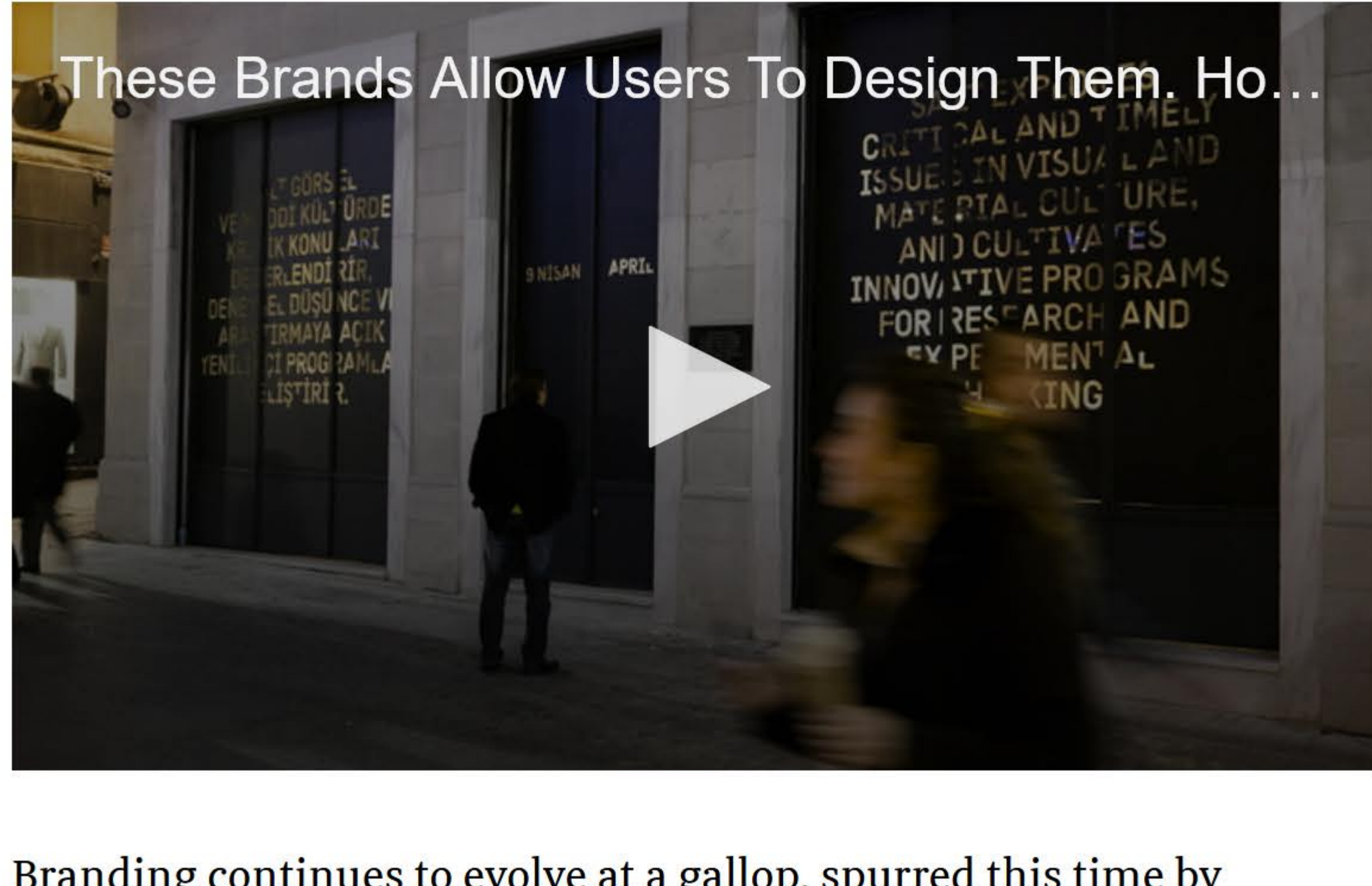
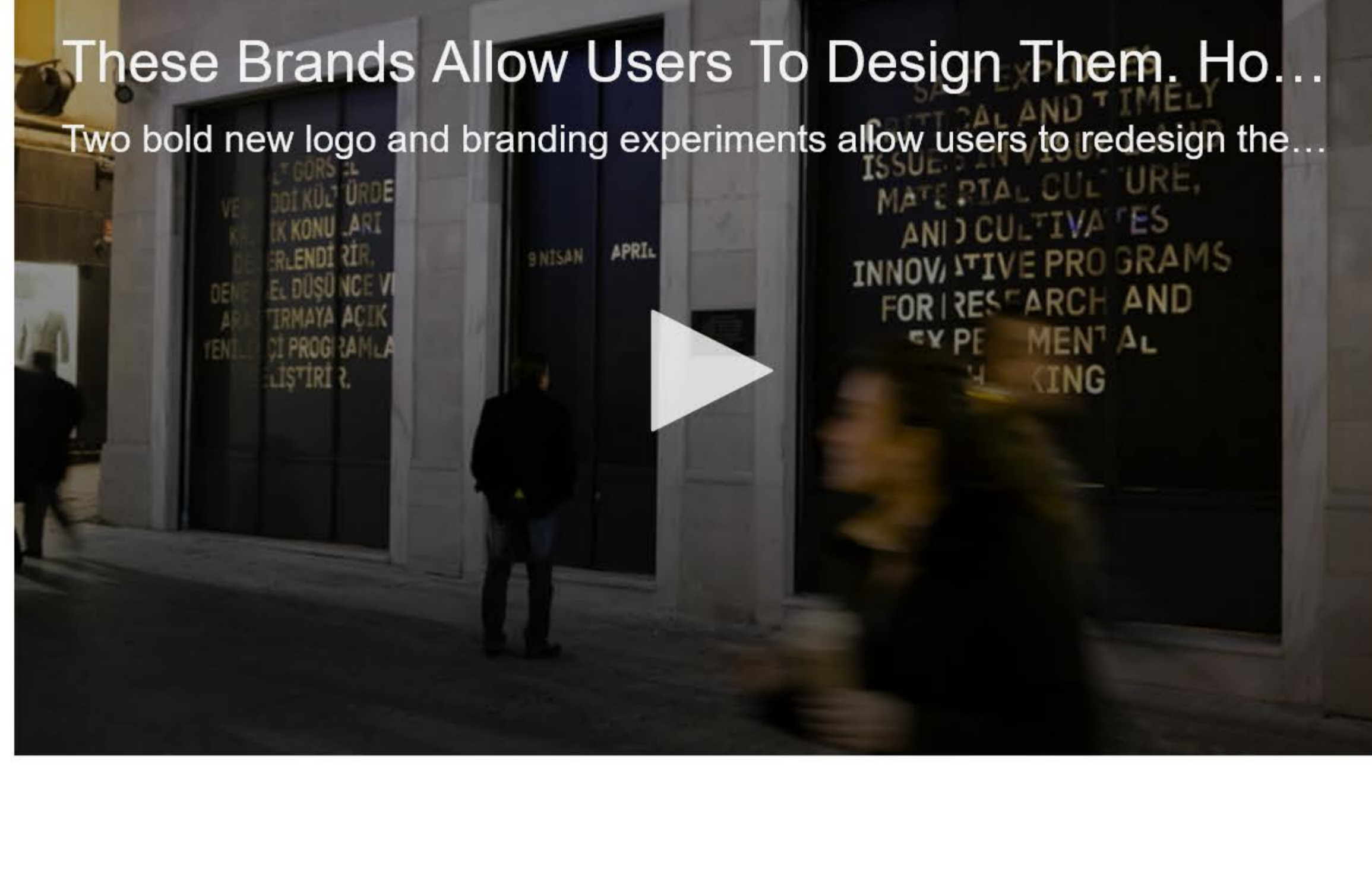


BY SHONQUIS MORENO 3 MINUTE READ



Branding continues to evolve at a gallop, spurred this time by advancing technology and the rise of social media. “The internet has challenged the conventions of branding,” says Simon Browning, a brand specialist at Tokyo creative agency EAT. “We believe that smart companies will shift focus from logos and CI’s to actively demonstrate what they are capable of and establish innovative policies that people can align with.” Today, logos aren’t just a symbol, static or dynamic, of the business, but a tool for, and the site of, the brand’s community-building efforts.

Logos, to be sure, are inching towards interactivity and mutability: There’s Bruce Mau’s **frame logo for an art school**, which is filled with student works like a gallery wall; the MIT Media Lab’s **morphing logo**; and Google’s web signage, which was recently **made into a pluckable guitar**. But two recent identities—for Istanbul’s newest cultural institution, SALT and the nascent, internationally mobile urban planning platform, the BMW Guggenheim Lab—don’t just change. The patrons of the brand change them.



These logos don’t just change; the patrons of the brand change them.

SALT debuted in Istanbul this summer with an identity by New York graphics studio, Project Projects. It calls itself a “designing institution,” not a “design institution,” commissioning new work and building an international creative community, rather than just collecting, archiving and showcasing it. SALT’s is a non-logo made in a typeface that will be remade every four months by a rotating cast of designers. The letters form a dispersed “logo” and articulate the idea that SALT itself is a work in progress, undergoing constant design. “The SALT system is not just an open-source or collaborative model, but a uniquely curatorial approach,” says Project Projects partner, Prem Krishnamurthy. “Each new typeface version functions as a site-specific commissioned work, presented within the venue of the identity.” Which, over time, knits together a community of creatives.

The BMW Guggenheim Lab will tour the world starting in New York this August, encouraging an exchange of ideas about urban improvement by eliciting public feedback. Sulki & Min of Seoul designed a colorful interactive mark that changes when visitors to the website or to keyboards in the temporary Lab buildings respond to a curatorial question about how to better city life. Suggestions are added to the moving phrases that form the constantly morphing letters L-A-B. The logo represents the public effort to address the issues but also acts as a site where the effort takes place while gathering data crucial to execute good ideas later. “It’s like a thermometer that takes the temperature of what people are thinking about cities,” says Lab co-curator, Maria Nicanor. “People are letting us know how they would change their cities, and to us, this information is priceless.” But what makes these experiments work? Here’s three keys:

Provoke participation

Sulki & Min co-opted conventional methods for encouraging online participation—comments gathering and the Q+A—but incorporated them, unconventionally, into a dynamic logo system: “A logo is an institutional device that the public can’t usually have any affect on: There are logos that change over time and place, but you can’t change them for yourself,” Min points out. “For us, it was important that it be the logo that does this.” By changing the curatorial questions over the six-year run of the project and commissioning different designers for cycles 2 and 3, the LAB logo will change, eliciting renewed feedback.

Make the system bigger than you

Project Projects won’t alter the typeface of the four letters; they’ll select a rotating series of graphic designers to do it and then showcase the work. “We considered the identity system not as a finished work, but rather as something open-ended — a system that has fixed rules, but which also accepts a large degree of change, participation and outside input,” says Krishnamurthy. “Once we made that mental leap — to let go of ‘owning the system’— the rest seemed relatively straightforward.”

Create, share, distribute

SALT will let the public copy and use each version of the typeface, found in the source code of any SALT web page. This strategy simply accepts that exclusive typefaces are impossible if the design is good. Instead, it uses would-be thieves to get the word out. “We asked ourselves,” Krishnamurthy explains, “how can the institution extend its reach beyond its physical structures into unexpected contexts?”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Istanbul- and Brooklyn-based Shonquis Moreno is a former editor for Dwell, Frame, and Surface magazines, who contributes to publications that include Wallpaper, Case da Abitare, Whitewall, and Metropolis. [More](#)



The latest innovations in design brought to you every weekday.

SIGN UP

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

[Privacy Policy](#)