

By JULIE V. IOVINE

THE Vanity Fair group portrait is today's equivalent of Parnassus, where glorified talents come to pose. Last week, an elite fraternity of architects participating in a high-end housing project in Long Island gathered for the magazine's group photograph of 40 top architects. Richard Meier, the mastermind of the all-star development, anchored the foreground. Michael Graves settled in the second tier. Just in time to say, "Cheese!" the mighty Zaha Hadid, wielding an oversize gold purse, maneuvered insistently from far right to dead center, while some of the younger set carped about being relegated to the fifth row.

Lindy Roy, 39, in a Comme des Garçons frock coat slashed with panels of pinstripe and camouflage fabric, stood out on the far right. Six feet tall, Ms. Roy holds her own with ease. Professionally, she is teetering between start-up jitters and white-hot ascendancy.

Today, in a newly fashionable stretch of the meat-marketing district, Ms. Roy will have a debut at an invitation only opening of a gallery and showroom for the Swiss furniture maker Vitra. The store is designed with a flavorful hint of automat: through a two-story window, passers-by will glimpse a stack of rubber-matted platforms, like a vertical conveyor belt, each holding a tasty-looking chair. It is Ms. Roy's first significant job to be completed, and it's for a company known for catching talent on the way up.

"Don't ask me to say what specifically attracted me to her," said Rolf Fehlbaum, the chairman of Vitra who in 1986 gave Frank Gehry his first European commission, the Vitra Museum, and then crowned Ms. Hadid, the London-based architect, with a career making firehouse. "With Lindy, I felt a sense of promise and the presence of a fast mind with a keen understanding of architecture."

Less than a decade out of Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Ms. Roy, born in South Africa, has been hyped as one of design's bright young things in glossies like Interview. In April, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art will bring a series of exhibitions of innovative new designers with a show of Ms. Roy's work.

She is an architect on the verge, even without much built work. Three of her projects, including a heli-ski resort in Alaska, where visitors will arrive on mountain-tops in helicopters, and a spa in Botswana where guests can bathe among crocodiles, appear in the "New Hotels for Global Nomads" exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum. Works closer to home include an apartment for a Vitra executive in a condo on Perry Street designed by Mr. Meier and a \$1.5-million house, with a swimming pool in the living

DESIGN NOTEBOOK

HOT SEATS In a store designed by Lindy Roy, right, Vitra reproductions of classics, far right, by Verner Panton (top, \$195) and Ron Arad (\$260).



An Architect Finds Her Buzz

room, to be built next spring in the development that was the occasion of the Vanity Fair photo session.

"Lindy's name always comes up in conversations about who's doing something that's going to make a difference," said Joseph Rosa, the curator of architecture and design at the San Francisco museum. "She comes from a different cultural background, and her outside mentality, her drive and excitement are all reminiscent of the just-do it optimism of the European Modernists, who went to California and were so influential to postwar architecture."

Last week, Ms. Roy strode with confidence through the chaos of the Vitra showroom's final preparations. Dressed in jeans and a form follows leather jacket, she negotiated adroitly between rail-less staircases and workers trailing behind with punch-lists. With an easy camaraderie and breezy flirtatiousness, she calmed a construction worker made apoplectic by a high ledge on a stair. She peeled back the wrapper to inspect the sheen on a stainless-steel tread slipping like a Slinky down a molded walnut staircase. "It really looks good," she said with the infectious cheer that friends and competitors say lends her an aura of invincible success.

Over an omelet at Pastis, Ms. Roy reviewed the highlights of her brief but gathering career. The first break was the Botswana spa, designed when she was fresh out of school for a friend who owns a safari company. Ms. Roy's zoomy computer renderings of an archipelago of floating spas inspired by termite lodgings were an easy sell to magazines on the lookout for

wacky futuristic designs. Then in 2001 she won a competition to design a summer installation in the courtyard of P.S. 1 in Queens. With 12 hammocks, 42 fans and mobile stretchers lung with plastics bladders she conceived her island as a kind of "Swept Away" for hip young anesthesiologists. Next came the Vitra commission, which she is completing with Peter Himmelstein Design.

"Watching the space emerge is incredibly intense," Ms. Roy said, "It's such a long way from designing on computer, where you can hit the delete button if you don't like a beam. In reality, there are a lot of hits and misses."

Ms. Roy's work takes the sanitized aesthetic of the medical lab and fleshes it out with sensual materials, a dash of humor and a whiff of risk. The Vitra showroom abounds in double takes, including an acrylic-impregnated wood floor in a tiger-stripe pattern and display platforms that turn in to staircases. A bar she is designing for the meatmarket district will have cast-resin table tops suspended from overhead tracks once used for meat hooks, as if to say, "Let the furniture do the mingling."

"I know a lot of architects, and they are all portentous," said one client. "Lindy is fun without being a wiseacre."

"I go with what works," Ms. Roy said. Like many young architects in a post-Rem Koolhaas world, she bolsters every design with heavy research. No napkin sketches for this generation. After graduating from Columbia architecture school, Ms. Roy studied deconstruction, semiotics, swarm theory and brain waves. Then she spent two years working for Peter Eisenman, the

profession's heavyweight thinker, before heading off to teach design and design theory at Rice. Two years ago, she opened her own firm, Roy.

In addition to finding inspiration in swarming termites, she admires the work of non-dogmatic Modernists like Oscar Neimeyer, Jean Prouve and Buckminster Fuller. "And, of course, I follow all the fashion designers, especially Rei Kawakubo and Issey Miyake," she said.

But it's the intrigue with danger that Roy-watchers say sets her work apart. "In her hotel projects, she really understands the sublime, as in the 19th-century fascination with seeking the exotic, the remote and the overpowering," said Donald Albrecht, the curator of "Global Nomads." In one project, she envisioned barge motels floating down a Louisiana river poisoned by the petrochemical industry. Ms. Roy attributes her skill at designing for risky situations – a mountain ski drop or toxic dump – to the instability of a childhood spent in South Africa. (Her own home, however, is in a placid Greenwich Village town house.)

Last summer, Ms. Roy jumped at the chance to design just 10 days a museum show to mark the 25th anniversary of Elvis

Presley's death. A close-up portrait of Presley's face covers the side of a 50-foot trailer truck. Inside, she arranged a federal badge presented by Richard M. Nixon, a Colt .45 and the gold coveralls from Presley's later years in backlit alcoves and lined the rest with black rubber shag carpeting.

Ms. Roy belongs to a generation of architects accustomed to working the levers of the news media and publicity machinery. She didn't flinch when Vogue came calling to feature her and Winka Dubbeldam another tall, attractive woman architect, in an article that could have been headlined "Babes in Designland." Here is the first generation of women architects comfortable about being womanly and authoritative on the job.

"When I was starting out," said Deborah Berke, a Manhattan architect, "I was really careful about being taken seriously as a woman and not appearing frivolous – I simply wouldn't do certain things. Now I see younger women architects posing in fashion magazines and appearing in advertisements, and I think, 'Boy, was I an idiot!'"

Not that it all has come effortlessly for Ms. Roy. "I remember one summer," she

said, "just sitting and staring at the phone thinking: 'Who can I call? How can I make things happen?'" To complete the research for the Louisiana barge project – it has been called, much to Ms. Roy's chagrin, toxic tourism – she ran up all her expenses on credit cards when she could not get a grant. For the moment, there is no client for the meatmarket bar. No problem: she may finance it herself if the right partners materialize. "It's only a matter of time before all the paraphernalia of the meat market become valuable artifacts from another era," she said.

At the Vitra construction site, it's business as usual, with about 30 construction workers stomping around, and Ms. Roy commanding their full attention. "She helps get the job done," said Rupert Heron, the superintendent for the Vanguard Construction company. "And she's hands-on. A lot of architects aren't. Not only is she a lady. She's a gentleman."

MAKING A NAME Below, the Vitra store, her first big job. Upper left, Lindy Roy's house for the all-start Sagaponack development on Long Island, lower left, her Elvis Exhibition trailer. Lower right, water sprays and hammocks at her P.S. 1 installation in Queens.

