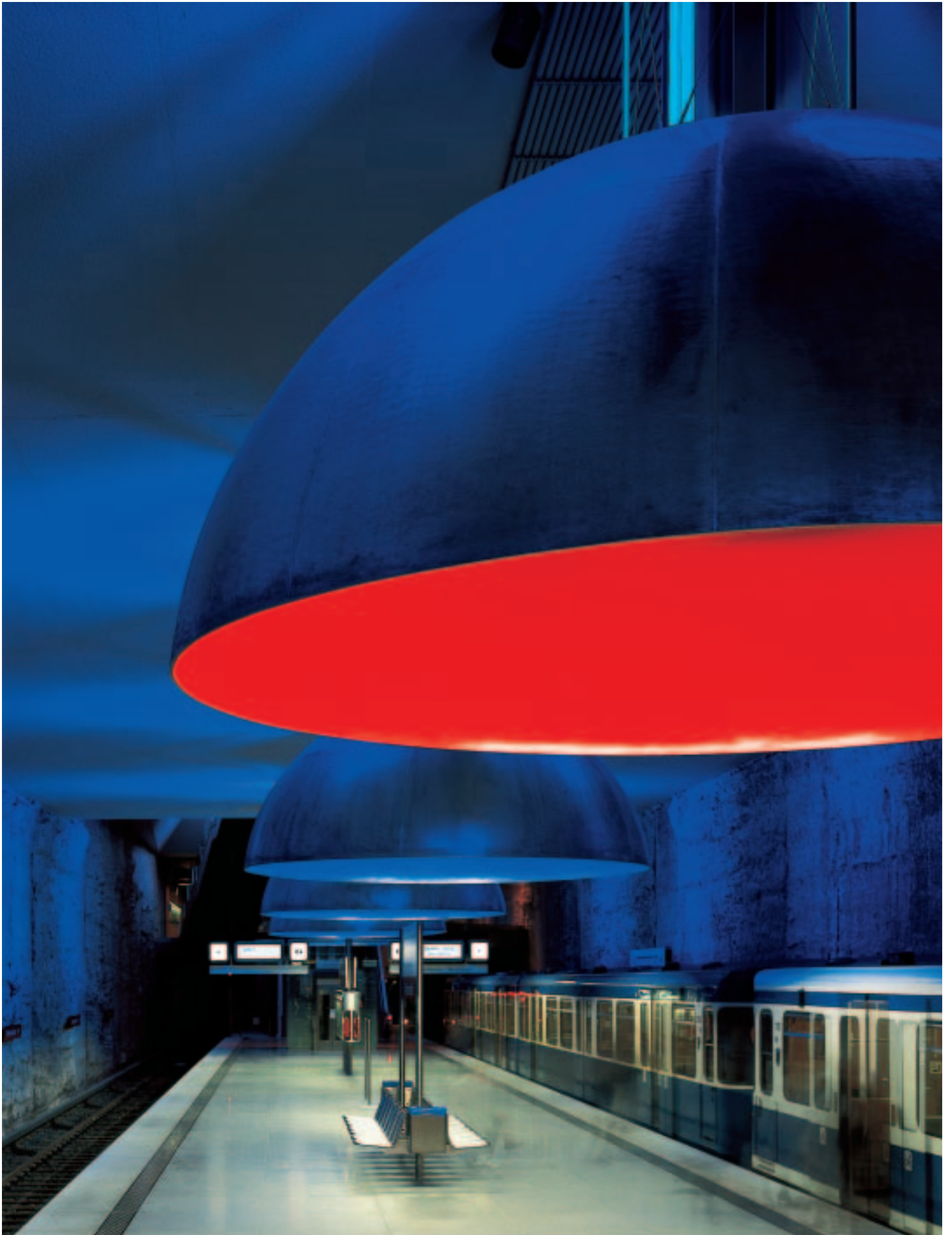
Another technology that has furnished Maurer with possibilities for reduction is LED (light-emitting diodes), which like halogen lamps were long almost exclusively employed in a technical function but are now found in residential interiors and offices as well. In such capacities, they appear destined to conquer the future thanks to their numerous advantages, namely their small size, durability and extraordinary efficiency. With the table lamp *La Bellissima Brutta* (1997), Maurer was one of the first to recognize and make use of this potential. The cool aesthetic of his LED hanging lamps *Yoohoodoo* (1999), *Stardust* (2000) and *Licht.Enstein* (2001) plays with the experimental character still inherent in the pioneering work with this forward-looking technology. Like many other of Maurer's lamps, table lamps like *EL.E.DEE* (2001) or the *Licht Prototyp* shown in the exhibition function with *Touchtronic*, a system that allows dimming through touch and – here another example of reduction – makes a switch unnecessary. This too was developed in the *Designerei*, by the engineer Herman Kovacs.

Since the 1990s, the MoMA-celebrated Maurer has increasingly turned his attention to developing complete lighting concepts for private and public clients. For the *Westfriedhof* subway station in Munich (1998), he created giant aluminum ceiling lamps in the form of a dome, lacquering the inside surfaces in different hues to imbue the light with a unique tone. A New York hotel subsequently commissioned Maurer to produce a similar dome-shaped lamp, whose twin brother can now be admired in the exhibition. The light sculpture *Paragaudí*, a gilded aluminum band several meters long, as if captured in a moment of fluttering motion, was created by Maurer for the conference room of a bank in Leon, Spain. In London, the lighting artist set Issey Miyake's showroom aglitter under a filigree cloud adorned with hundreds of silver leaves that reflect the light and shimmer when stirred by a draft (1999). Extraordinary projects the exhibition documents with a series of models and photographs. The same year in Paris, Maurer put the couturier's fashion show in a favorable light with a sky of small, seemingly floating colored sails. A poetic installation that continually involves the surrounding space and is likewise on view in the exhibition.



Installation at the Vitra Design Museum. In front: Lucellino (1992).
Background left: Birds Birds Birds (1992) and Birdie (2002). Background right: Bibibibi, 1982
Photo: Thomas Dix/Vitra Design Museum





Illumination of the subway station Westfriedhof, Munich 1998. Design: Ingo Maurer. Photo: Markus Tollhopf, Hamburg



Installation at the Vitra Design Museum. From left to right: LED wallpaper (2001), Installation with Georg Baldele's Fly Candle Fly!, Stardust (2000)
Photo: Thomas Dix/Vitra Design Museum



Visitors inspecting the Chanel glass bench (2002).



Young visitor admiring Maurer's designs with LED.

2. Exhibition format

Designed by Dieter Thiel, the show gives an overview of Maurer's work going back almost four decades, featuring rare prototypes, serially produced lamps and one-off pieces as well as models, photographs and films documenting a number of his outstanding illumination projects. Special highlights are the installations Maurer created especially for the exhibition.

The exhibition starts off with a stylized version of Ingo Maurer's studio. Worktables are used to display Maurer's first collection, most of which is no longer in production, as well as rare prototypes and models for lighting installations. A shelf holds work materials and tools along with objects collected by Maurer in his travels which have served as an inspiration in his work.

The second section of the exhibition is devoted to Maurer's wide-ranging explorations with halogen lamps and low-voltage systems. Numerous table, floor and wall lamps demonstrate the designer's creative breadth while underscoring his aim not simply to create unusual forms but also, with these forms, to provide optimal illumination. Low-voltage technology constitutes the basis for Maurer's lighting system YaYaHo, which he employs in staging the magical lighting installation Symphonia. Strung on wires in the exhibition space, a multitude of seemingly dancing colored sails reflects the light into the room. Two quite different yet equally central themes in Maurer's work are treated in the third section of the exhibition: the materials paper and LED (light-emitting diodes). Along with serially produced lamps using LED technology, visitors are treated to prototypes and one-off pieces: costumes and hats with integrated diodes, a glass bench with hundreds of lights that seem to glow by themselves or even an LED tablecloth made from silicone.

In contrast to the cool aesthetic of the LED designs, Maurer's works with paper radiate a warm, sensual atmosphere. The focal point here is the series of MaMo Nouchies with their sculptural forms, joined by such earlier works as Flootation or Lampampe.

Lighting installations fill the fourth and final section of the exhibition. Set in front of swarms of his Lucellino winged light bulbs is the contemplative Tableau Chinois. Here the rippling surface of a goldfish pond is reflected onto the wall behind it, giving the effect of a Chinese ink drawing shifted into slow motion. A white cube with a light bulb swinging evenly back and forth in the interior symbolizes the inseparability of light and shadow and sharpens one's sensitivity and awareness of the multifaceted nuances that even such a simple and pure light source can create.

3. Curator

With an M.A. degree in Applied Cultural Studies from the University of Lüneburg, Jochen Eisenbrand (b. 1970) has worked at the Vitra Design Museum since 1998. As a research associate, he contributed to the exhibitions Automobility and Verner Panton. He served as co-curator for the exhibitions Blow Up – Inflatable Structures in Design, Architecture, Fashion and Art and Isamu Noguchi – Sculptural Design. The exhibition was conceived in close cooperation with Ingo Maurer and his team.

4. Objects / Installation

Exhibition objects

Lamps: 90

Prototypes and one-offs: 10

Other items designed by Maurer: 10

Objects from Maurer's vernacular collection: 30

Models: 4

Films: 3

PC terminals: 1

Installations: 5

Illustrations: 15 framed product photos

Large-format illustrations: 2

Installation components

6 large tables (frame in solid oak with tabletop in solid oak, aluminum and Eternit)

2 small tables

8 colored partition walls

4 platforms

3 spatial units for installations

Exhibition floor space: approx. 600 – 1000 square meters

Transport volume: approx. three 40-foot high cube containers

(prospective estimate)

5. Catalogue

Publication of the exhibition catalogue is set for spring 2003 with a German/English edition of some 200 pages featuring about 180 mostly color illustrations. One article gives a detailed presentation of Ingo Maurer's factory, using select examples to trace the long, complex creative and technical development processes up to the stage of serial production. Deyan Sudjic, editor of the magazine *Domus* and the director of this year's Venice Biennale of Architecture, provides a comprehensive overview of Maurer's lamp designs and classifies his work from a design history perspective. Maurer's poetic lighting installations and illumination projects are treated in an essay by Claudia M. Clemente, author of the book *Ingo Maurer – Percorsi di Luce* (2001). Complementing the essays are tributes from prominent designer colleagues and friends, yielding a multifaceted portrait of Ingo Maurer the man and artist.

6. Accompanying sales products

To accompany the exhibition, products from Ingo Maurer GmbH are available for sale.

7. Contacts

For scheduling information please contact:

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MaMo Nouchies

Die Werkstoffwahl von Ingo Maurer, Dagmar Mombach und Ingrid Isenhardt für die MaMo Nouchies ist ein Paradebeispiel für die Verbindung von Kunst und Design. Die MaMo Nouchies sind eine Serie von Lampen, die aus Papier gefertigt sind. Die Lampen sind in verschiedenen Größen und Farben erhältlich. Die Lampen sind aus Papier gefertigt und haben eine einzigartige Form. Die Lampen sind aus Papier gefertigt und haben eine einzigartige Form. Die Lampen sind aus Papier gefertigt und haben eine einzigartige Form.

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Installation at the Vitra Design Museum. MaMo Nouchies, 1998
Design: Dagmar Mombach, Ingo Maurer and Team
Photo: Thomas Dix/Vitra Design Museum