

STUDIO PROFILE / MILAN

# Group effort

Designers Arianna Lelli Mami and Chiara Di Pinto are the founders of Studioepe. They've flourished by putting their heads together to realise concepts and projects that stand out from the crowd.

WRITER *Laura Rysman* PHOTOGRAPHER *Name Surname*

"Like Giò Ponti, who designed every detail of a project from the building itself down to its spoons, we think about context," says Studioepe's co-founder Arianna Lelli Mami, in reference to Milan's great mid-century modernist. "We're interested in every aspect that makes you feel good in a location," says her business partner Chiara Di Pinto.

The two designers hooked up at Milan's Politecnico University and since 2006 their multi-faceted studio has been in demand for a vast range of furniture, products and interior design in Italy and beyond. While the projects are varied, the results tend to be marked by a potent use of colour and composition in combination with unusual material matches. This year, the pair are devising a hotel in Paris, a restaurant and club in Athens, a bar in Milan and retail concepts locally and abroad.

"In Milan, the old guard is finally fading, the restrictions are loosening up for designers," says Di Pinto. "You don't have to be an architect to make architecture; you don't have to be trained as a designer to do design. Everything's becoming more interdisciplinary now, more hybrid."

"And there are more women's voices in Italian design than ever," says Lelli Mami. "Design companies are recognising that their clients want more than just minimalism now – they want colours, they want textures, they want new ideas and women are a big part of introducing those new ideas."

Studioepe has benefitted from the relationships it established with Italy's powerful design brands through its initial styling and consulting work. But as its own scope has grown, so too has the seriousness with which it's considered by these clients. "They used to call us



*le ragazze (the girls),"* says Di Pinto with a laugh. "But now they call us designers and architects."

This year Studioepe will present an ambitious project for Salone del Mobile. Club Unseen is a secret poop-up bar. It is a testament to the comprehensive scale of work the two designers tackle and explores unconventional material uses and manufacturing techniques through its interior-design concept.

"It's so much more than an exhibition," says Lelli Mami. "It's an experience where you're involved, where you're drinking and taking in the music. You're living it."



**LOREM IPSUM:** *temperum atia doluptat est, nonet rem reptat ipist rem harchic te volupturate omnis por seria nectio explacearum voluptatur maio excesequi nes maximus citias*

ARCHITECTURE / MILAN

# Green ambitions

Milanese architect Stefano Boeri's mission to introduce more greenery into dense urban environments is lauded the world over.

WRITER *Ivan Carvalho* PHOTOGRAPHER *Name Surname*

While Salone del Mobile's design-minded visitors once came to admire new furniture, many are now looking skywards for ideas. Their eyes are drawn to the city's Porta Nuova district, home to Bosco Verticale (Vertical Forest), a pair of high-rise apartment towers cloaked in greenery, which were conceived by Milanese architect Stefano Boeri.

The building is well known – its genesis less so. Boeri, a one-time mayoral candidate in Milan, became interested in finding new ways to build in congested urban areas. "There was a report out showing that 94 per cent of tall buildings in the world built after 2000 were covered in glass. I wanted to try and reverse this," says Boeri, from the Milan office of his architecture firm.

The global fanfare Bosco Verticale has since received has led to a spurt in commissions and the building has become something of a design soft-power asset for Milan. Boeri's practice currently has 20



projects in development, from a wood-clad mixed-use tower in Paris to a masterplan for a new district in the southeast Chinese city of Liuzhou, which will boast 40,000 trees and a million plants. Boeri and his quest to build greener buildings, it seems, is only just beginning.

MONOCLE COMMENT

## Bushy number: are we for it?

A tree-covered skyscraper? It sounds like science fiction or at best a beautiful architectural render of an ambitious project that never came to be. Yet Bosco Verticale is well and truly realised and with similar commissions coming to its architect from the Netherlands and China there will soon be more.

Since topping off in 2014 this building has been much more than a render, yet it's also a project that might actually look better in its original computer-generated form (indeed a rendered image leads pictures of the project on the architect's own website). It's fair to say that this pioneering low-carbon tower's merits outweigh its downfalls but tenants have paid high costs to keep the trees on the balconies alive. And the shrubby blocks out a good view or two. We're all for a low-carbon footprint in architecture so let's hope Boeri's green-thumbed approach develops as his bushy numbers rise up around the world. **Nolan Giles**

Q&amp;A / ITALY

# The future is now

The multi-tasking architect Joseph Grima is a man of many skills. The most pertinent? Shaping raw talent.

WRITER *Ivan Carvalho* PHOTOGRAPHER *Name Surname*

A well-travelled design thinker and doer, Joseph Grima was born in Malta, raised in London and schooled in architecture in Milan. He now heads up the creative direction of Design Academy Eindhoven, one of the world's most important design schools.

A former student of Stefano Boeri (*above*), Grima has curated the Istanbul Design Biennial and the inaugural Chicago Architecture Biennial. In 2011 he became the youngest editor of respected Italian design title *Domus*. Today, in

addition to his duties in Eindhoven, Grima runs Space Caviar, an architecture and research studio based in Genoa and is the artistic director of the European Capital of Culture for 2019, which will be in Matera in southern Italy.

**M: What influence does Italian design have abroad today?**

**JG:** It is less about the variety Milanese masters like Ettore Sottsass and Alessandro Mendini once commanded and more an affirmation of a certain style of life or set of values.



The form of the singular object is not so important anymore. Today it's about the introducing or reaffirming of certain design priorities – the quality of materials or ingredients and perhaps then aesthetics – into moments of everyday life. Italians look at design as an expression of a

value system rather than an exercise in style.

**M: Based on your experience at the academy and in the industry, what direction do you see design heading in today?**

**JG:** There's a lot of interest in bio-materials. People are interested in the by-products of food production, looking at waste and how to find ways to use these materials. We have a student who used animal blood taken from a slaughterhouse that is usually thrown away and created a series of small objects. It questions the value of blood, which is said to be precious to humans while animal blood is seen as waste. In technology, another student has developed an instant-messaging application that shows you the letters as they are being typed so it is immediate and you interact with the person in real time as if you were having a conversation with them. It's honest and direct.

"Italians look at design as an expression of a value system rather than an exercise in style"

**M: What plans do you have for Salone del Mobile this year?**

**JG:** This is my first time with the academy at Salone. We will be working with a group of businesses in a street in Milan and a covered marketplace in an amazing rationalist building from the 1930s. We will make things that are very much driven by everyday reality as opposed to abstract projects. It will be site specific, working with a butcher, a newsagent and so on, dealing with issues such as mobility and information design. One student will create a café that looks at how the flow of coffee and capital are related.