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ISSUE

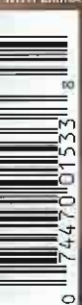
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
EMILIA

**65**

**SHORE THINGS** THE MOST PROVOCATIVE AND PROMISING IN MEDITERRANEAN DESIGN  
*from RUDY RICCIOTTI'S architectural assaults to Turkey's grand KANYON and the urban plantings of ECOSISTEMA*

**FUTURE SHOCK** ARNE QUINZE, SPHAUS and JURGEN MAYER H. *propel design into the next dimension*

**NOUVEAU ITALIAN** *Reinventing traditions and techniques with GIANVITO ROSSI, NICOLAS CAITO and 6267*



# Invisible Man

As reclusive as he is prolific, Rodolfo Dordoni may very well be the most brilliant designer you've never heard of

Writer VIRGINIO BRIATORE

Italian designer Rodolfo Dordoni is shy, refined and in his early fifties. Notoriously reticent and averse to the press, he has had severely limited public exposure – no books, not even a website – despite his vast and impressive body of work. Over the past twenty-five years, his portfolio has expanded like an almanac of high-end design, including collections for Minotti and Flou, lamps for Flos and Foscarini, outdoor furniture for Roda, vases for Venini, and even stores for Breil and Dolce & Gabbana. His studio is located in a converted rice warehouse in the heart of Milan's Chinatown – a long, stark space hosting a score of designers who quietly ply their trade. His office sits at the far end where he surveys his team like the revered captain of a well-run ship.



## How did you start your design career?

I went to university with Giulio Cappellini. I intended to be an architect, but immediately switched my focus to design after I started working with him. We worked across a wide range – product design, catalogs, photography, exhibit design, everything you can think of.

## You're known for building steady relationships with your clients. Do you have a flair for management?

I'm not interested in one-night stands! You need to look at a project logically; that takes energy and shared enthusiasm. I'm very self-indulgent so if I'm doing a job for someone, we have to be on the same wavelength. When you first work with a firm, it's easy for things to go wrong. You lack a necessary level of familiarity, and it takes a certain amount of time to forge that working relationship. >

**A MAGICAL NUMBER:** (Clockwise from top) Avoiding clichés, Zero, Dordoni's Japanese restaurant in Milan, features sleek, ebony and steel tables overlooked by a mirrored-glass kitchen; a table in the private dining room sits beneath a large Venini chandelier made of 400 tinted strips of Murano glass; dividers made from overlapping brass circles give the tranquil space texture; a backlit white onyx wall lines the hallway  
Photography Ray Teixeira



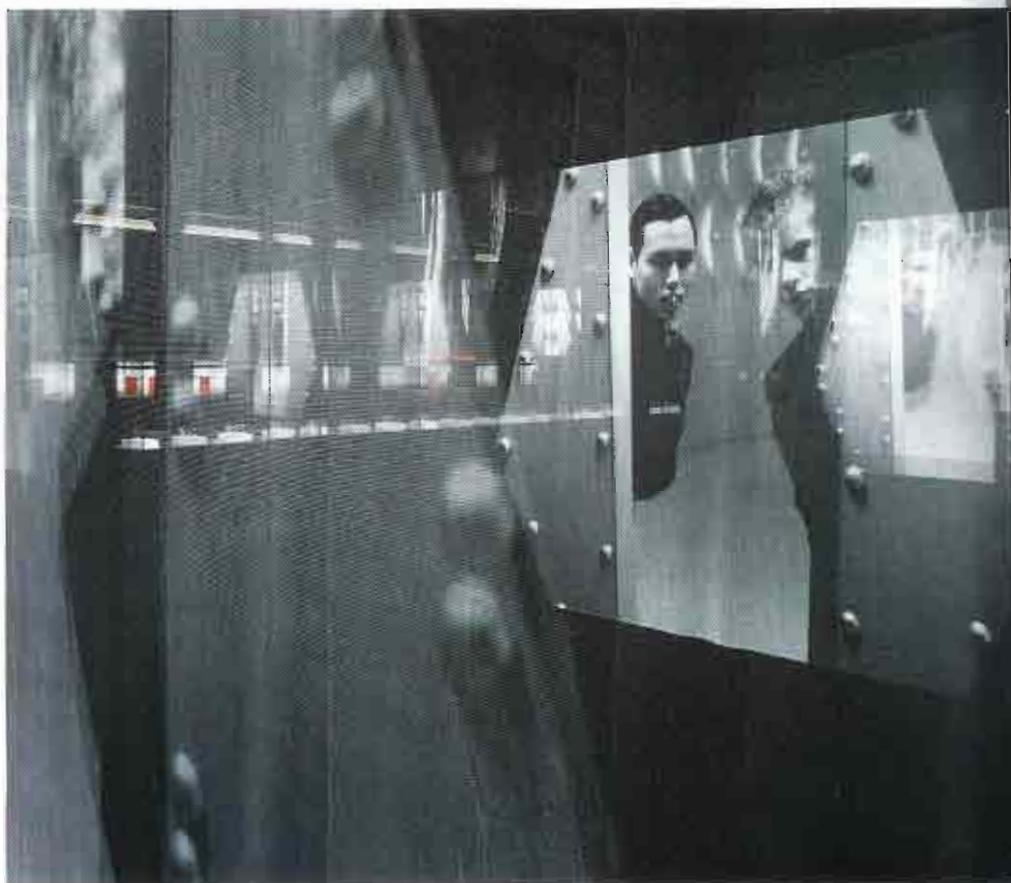
That should be the main focus of a designer – that sense of harmony, once achieved, is invaluable. Take Minotti – I've been working with them for eleven years now. We're busy with a new collection that will be presented this April. Or Flou, whom I've been working with for seven years. I designed most of the beds in their catalog. As for Dolce & Gabbana, we've been styling stores around the world for the D&G line for the last ten years.

**How do you approach new projects? Do you have a particular set of methods?**

I have a pretty casual approach. I prefer to fish around in my memory, because too many outside markers can be dangerous. Then I study the context, the market and I think about contemporary tastes. I build a "package" of materials, combinations, colors, ideas and gradually the designs take shape from this research. For example, we're working on a series of furnishings for the home. I'm using a 50-50 ratio between glossy lacquer and sanded wood – but in monochrome – and applying this aesthetic to tables, closets and storage units. This is a framework that will define the look of the entire project.

**The outdoors are a big part of life in the Mediterranean. Are you working on anything related to this?**

Yes, we're designing a whole collection for Roda and a new line of chairs for Emu. When designing for the outdoors, you generally have to change your focus. But in the new Roda collection, we're trying to whittle away this boundary that separates the indoors from the outdoors.





For example, in the Mediterranean tradition you have gardens, terraces, and summer residences, so there's a tendency to think in terms of furniture you can fold up and stow away when the season ends. But that's not the case everywhere. There are parts of the world where summer lasts eight, nine months, even the whole year. Besides, we're not furnishing a campsite. So we threw out the classic oilcloth and canvas. We asked textile firms to produce fabrics that are durable, waterproof and will resist mildew, but have the same tactile qualities as indoor fabrics. And the same goes for varnishes, paints and finishes. The aim is to make furniture for the home in general.

**You've recently rekindled your interest in architecture by designing homes, stores and restaurants. Did this change of scale call for a change of method?**

I spent years focused on product design, but I never

forgot my training as an architect, and my concern for spatial values. Furniture itself affects the proportions of a space, so the change didn't really call for a new approach, but a new energy. Architecture involves a lot of technical, managerial and administrative work – all this red tape that I didn't want to wade through by myself. But I recently developed a close relationship, based on affinity and trust, with two young architects, and so together we started a firm, Dordoni Architetti.

**CASE STUDY:** During a recent watch and jewelry trade show in Switzerland called BaselWorld, Dordoni designed a sultry, two-story exhibition booth for manufacturer Breil  
*Photography Peter Hauck*





**What was the principle behind Zero, your new Japanese restaurant in downtown Milan?**

I wanted to create a hyper-luxurious yet restrained ambience that made special use of light. The restaurant is illuminated through thin slabs of backlit onyx and a big strip chandelier by Venini, which has over 400 colored crystals.

**Your name is instantly associated with high-end luxury brands. How do you feel about that?**

I like the luxury concept in a project. In my work, luxury means being able to think at the highest levels, using the finest yarns, perfect weaves and precious materials, all applied discerningly. But as far as I'm concerned, a plate of pasta cooked nicely is a luxury. So is a trip to the country, to sample a local cheese. Luxury means the ability to recognize a value. I love luxury that's natural, not ostentatious.

**So materials are important to you?**

Materials matter, but they're not everything. Even a low-cost plastic, if it works well, can be crucial. Luxury is not empty display, but the ability to strike a fine balance where the first and lasting impression should be a satisfying sense of proportion. **VB**



**OFFICE MAX:** (Top to bottom, left to right) Architectural models in Dordoni's office in Milan; Rodolfo Dordoni; Hopper chair for Minotti (2006); a glass-encased conference room; 2Leather armchair for Matteograssi (2005); the office, formerly a rice warehouse, is lit by 12 large windows

Portrait by Massimo Bestetti; Photography of interiors by Rui Teixeira