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MATTEO THUN

Renowned Italian architect and designer, Matteo Thun has an extensive designing portfolio: from designing watches for Bulgari and Swatch to creating the espresso cups for Illy to the Hotel Missoni Edinburgh, the first Hotel Missoni property in the world. It seems like this three-time winner of the prestigious ADI Compasso d'Oro Award can do anything.

"Architecture is basically the design of interiors, the art of organizing interior space" - Philip Johnson

Introduction by [Jessica Cooper](#)
 Interviewed by [Stephanie Summers](#)
 Portrait by [Nacho Alegre](#)

The creative process comes differently to everyone, how does it usually work for you? A steady drip-drip of inspiration or a blinding eureka moment?

Both of it. Mostly I visualize my ideas in water-colours to not just express forms or proportions but also communicate emotional point of views.

Given the range of items you can take credit for creating for the world to admire and enjoy, amongst which are watches, glasses, cups, lighting systems, faucets, carpets, hotels... is there anything you would want to turn down if asked?

Not really, since every single design represents a certain time and thought. Maybe I have another view of things today than back in the 80s when I was the Art Director of Swatch, and produced tons of plastic watches...

What is your favourite piece of work? If you could save only one thing from the apocalypse, what would you choose?

A tiny sculpture from clad that I formed in my childhood. My mother was a ceramic artist and gave me lumps of clay to play with...

Do you ever have crazy new ideas that you don't dare tell anyone or attempt to create, or do you always attempt to follow through on what your brain comes up with?

Actually ideas are coming quite constantly to me, especially when I am traveling. Of course a lot of them are not realisable and my teams at the offices are getting nervous when I return from trips. But often we pick up the initial idea, we start to discuss and a project might start from there.

Over the last sixty or so years you must have seen plenty of change taking place in the world around us, and change in how we live, let alone

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in the art of design. One of the key issues of the Matteo Thun Atelier brand is sustainability; do you see this as one of the biggest challenges facing society as a whole as we move further into the 21st century?

Sustainability is key to my work in every aspect of my work, it always was. I think creating sustainable, long-lasting projects and products is the responsibility of an architect ever since. Acting as a lifecycle engineer, I follow the principal of the three zeros: zero kilometres, zero CO2, zero waste.

In the same vein, what advice would you give to an aspiring designer leaving art college hoping to follow in your foot steps?

Look for a master and learn 'by doing'.

The Memphis Group in the 1980s was an amazing melting pot of ideas from some great minds that produced some truly iconic design concepts. Have you ever thought of creating a similar group now, just to see what might happen?

With Memphis Group we approached design in a different way, finding a new emotional language as an alternative to the unimaginative functionalism at that time. We wanted to break the rules... Memphis was a manifesto and left a legacy.

Today, there is no need for a movement such as Memphis, we are facing other problems worldwide. Today we must learn from the mistakes of the past and have to find innovating and long lasting solutions to face an over populated and polluted planet.

Your friend and once-colleague, Ettore Sottsass, is a recognised talent in his own right, having worked with the big names of the day during his lifetime, but turned away from big companies and consumerism later in his career. Was his attitude an inspiration to how you approached your own career, and what do you think he would have said about the Matteo Thun Atelier brand launch?

I am still true to what I believed in when starting out and enjoy challenges of innovation and differentiation. This is how Matteo Thun Atelier was born: There is a huge expertise in Italy for hand-crafted products. The workshops for hand-blown glass, ceramics or joineries are about to disappear

since they have not access to the industry. For Matteo Thun Atelier we took existing forms, changed proportions slightly to make them easier to produce, suggest specific colours and link the craftsmanship with the industry professionals and consumer.

Ettore might have loved the idea of Manus x Machina.

You've worked with businesses internationally, and travelled around the world but you still have strong feelings for home, in Italy. Do projects based in Italy fill you with more excitement or does your love for Italy provide you with added passion whatever the project?

Italians have a strong sense for quality and are, once enthusiastic about an idea, very creative and driven to realise the impossible.

The Matteo Thun Atelier project has a huge focus put on the issue of customisation, and used smartphones as an example of how much people like to add such detail to their possessions. Do you have a love or hate relationship with your smartphone (assuming you have one) and do you have a personalised phone cover?

Customization is a tool to express individuality, but I do not go as far to have a personalised phone cover. My cellphone is normal black iPhone used for sms and to do calls. (ONLY!)

The JW Marriott Venice Resort and Spa was a ruin you transformed into something beautiful and luxurious, complete with MediSpa suites, yoga and meditation gardens.

You've also reportedly worked on a wellness hotel in Burgenstock in Switzerland. Is physical mindful wellbeing a particular passion that gives you an added interest in these projects, and do you do yoga?

Both projects are about wellbeing, the Waldhotel at Bürgenstock is a medical hotel, a modern version of the Davos sanatorium in Thomas Mann's, The Magic Mountain. Architecture should convey physical mindfull wellbeing, no matter what kind of use it was planned for. I do Yoga and Pilates every morning at 7.30 am.

If you could pick a designer from any time or place to make you a present for your next birthday, who would it be and why?

A day with Brunelleschi...

You've said in the past you wanted to be a doctor, not a designer or an architect. Do you think you still apply the same mentality, by using your creativity as a 'cure' and a means of putting more beauty and wellbeing into the world?

I am happy to have the chance to be creative in many different segments within my profession. Matteo Thun Atelier is our latest 'baby', in a way I sometimes feel like a obstetrician.