


PROFESSIONAL

LIGHTING

DESIGN



Magazine for
professional lighting de

**CURRENT FOCUS
PROJECT**

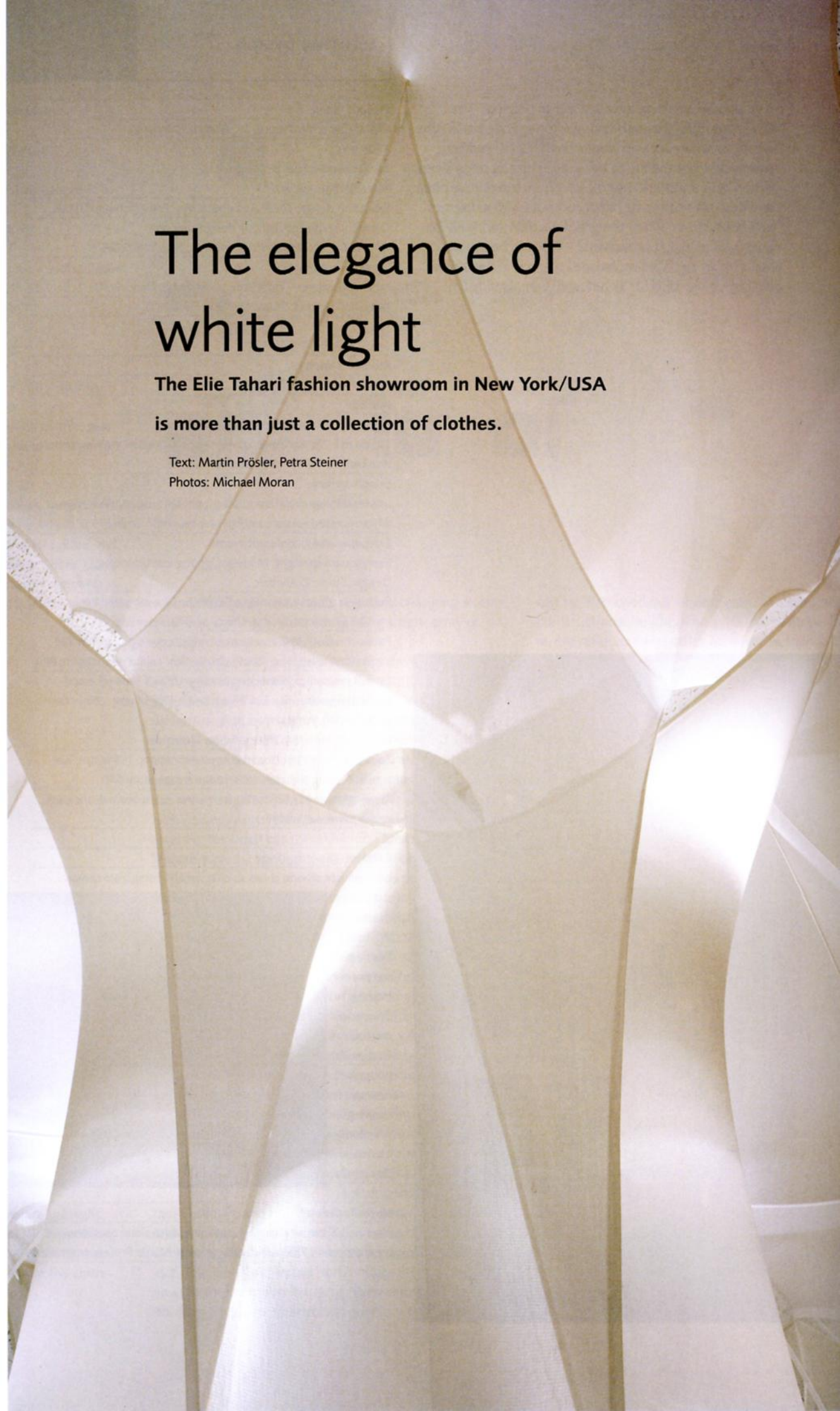
Phaeno Science Center

LIGHTING DESIGN

Hotel Puerto América

**LIGHTING
PHILOSOPHIES**

The sense and nonsense
of coloured light



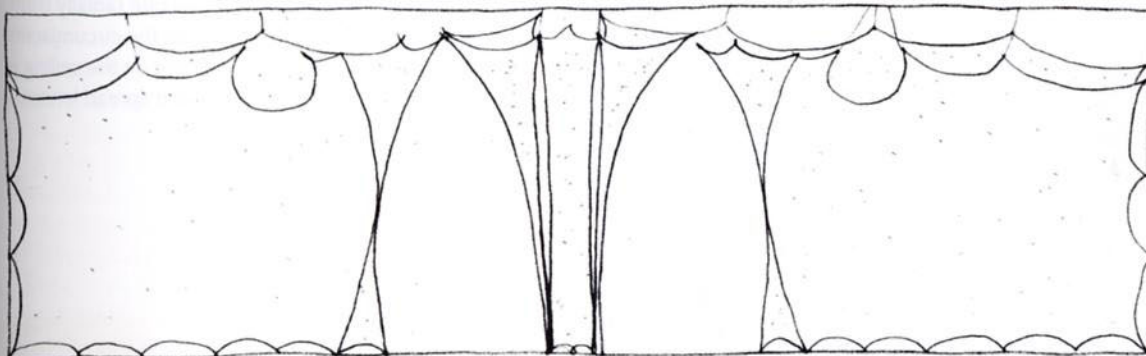
The elegance of white light

**The Elie Tahari fashion showroom in New York/USA
is more than just a collection of clothes.**

Text: Martin Prösler, Petra Steiner
Photos: Michael Moran



It takes more than just the quality of a product to convince a potential customer to buy. Marketing, commercialisation and presentation are key factors in our consumer society. If these are handled well, a product will have the chance of standing out vis-à-vis its competitors and attracting the attention and buying power of the consumer. The fact that the New York fashion company Elie Tahari decided to cut out daylight altogether from their new showroom design and have the garments displayed in exclusively white light, may not sound especially spectacular, let alone like the result of a clever marketing strategy – reality tells a different story.



How do you make something special out of a perfectly ordinary space? It's simple: take some lengths of white cloth, redefine the spatial limits and last but not least, backlight the spanned material with white light: welcome to a fairytale world.



The headquarters of the exclusive Elie Tahari fashion company is on the 48th floor in the Grace Building in Midtown Manhattan. The fully glazed façade allows a fantastic panoramic view of New York City as far as the Statue of Liberty in the south. Visitors to the fashion company have another visual delight awaiting them inside the building, however: for the presentation of their latest collections Tahari have had a windowless room dressed in the truest sense of the word to create an exclusive showroom – white and transparent materials are spanned across walls and ceiling and define new spatial limits. The cloth is backlit with the effect that the tent-like space appears to open upwards. Minimalism and lightness are the key features of Gisela Stromeyer's spatial sculpture.

Visitors to Elie Tahari are led through a series of conventionally designed offices before they reach the showroom, which is like entering another world. Here they can view the company's latest creations. Eight vertically mounted sails divide the presentation into four sales spaces. The flowing textiles generate a feeling of elegance and sensuality. Large semi-oval openings are cut into the material to create wardrobes along the walls. The differentiated lighting in the sales spaces designed by David Apfel using conventional low-voltage halogen spots makes for a pleasant, almost intimate atmosphere for customers and sales representatives. In accordance with the overall design concept to use white textile elements to create the space, Gisela Stromeyer and David Apfel used no coloured light, applying white light to underscore the magical atmosphere.

The spiel with the lengths of white material of different translucent quality is most impressive in the centre of the space. A supporting column in the practically square showroom (11.6 by 12.2 metres) is spanned by two different kinds of textile material, one transparent and the other opaque. The light source remains invisible, with the light appearing to spread out over the canopy-like ceiling from the one point of light. The fashion garments are displayed along the walls only, which is why the luminous intensity is increased along the edges of the space, thus attracting attention to the collection. This effect is enhanced by a number of bright openings in the textile ceiling – the backlit lengths of cloth are not sewn together but joined by numerous invisible hooks.

The entire design is realised with surface-mounted tracks from Lightolier carrying low-voltage 50 watt MR 16 adjustable luminaires which are controlled by a multi scene pre-set dimmer. The tracks are mounted in vertical lines behind the fabric on all four sides of the central column. Thus the light seems to propagate radially from this point along the ceiling and towards the circumjacent walls. The fabric around the column and on the ceiling is backlit using multiple beam spreads and spread lenses.



The track mounted on the ceiling parallel to the wall contains the same MR 16 luminaires fitted with long pendants which allow the accent lights to beam through rivet holes in the fabric and light the fashion collection presented on the walls with 50 watt narrow beam lamps. Both the fabric and track mounted accent lights are very flexible and can be adjusted for multiple applications.

The practical aspect to this installation: all textile elements are fixed to the walls and ceiling by means of simple hooks, or to the ground by movable weights. This means the company can use the space for a variety of purposes and the halogen spotlights remain easily accessible. Should certain textile elements not be required, they can be folded and stowed away. The stretch material is known as Spandex. It is the material that is used to make swimwear, and thus easy to clean and specially treated to be inflammable. The material also makes for a perfect surface for projections.

German-born Gisela Stromeyer lives in New York City and has worked with spanned textiles for a number of years. Gisela Stromeyer has played a significant role in creating and developing the market for textile installations in the USA and Europe. The versatile quality of her designs, and the way she creates spaces in a poetic but practical way, and always involving light, make her installations truly remarkable experiences.

Although lighting technology has now opened the doors for a vast range of colours to be combined with light, it appears that the trend is not towards more colour, but rather towards simplicity, with the emphasis on the essential. The Elie Tahari fashion showroom is a wonderful example of this trend, especially when the word showroom already sounds like show-time and a carte blanche for colour effects – it is a place that is designed to leave visitors with an impression, after all, from the point of view of the display and as a space in its own right. Colour may well attract the immediate attention of the viewer and if applied well will inevitably have a lasting effect. But what if an installation using exclusively white light can have the same kind of impact? Does that not mean that such designs are basically more sophisticated and excellent, since they draw on fewer affected effects to achieve the desired result?

The astounding aspect of the Elie Tahari fashion showroom is that it demonstrates how a magical landscape can be created out of a banal space using very few means and that coloured light definitely does not go amiss. On the contrary. Entering this space after finding your way to the building through the hectic streets of New York City, is like walking into a heavenly oasis of calm – and what is more conducive to opening the spirit and mind to what you are supposed to be doing here: buying product.

Project team:

Client: Elie Tahari, New York/USA

Showroom design: Stromeyer, New York/USA

Lighting design: David Apfel, New York/USA

Products applied:

Textile: Spandex (Lycra)

Luminaires: low-voltage halogen -spots, Lightolier



The discreet, unobtrusive white space and white light leave the fashion garments on display to steal the show, at the same time creating the perfect framework for the setting. The eye of the observer is attracted to the unusual: anything that is not white.

