

Harry Nuriev in his installation,
The Bedroom, at Design Miami/ 2021.
Photography: Lex Merico.
Courtesy: Crosby Studios.



Digital Dreamer

Harry Nuriev's futuristic vision
blurs the line between material
and virtual reality.

by Jackie Cooperman

Harry Nuriev, a 37-year-old designer with close-cropped, bleached blond hair, a penchant for the word “beautiful” and a thriving Instagram account (with 69,000 followers and frequent supermodel cameos), has a distinctly media-savvy, omnivorous approach to art and aesthetics, his creative perspective born of an austere childhood.

Growing up in the southern Russian town of Stavropol, Nuriev recalls having few material comforts: he slept on his bedroom floor and didn’t own a computer until he was 23 years old. “I’m from a very modest family, but I had nothing to compare my home with, so I didn’t know it could be different,” he says. “That shaped my sense that beauty is what you see from the windows, from nature, from things that cost nothing but are very beautiful. That’s where my minimalism—simple designs, simple shapes—came from.”

Nuriev, who graduated from art school in his native Stavropol before enrolling at Moscow Architectural Institute, has effectively parlayed his youthful passion for minimalism into a successful international design practice. His Crosby Studios, which opened in 2014, employs 25 designers in New York, Moscow and Paris. A Renaissance man for the new media age, Nuriev is just as apt to design furniture and loungewear as he is to create entire digital homes.

For last March’s *Vogue Russia*, Nuriev rendered a virtual home for supermodel Irina Shayk, styling her in an acid green fantasia amid his flying saucer-inspired glass house, and sprinkling in elements like waterfalls, lush flora and bubble-shaped LED light sculptures.

In July, Nuriev wore pajamas of his own design as the cover model and guest editor for *Architectural Digest Russia*. Barefoot and bestriding his own blue sofa, he centered himself in a virtual recreation of Moscow’s famed 1929 cylindrical house designed by Constructivist Konstantin Melnikov.

“This project is a dream, as it was entirely created in 3D and has nothing to do with its real appearance, although it looks very realistic,” he wrote in his editor’s letter. “Art and design, like many other similar professions, is also a dream, because our job is to constantly dream and create. As you read this issue, I want you all to dream a little about what you most want.”

That dreamy quality should not be mistaken for a lack of ambition. Nuriev’s pastiche of sleek lines and nature references, mixed with an occasional drop of camp, is both eminently photogenic and seriously playful. His inviting vision has led to collaborations with architect Rem Koolhaas as well as brands like Nike, Lexus and Opening Ceremony.

In Parisian apartments, Brooklyn lofts, Moscow restaurants and retail emporia like the Dover Street Market in Paris, Nuriev uses design to explore ideas about intimacy and immediacy, his austerity mitigated by cobalt blues, piercing greens, the occasional pattern or judiciously placed fuzzy surface.



Harry Nuriev presents *The Elevator* at Design Miami/ Basel 2021.
Photography by James Harris (@james_harris_london).
Courtesy of the artist and Crosby Studios.



Harry Nurtiev in his installation, *The Bedroom*, at Design Miami / 2021. Photography: Lex Merico. Courtesy: Crosby Studios.



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The Balenciaga Sofa by Harry Nuriev in collaboration with Balenciaga at Design Miami/ 2019. Photos by Inna Kablukova.

“My design language was always very futuristic and digital, even when I’m creating something physical. Having a dialogue for people who are used to having beige chairs and sofas for decades and bringing in neon green and bringing people out of their comfort zone is always challenging. That’s what makes my practice different,” he says.

After architecture school, Nuriev says, his teachers were “disappointed” when he opted to be an interior designer rather than an architect. “It’s like studying surgery and then deciding to be a nurse,” he says, wryly. “To them, it was less prestigious, but I realized I cared more about the inside of a space than the outside. Still, no one understood me.”

On his own, in a pre-Pinterest and Instagram world, Nuriev says, “I had to figure myself out. It was just me, my memories from childhood and my vision of the future.” That future included years of living nomadically, bouncing between Airbnbs in the United States and throughout Europe.

After living in New York for several years, Nuriev settled in Paris last summer. “Paris will be one of my first experiences having a home base. When you think about Paris, you think about a conservative city, but when it comes to pushing boundaries, they’re open to that now.”

Though Europe-based, Nuriev says he continues to focus on his American relationships. His installations for Design Miami/ draw effusive praise. In 2019, in collaboration with Balenciaga, he created a sofa out of “proto-garbage”: a vinyl-covered sectional festooned and filled with cast-offs and damaged clothes from Balenciaga’s archives. “I love the idea of giving a second life to something,” he says.

Nuriev’s Design Miami/ 2021 project drew long lines, with viewers eager to walk into his installation *The Bedroom*, a vinyl-clad, LED-lit silver room centered on a ryokan-style mattress, dressed in a fitted vinyl sheet. “The main idea was to create a virtual space in a physical world that feels very digital, like inside of a rendering,” he says. “I remember being a child and having friends stay over and putting a comforter down to all sleep on the floor. The feeling of reunion or community was very important to me.”

Indeed, community remains central to his Miami experiences. “Design Miami/ is like a family,” he says. “It’s what I love the most, to be surrounded by like-minded people, where you can express yourself the way you want, and there are no limits.” Assessing his success, Nuriev says he’s grateful for his humble start. “I learned so much from being uncomfortable and feeling there was room for innovation and improvement,” he says. “When you have everything, you don’t think you need much to change.”

