

INTERIOR DESIGN

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stairway to heaven

take me to your leader

Graft's installation for the Sci Fi Channel lands at Comic-Con International, a trade fair in San Diego

IT'S DEFINITELY NOT A BIRD OR A PLANE. BUT IT COULD BE AN ALIEN—OR ITS TRANSPORT vehicle. Extraterrestrial associations are what the architects at Graft were shooting for in the pearlescent white fiberglass exhibit stand that they designed for the Sci Fi Channel, a cable TV division of NBC Universal. On display at Comic-Con International—a comic-book and pop-culture trade fair at the San Diego Convention Center—Graft's installation used glossy surfaces and computer-animated projections to lure conventiongoers who might be interested in the Sci Fi Channel's original series, which include *Ghost Hunters* and *Stargate Atlantis*. "It's a super-sign, marking the threshold between a dream and the future," explains Graft partner Lars Krueckeberg.

In more concrete terms, the structure might be a giant eel with a tail that flows back on itself. The eel's head houses a conference room, where LEDs produce a light show on the sloping walls, and a server room, which holds air-conditioning and multimedia equipment. This technology controls the trippy patterns projected directly on the eel's fiberglass skin and the TV previews shown on the three LCD screens embedded at the end of the eel's tail—which first swoops upward in a billowing arc 30 feet high. Around the other side of the tail's end, two built-in gel-topped benches encourage lingering.

Seven months before the first convention-goers encountered Graft's \$400,000 creation, Krueckeberg and designer Stefan Beese began working out ideas with Rhino digital files. The architects then moved on to AutoCAD for construction documents. Fabrication was handled by a Los Angeles company that does fiberglass work for the entertainment industry, such as an Incredible Hulk sculpture for Universal Studios. For Graft, a team of 15 used foam blocks to construct a full-scale prototype from which fiberglass molds for 14 individual sections could be cast.

These smaller pieces—seamlessly held together at Comic-Con by industrial steel bolts—make transport relatively easy. After disassembly, Graft simply placed the pieces on 12 special steel dollies for shipment to the next trade fair. Or a galaxy far, far away.

—Eddie Cohen

FLOORING: LONGSEAL FIBERGLASS WORK; GREENEYER; LIGHTING CONSULTANT: PAUL DEXTER; VIDEO CONSULTANT: CHARLES HELLWIG.



Above: Transforming an ordinary 30-by-60-foot stand at the San Diego Convention Center; Graft's white fiberglass installation; read gray in one light, pale lilac in another. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Part of the full-scale foam model, fabricated in a downtown Los Angeles warehouse. A foam support piece. A worker sanding the foam. Assembled in San Diego, the installation comprised an enclosure for conference and server rooms, an arched 30-foot-high display structure, and a freestanding computer station, all anchored by vinyl flooring. Two 61-inch plasma screens set behind the windows of resin and fiberglass in the shell of the enclosure. A projection accentuating the curves of the arched structure. Sci Fi Channel merchandise, such as figurines and branded iPods, displayed on six shelves up-lit by halogen lamps.

