



by Lee Freeland
 photos by Matteo Serri

Next Floor

The Enjoyable Elevator Experiment

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In September 2008, at Abitare il Tempo 2008, Italian lift manufacturer and supplier Sele S.r.l. presented its “Next Floor” installation, designed by architect and designer Diego Grandi in collaboration with multidisciplinary project manager Dotdotdot. Abitare il Tempo is a decoration, home/office design, furniture and lighting expo held annually in Verona, Italy. Castenaso, Italy-based Sele organized and promoted the event.

Next Floor, envisioned as a macrocosm concealed in a micro environment, explored the potential of the micro space of the lift car in which moving is a sort of journey that extends borders and defines new interpretations rich in different stimuli. Here, the normally anonymous and standardized means of transportation that we use become more preferable places with dilated dimensions rich in both sight and smell.

The exhibition setup was a dark space featuring a bare lift. The stripped-down look of the unit was accomplished with the use of exposed structures and unfinished industrial materials. Steel, sheet metal and gratings are juxtaposed against large, brightly lit red signs meant to invite visitors to enter the lifts and be immersed into the new atmosphere. These arrows ushered visitors toward the heart of the installation – the cabins.

Of the five cabins, two explored the theme of travelers’ sensations, memories and emotions. The first mimics the setting of a highly intimate, private domestic interior,

Above (l-r):

- This cabin conveys domestic intimacy, memories and encounters.
- A branch from which a swing is hung further emphasizes the dream-like atmosphere of room two, together with rough surfaces (suggestive of bark) and the pebbled floor, which evokes thoughts of a playground.

analyzing the dimension of memories and encounters: 24 large passport-type photos portray people's faces against an anonymous background. Framed like "family photographs," they convey the feeling of fleeting close encounters.

The second "room" of the display was intended to explore the potentialities of "micro space" with a design that conceptually expands boundaries and redefines values and connotations. The cabin seems to soar upward to the sky and be illuminated by the sun, thanks to the simulation of a skylight covered with leaves, through which a soft natural light floods the small space.

In the first stage of what was dubbed the "technological tour," the lift was designed to enable passengers to reach fantasy worlds and unexpected scenarios – from starry heights to the center of the earth. At each landing, doors open to various suggestive film sequences ranging from satellite images to scenes of abysses.

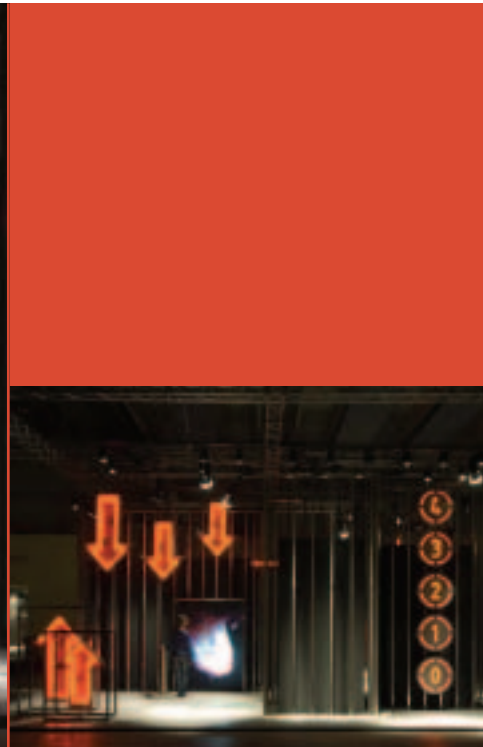
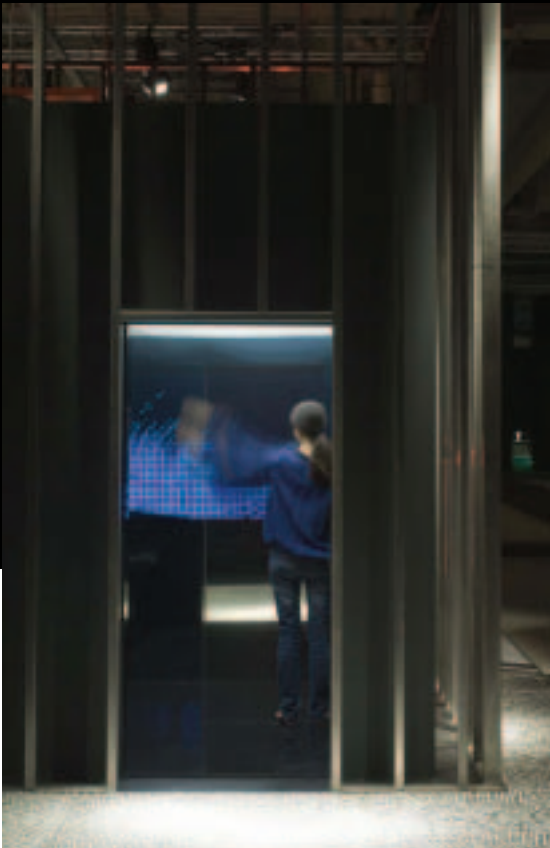
The second interactive theme cabin took visitors into a shiny, black environment devoid of spatial limits. This was achieved by a mirrored wall animated by constantly varying digital patterns that reproduce the movements of the person (captured by a hidden camera) in front of the mirror. Sele suggests that while the application of these means were meant only for entertainment, the technology could also be used for informational or teaching purposes.

The third technological microcosm is a tunnel outfitted with a "sound sculpture" of cables and loudspeakers hanging in clusters from the ceiling. When visitors enter, a sensor detects their movement and activates a progression of sounds that *crescendo* or *decrescendo* depending upon the number of people present and their movements.

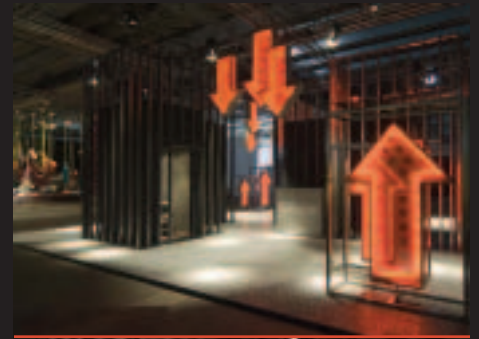
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Left and below:

- The cabin walls and floor are entirely clad with shiny black steel, which gives the perception of expanded space and "reflections within reflections."



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Above (l-r):

- The audible properties of this “sound sculpture” change with the number and actions of people present.
- Marked lines cross through a weave of shiny, raised enamel in the exhibit’s 60 X 120 format.
- Gray and anthracite hues are also intended to project the urban atmosphere.

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Materials

The metal mesh in room one, used here in interior design for the first time (being conceived for agricultural/food industry applications) was manufactured by Costacurta Vico. It was used as a refined cladding for the two side walls. Its weave, in an antique gold-work design, is embellished by a finish and a coating of mica paint.

The second room’s walls are covered with Abet laminate panels characterized by a textured bark-like finish. Another distinctive element is the ceiling in Diafos Abet, with the particular characteristic of diffusing light evenly, lending help to the illusion of a skylight overhead. The image of settled leaves here was obtained by directly printing a photograph on the panel using digital printing techniques.

Founded in 1921, Costacurta started manufacturing woven cloth and crimped wire mesh in a factory based in Lecco, Italy, and sold them from a shop in Milan. Now an international company, Costacurta has approximately 240 employees, sales offices in Milan, two factories and a subsidiary in The Netherlands, Costacurta b.v. Costacurta exports over 50% of its turnover and is a qualified supplier to international companies that develop technology and provide engineering services, manufacturing systems and equipment for various industries.

In addition to its traditional production of steel components, Costacurta has created Archi-Net®, a specific range of wire cloth for architecture. The design, which can be used both indoors and outdoors, intends to harmonize shapes, shine, transparency and suppleness. Façade coverings, false ceilings, partition walls, parapet coverings and furnishing components and elements are the main fields of its application.

Sele

Sele was founded in Bologna, Italy in 1989 by a group of vertical-transportation entrepreneurs. The objective was to create an Italian product, totally developed and manufactured independently of other influences, that could restore the country’s national technology and tradition in a highly competitive market dominated by large multinational corporations.

A single trademark grouping together a number of companies has allowed the creation of synergies between each business that optimize the quality/price ratio of the systems produced. The result is today’s Sele, which claims to be the largest Italian company with a national presence and completely independent manufacturing process. It has five sites, each of which specializes in one phase of the supply chain, and a network of technicians, retailers and installers. 

