

PATRICIA URQUIOLA

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Product Design





PATRICIA URQUIOLA

DESIGN FRIENDS



AT THE CASSINA SHOWROOM IN MILAN

2018

Photo: Stefano De Monte

COVER:

FLOS "CHASEN"

Suspension lamp providing diffused lighting

2007



ROOMMATE GIULIA
Hotel Milan
2016







MIRAGE ORANGE

Hand-knotted rug
for spanish company Gan
2018



PALAVAR CHAIR / SWING CHAIR
for Louis Vuitton "Objets Nomades"
Photo: Louis Vuitton / Philippe Lacombe
2017

At what point in your journey did you decide to make the leap from Spain to Italy?

I am from Asturias but I was studying architecture in Madrid at the Politécnica. After three and a half years I moved to Milan. It's hard to say, now, what the reasons were because I was so young, but mostly it was because I needed to move out of my comfort zone as an architect. When I arrived in Milan, the university was in some ways the same but they were not only teaching architecture. At the time design and architecture were mixed. Without really thinking about it, I got into design. Achille Castiglioni was the teacher for the design projects, and I was so focused on that, that I did my thesis with him. Many

years after, I have had the luck to do an exhibition about him at the Triennale of Milan. In doing so, it was really interesting revisiting my relationship with him and the values that constituted a bridge with today's generation. It's not a chronological exhibition but focuses on his work and all the people that worked with him, including his brother Piergiacomo. These are gathered in a series of clusters that represent the different concepts that are representative of his work.

When you look back at your time working with and training under some of these iconic designers like Vico Magistretti, Achille Castiglioni and Piero Lissoni in the past, how has the

profession evolved since you first started out? And what are the changes that you embraced most willingly?

There was also Maddalena de Padova. Obviously, the profession has changed, but it's not about having embraced a particular change but rather about every day trying to embrace changes and evolve. When I think back at the first part of my career, the conceptual idea behind a designer was to propose ideas to a company and even arrive to a prototype but then it was the company that took the lead and went the rest of the journey on their own. I was always interested in all of it, the graphics, the narrative of the presentation, and I was asking many questions, that they

did not necessarily believe concerned me. Today, when we do anything we need to have a more transparent process. There are a lot of questions that you share with the company about the reasoning, the process, about how to proceed and how to understand every phase of the project until it gets in the hands of the final user. It's quite complex, but that complexity is something that is part of the change that the profession has undergone. In my work as the art director of Cassina and in my relationship with Haworth, which is similar in some ways, albeit in a different environment, it is about giving them a kind of project, but a project as a service in understanding the company from many points of view. It goes beyond my normal role as a designer doing a product in relation-

ship with a company, it is much larger than that and I need to think in many different directions. You have to think about many other things, which are not only physical. It's very interesting because it makes you understand more, it makes you discuss how society is changing and what is or isn't a value we are in line with. A lot of arguments that I can happily say help me grow. As an architect part of my work is to think about spaces, public spaces (hotels, offices, exhibition spaces, etc) and so at the studio we find ourselves managing a lot of reflections, crossovers, interests - as in new technologies for example and how they have evolved and changed our way of living. I think it's a moment of change of paradigm with this new digital era. I am one

generation that is between analogue and digital.

Does that relate to what you often talk about in terms of "breaking prejudices"? What does that really mean in the realm of design?

It is possibly connected to that. I have been talking about this for a while; I try to apply it to myself in relation to this "new society" which is evolving so quickly. Every few days, I am travelling to a new destination, I have to try to understand these different societies and the way they communicate, and the studio is in the middle of all of that, learning to multi-task but also keeping a certain depth and consistency in our attitude and not dealing with things superficially.





IGNIV RESTAURANT
Badrutt Palace Hotel, St. Moritz
2016

But going back to this idea of prejudice, I think this has been inside of me for a long time in my personal evolution. I think you have to be open to this idea of breaking prejudices, otherwise when things happen suddenly and monumentally you are not ready to deal with them, because you do not understand them. If you have an attitude of looking at things with a different point of view, then you can use irony, critical thinking, etc. I grew up in a family with a lot of gentle criticism and discussion. There was a lot of: Where are you going? Why? How are you going to get there? So, from a young age I learned to say, yes I have decided I want to go to this place, and I am going to get there like this. There was always a very strong dialectic in the

family about what each of us was doing. I think that's a good thing, because, to start, it makes you aware of what you are thinking that very moment, and it is never the same thing as what you were thinking maybe a few months ago. That means that you are evolving all the time.

It's a good system to keep your consistency. Consistency provides you with a path, but the path has to have parenthesis, moments of calm intervals, where you go out, come back and then decide. It gives your consistency a rhythm.

Does that also relate to when you were saying that initially you were not interested in materials like ceramics

or marble but then eventually you came around and you rediscovered them in a new way and applied them to your work? Is that also a way of breaking prejudices? What makes you come around and see a material that you were initially not interested in under a new light?

I am working with a few companies today, which are not only doing three dimensional design but also surface design. They are working with quite advanced technologies in ceramics, wood flooring, marble ... For me at the beginning I was just thinking what can be a nice new surface? I didn't know how much I could grow in this kind of research. But today there are so many

complex machines that are able to do double or triple printing and do so many different things, so I was able to learn a lot, not only in terms of technology but also about how these materials are evolving.

It's been very interesting. Today, I look at them as a fantastic white page, a landscape to grow. I think I am very lucky to be able to work with all these people, who don't seek me out because I would revolutionise things for them, but rather because I offer them a kind of empathy. Together we implement changes but it is with a day-by-day attitude where along the way we learn together, we share together and develop an affinity. Sometimes, when you work on a project you need to listen to your needs and that may take you away from the original

brief, but if you don't listen to where your interior need wants to take you, you may lose part of the project. Sometimes you need to break the rules.

So, you always keep an open mind?

I need to. I think we have to do a lot of things and there is a large space to do better. My path is my path and there are obviously plenty of limits but if I communicate this energy and desire to be on this path and always be evolving, open and unafraid to try new things, then that's enough to give to others. In the end, what you are making are objects, but perhaps the virtual side of what you give to others is what's most important, and that's in the attitude.

What do you like about being able to practice in these overlapping professions of design and architecture?

They are really overlapping but in a very natural way. It's been like that for me from the time of my studies. I am not a kind of creative that just sits at a table and the ideas just flow on their own. I like to work with the idea of being asked to do certain things, and sometimes it's the architecture that asks the questions or gives answers for design. In my collaboration with Moroso for example I was often asked to create an object but then I would come in and see that the space (showroom or booth) didn't work and we would rework that as well. So, the overlapping for me is natural and necessary. And now you can add to it the overlapping of



GLAS ITALIA "LIQUEFY"

High and low oval-shaped tables
in tempered extralight glass,
with faded and irregular decoration
2017



GLAS ITALIA "SHIMMER"

Tables, consoles and shelves
with an iridescent multi-chromatic finish
2015



art direction, which requires you to be open to many more criteria.

I want to touch on your work with hotels, the idea of art direction, design and architecture all intersect when designing spaces for hotels. Thinking of the Roommate outpost in Milan, it really looks like every frame and every vase is playing a note in a rigorous symphony.

We actually had a really low budget for that hotel and I am happy that we were able to put in pieces that are really well done. They could be from Moroso, Cassina or Kartell. For the wardrobe and tables we just found new ways of making it work. I didn't have a special budget for tiles but

we instead worked on the joints of the tiles. You always find a way. We were able to get a wallpaper and fabric that was especially done for the hotel. The lower budget just made us accept our limits and think about what could work. Though the technology was not at the level that I would have liked.

There is a real warmth to the things and spaces you design. Looking at the chairs you created for Moroso, you feel enveloped by the richness of the fabrics. One of the other things that is really striking in the spaces that you create is the unusual colour combinations that live in perfect harmony. Are any of your colour combinations or textures

references to past memories?

It's sometimes difficult to explain all these ideas. In the case of Moroso for example, we created the fabrics too. We work in everything, not only the shape or idea of the project but also the material. So, yes, you could possibly say that memory plays a part in it. I think memory is always in the back of everything. I always think you can't really innovate because for innovating you have to break the rules in some way, to do that you have to love and really know the rules, the memory. The memory is there, you play around and then tack you make something and move on. It's not only a nostalgic thing for me. Memory is an incredible space in your mind where you can sometimes find elements of the future.

Sometimes your work feels like the antithesis to minimalism because it is so rich.

I think those are possibly labels today. This can be intended in many ways. It's a word that is being used in a superficial way. I have an education as an architect so I tend to be factual in my approach and I like to reduce projects to an essence that drives the project. Society is so complex; I think we can explore solutions in new technologies and in the periphery of things that used to be less reachable. I think even the two words Industrial Design have lost part of their meaning, because design is much more connected to the larger world than just the industrial world. Technology and craft represent a duality that is

more interesting because they are both two sides of a world where you can find interesting crossovers. Many things are evolving in this moment and trying to approach our discipline by just being an "industrial designer" is a bit limitative.

In your work with a marble company you consciously chose to work with their "rejects", it was an act of subversion but it also works with the notion of sustainability.

Well, this company wanted me to work with their best materials, but when I visited the company I saw these materials in a corner that nobody wanted and I wanted to play with that. Marble is so expensive and the language of marble is

so dense, but to understand the material better I started playing around with the less important pieces to create my own vocabulary.

Obviously sustainability is part of it. Anything that anyone is doing with a minimum of quality needs to take sustainability into account. Today, we are confronted with the limits of our products and sustainability is part of the path. The concept of quality has evolved into a concept of sustainability. It's always questioning why are you using this, and how are you using it etc. When I was young this was not part of the conversation, but today, it starts in the morning with the act of opening your taps when you brush your teeth. And it's never enough.





IL SERENO
Hotel Torno, Lake Como
Photography: Patricia Parinejad
2016



CASSINA "BACK-WING"
Made of solid ash and fine leather. The upholstery is shaped like a leaf and thereby bequeaths the backrest its discrete armrests, while enhancing the comfort and ergonomics of the dynamic-looking Cassina chair. 2018

FLOS "SERENA"

Adjustable table lamp
providing indirect and reflected light
Photo: Frank Huelsboemer
2015





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PUBLISHER Design Friends
COORDINATION Nadine Clemens
LAYOUT Guido Kröger
INTERVIEW Afsaneh A. Rafii
PRINT Imprimerie Schlimé
PRINT RUN 250 (Limited edition)

ISBN 978-2-9199462-8-0
PRICE 5 €

DESIGN FRIENDS
 Association sans but lucratif (Luxembourg)

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This catalogue is published for Patricia Urquiola's lecture at Mudam Luxembourg on November 7th, 2018, organized by Design Friends.

PUBLISHED WITH THE SUPPORT OF



LE GOUVERNEMENT
 DU GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG
 Ministère de la Culture

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