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ISSUE 132
YEAR TWELVE
SEPTEMBER 2014
A MOTIVATE PUBLICATION



Autoban's pod-driven space exploration
Turning the tables on enhanced wood
Identifying new bathing behaviours
Mixing with Dixon at Maison & Objet

DK£ 20.00 PD 2.00 RD 2.00
QR 20.00 SA 20.00 KD 1.50



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Wooden wonders

The enduring powers of wood are being rediscovered and explored by manufacturers and designers, mixing traditional materials with technology to give them a new lease of life. TEXT: CATHERINE BELDIN



Exit collection designed by Giovanna Azzarello for Colico



Above and below (left): Table and dresser from the Dolce Vita collection by Turri



Sandy maple wood watch by AB Aeterno

Today's approach to wood is deep-rooted in sustainability and the pursuit of perfect cut and finishes, together with the use of the best quality veneers.

Demand for its natural attributes, balanced with sustainable practices, is at the heart of this new trend for all things wood, from watches and bathtubs to floors, lamps and wall cladding.

At the recent Salone del Mobile and Maison & Objet, and indeed all the year's design shows, the trend for wooden furniture and accessories in all shapes and forms was blatantly obvious.

Perhaps more sensitive to the need to use sustainable woods, European manufacturers and designers are forging the path forward.

In particular, the traditional woodworking companies from Italy's Brianza, outside the design capital of Milan, are developing new ways to work this oldest of materials.

The challenge for many of these family-owned companies, such as Colico, Asnagli, Giorgio Collection, Angelo Cappellini/Opera Contemporary, MisuraEmme, and Turri – many of which are being spearheaded by a young and innovative third generation – is to create products that retain their heritage while adding the innovation and style demanded today.

In recent times, many of these companies have invested large sums to modernise and convert their production facilities to accommodate new types of sustainable wood practices and design requirements.

Turri recently opened a sprawling 18,000 metres square multi-million-euro factory where a team of specialist artisans work around the clock to meet increasing demand for his signature lacquered and highly polished



Sideboard from MisuraEmme



Edgar table and Dimitri bookcase from Opera Contemporary

wood furniture.

Meanwhile Giorgio Collection, led by Fabio Masolo in tandem with architect Giorgio Soressi, has opted to create a stronger brand image, a complete interior package of furniture accessories that are changed and adapted seasonally – much as fashion brands do.

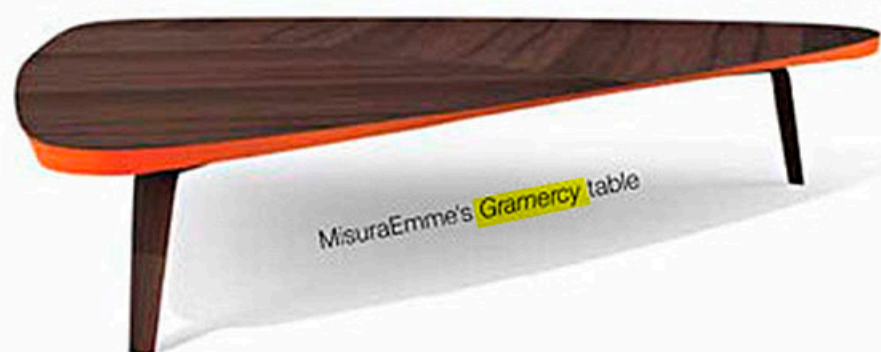
His approach is to create a brand look that is replicated in all the stores and outlets around the world where his high-quality products are sold. "We have to be versatile to find a niche, and to create a strong and striking collection every time," he says. "There are too many anonymous furniture manufacturers: now it's the era of the branded furniture collections."

Andrea Turri, the energetic and charismatic head of Turri, supports this belief. Turri takes a less aggressive approach to the new market, but working with his creative director, architect Giovanni Cagnato, he is striving to strengthen his brand and to make it instantly distinguishable, just as a Versace collection is different from a Céline.

While the demand for their faux marble finishes and mirrored glossed wood furniture is at an all-time high, the team is working to develop new leather lines, many of which seem to be influenced by fashion brands, such as the new Dior-style stitched armchairs or the Bottega-esque woven leather sofa collections.

Others, like Colco – which was established in 1920, have been diversifying their portfolio since Walter

Colco took over the reins in the early '80s. Changes include dabbling with other materials such as plastic and acrylics, to complement their wood collections. Founded even earlier, in 1886, Angelo Cappellini & C., which has its roots in reproductions of major European styles such as Louis XV, Regency, Empire and Biedermeier models, is diversifying in tandem with the market. More recently, they have developed new brands, including Opera Contemporary and Mediterranean, to suit the increasingly changing tastes of the global market, yet still based on the traditional standards and woodworking principles established by their forefathers. The more classic Angelo Cappellini and Opera Contemporary lines are available in the UAE, where demand for cleaner, purer design is increasing.



MisuraEmme's Gramercy table



Turri's leather and lacquer Miller armchair

Respect for the environment, while simultaneously developing a strong industrial-based company, remains the DNA of MisuraEmme. Founded in 1939 and now run by Daniela Mascheroni, the company continues to pride itself on its relationship with top designers who, over the years, have contributed to their success – these include Alvar Aalto, Alfred Roth, Werner Max Moser and Marco Piva.

Most recently, the company – well known for its exquisite storage and shelving units, including highly sought-after walk-in closets – is working in close harmony with architect Mauro Lipparini and other leading contemporary designers.

MisuraEmme has a very technical and scientific approach to its designs and manufacturing methods, focusing on integrating new technologies and other strengthening materials into their designs to develop technically enhanced products.

The new generation at the helm of Asnagli Interiors, set up in 1916, forms a dynamic team – although the majority of their order books are still for extremely formal and ornate objects, from gold-leaf thrones for newly crowned monarchs to palatial-style ballrooms.

Nevertheless, the company is slowly focusing on using the same techniques to create more modern alternative lines, suited to the likes of luxury hotels. These include special metallic-looking finishes that belie the natural wood underneath, similar to those that Kartell gave to their plastic collection this year, or the metallic finish applied to La Murrina's latest glass chandelier collections.

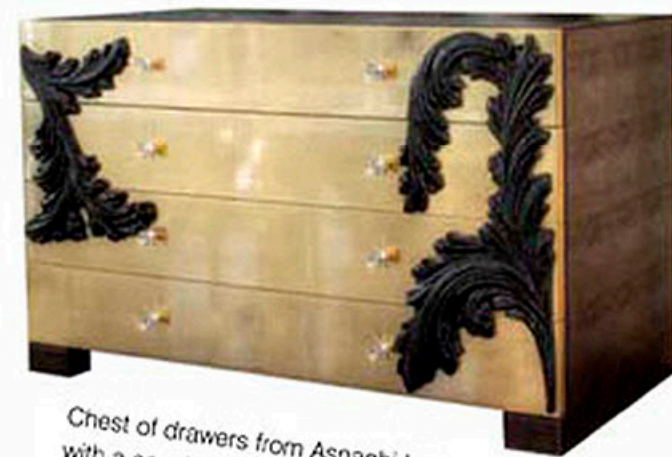
New approaches to designing with wood continue to evolve, aided by new technology such as the cool new wood watches designed by former Italian football player Marco Tommasoni, who launched his AB Aeterno watch brand recently. ■

Design sources

AB Aeterno	abaeternowatches.it
Asnagli Interiors	asnagli.it
Colco	colco.com
Giorgio Collection	giorgiocollection.com tel: (04) 337 0116
MisuraEmme	misuraemme.it
Opera Contemporary	operacontemporary.com
Turri	turri.it tel: (04) 337 0516



Absolute chairs (above) and Daydream console (below) from Giorgio Collection



Chest of drawers from Asnagli Interiors, with a special metallic gold finish.

