

max factor

‘I don’t design, I play with materials. All materials are vital. I fight with materials every day – steel, plastics, glass, ceramics – any material that helps me realise a project. For me, design isn’t a vague concept, it’s completely solid.’

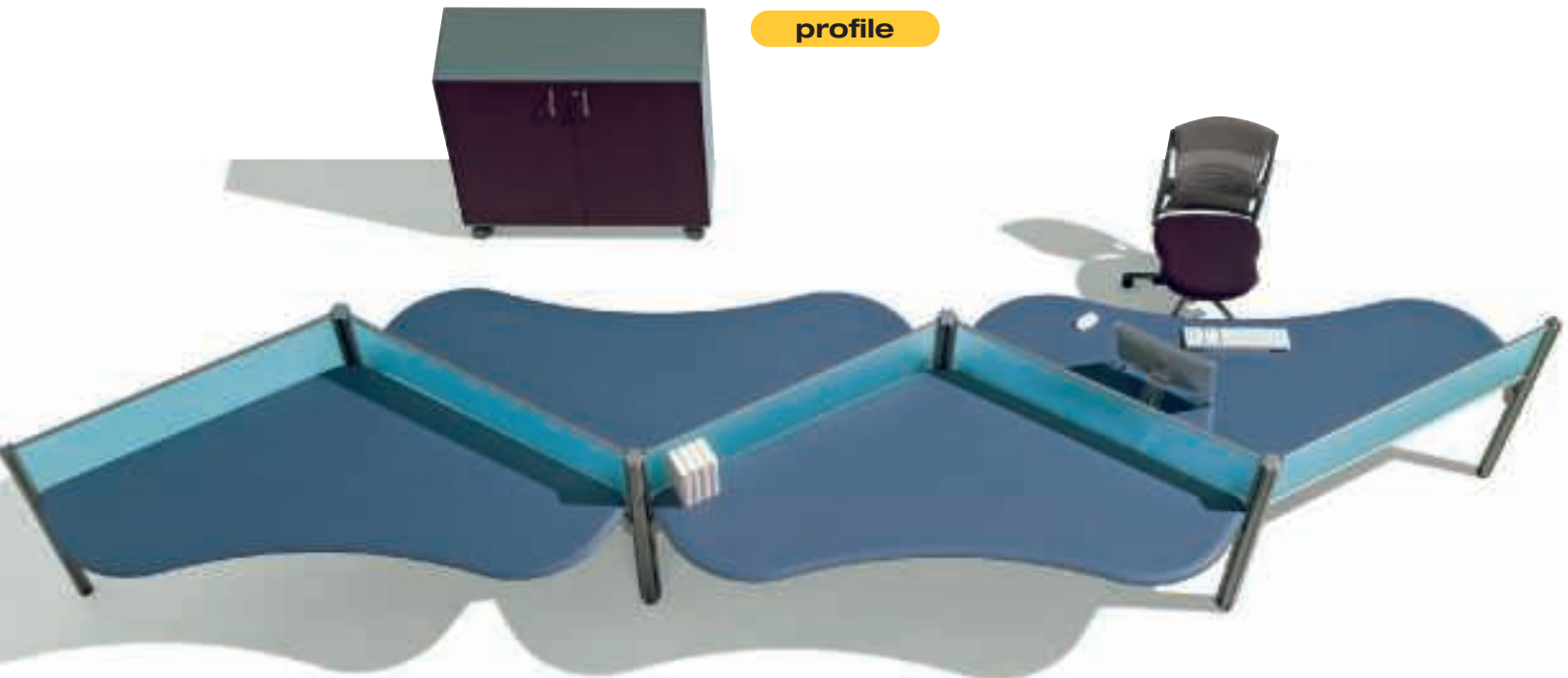
We’ve hopped over to Milan to chat with one of Italy’s favourite industrial designers, Max Pajetta. Charming and modest, Max would rather talk about others such as his mentor, the groundbreaking industrial designer Marco Zanuso, or his father, the celebrated painter Guido Pajetta. In fact, during our visit, Max was most disappointed that due to time constraints we were unable to visit a significant exhibition of his father’s work.

However, we persisted and managed to get Max to talk a little about himself and the way he works. It’s clear though that the man means what he says about his relationship with materials – during lunch a variety of evocative little experiments were brought out of a bag with evident glee. A shard of reflective glass that inspires him with all sorts of ideas; a tube of plastic that’s simultaneously solid and flexible through the introduction of intriguing spacers; a construct involving a ball bearing and the potential of magnetism...material and design ideas abound.

Not surprisingly, given this obsession with the possibilities of different materials, Max Pajetta’s client list is a diverse portfolio of manufacturers from a wide range of industries. Lighting for Artemide, bathroom fixtures for Ideal Standard, office furniture for Methis, architectural ironmongery for Olivari, ceramics for Fin Cuoghi and domestic furniture for Calligaris represent a small snapshot of the host of brands that have benefited from the Pajetta imprint.

This design versatility is an important element of Max Pajetta’s approach. Always keen to collaborate throughout a long career, Max enjoys nothing more than to share ideas with like-minded architects and designers from different disciplines and backgrounds – notably and profitably with his brother Giorgio Pajetta. Currently there’s a loose co-operation with various Milanese players such as the ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶





▶▶▶ architect Franco Bertoli, his daughter the architect Laura Pajetta and the designers Roberto Delponte and Matteo Gianni. It's clearly a work style that procreates creativity.

'I don't want to specialise in just one topology,' explains Max. 'I prefer to differentiate in design because I reckon that materials go from one area to another. I'm open minded to ideas and possibilities, I'm not just focused on one tight area. For me, diversity is the way to encourage innovation and creativity. For example, the experience I might gain from designing a piece may be projected into another. It's the route that you take that varies, it's always different from company to company. The key thing is to think about technology and materials. Right now I'm working on a new concept that could potentially be appropriate for either (or both) home furniture and office furniture – it's a kind of totem, a flexible small computer desk area. The idea is driven by technology and materials I'm working with, without any preconceived notion as to where it may be going.'

We changed tack to ask how Max Pajetta got into design in the first place.

'My father Guido was a famous painter. In fact my grandfather and great-grandfather, Pietro, were well known painters too. It goes back four generations, the whole family were artists going back to 1805. It was a difficult act to follow, so I decided not to be a painter – I wasn't much good anyway!

'So in 1962 I enrolled to study economics. In those days there were no design schools in Italy and the subject wasn't taken seriously. It was Marco Zanuso, the famous architect and designer who started the first design school, along with Alberto Rosselli. They were both really important in the development of design. So, having studied economics for two years I didn't finish the course – I went to study design under Zanuso. In fact I didn't finish that course either. If you remember during that period in the late '60's students were more interested in politics than in studying. So I lost interest in college, but I was still interested in design. I started work, and as a freelance was allowed to make use of Zanuso's studio. I was able to get clients straight away – my first client was a telecomms company called Face Standard. My first piece never went into production, but I remember I got paid!

We asked if Zanuso was a mentor to the young Max. 'Marco Zanuso was a great maestro, one of the most important founding figures of industrial design. I was, and am, very influenced by Zanuso.▶▶▶▶



▶▶▶ His main talent was the originality of his design. There was always a very strong feeling and connection between the user and the product itself – the connection is the tool. In particular, Zanuso was strong in the idea of moving objects, for example products that incorporated opening and closing elements. I suppose the main influence that Zanuso had on me was the design of components that are not static. I may not have finished my studies in economics or design, but I learned first hand from one of the most famous Italian industrial designers. For me, discovering design was like being St. Paul on the road to Damascus – I saw the light!

We asked what projects Max Pajetta is working on at the moment.

‘I’ve been working on some re-styling of Clover, the Methis workstation system. Clover’s been in production for 12 years since my original design, and I’m pleased to say it’s been very successful all over Europe – Methis UK alone has installed 50,000 workstations. In fact Methis just shipped over one million Clover worksurface brackets! When I took the idea to Methis in 1996, beam systems were very popular; my concept was a non-beam system and the rest is history. I always worked in close co-operation with the Methis R&D people, a very practical team, and the result is fantastic. The way I work is to get my hands dirty – my style is to make prototypes using the same materials that the end product would use. The attention goes on the material that’s going to do the job – why model a metal bracket in wood? I produce 1:1 models; it’s an expensive way of working, but it has the advantage that you make immediate, real modifications. Somebody else puts it on a computer afterwards!

‘I’ve worked on and off with Methis for 20 years. It’s very unusual to have such a long term relationship with a company – it’s really strong and close. The parent company, Coopsette, is a true co-operative – where every worker has a stake. It’s about people, not just about a big boss, and it’s a very successful major company.

‘Although I enjoy designing furniture, with other clients apart from Methis such as Lamm and Calligaris (the leading Italian home furniture brand) I like to work in different fields to keep my creative juices flowing. Right now I’m working on some lighting with Artemide, and some ceramics – I’m busy!

Our flying visit to Milan had come to an end. But before bidding farewells Max thrust into our hands a signed book of his gather Guido’s work, and expressed regret once more that we had no time to take in a visit to the exhibition at the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana.

Mind you, it’s on until March so there’s plenty of time for you to fly over to Milan ! ●

