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DESIGN detail

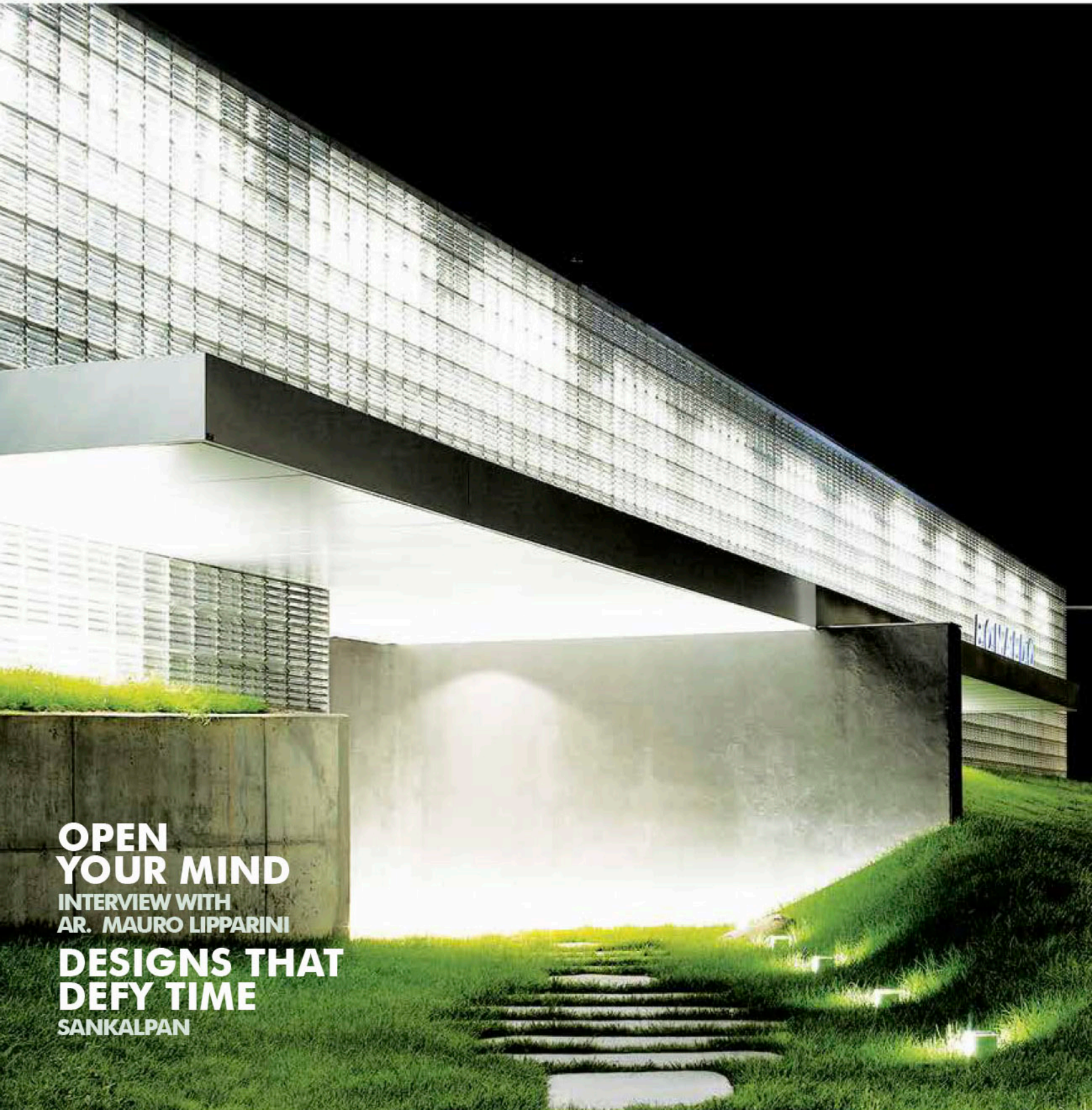
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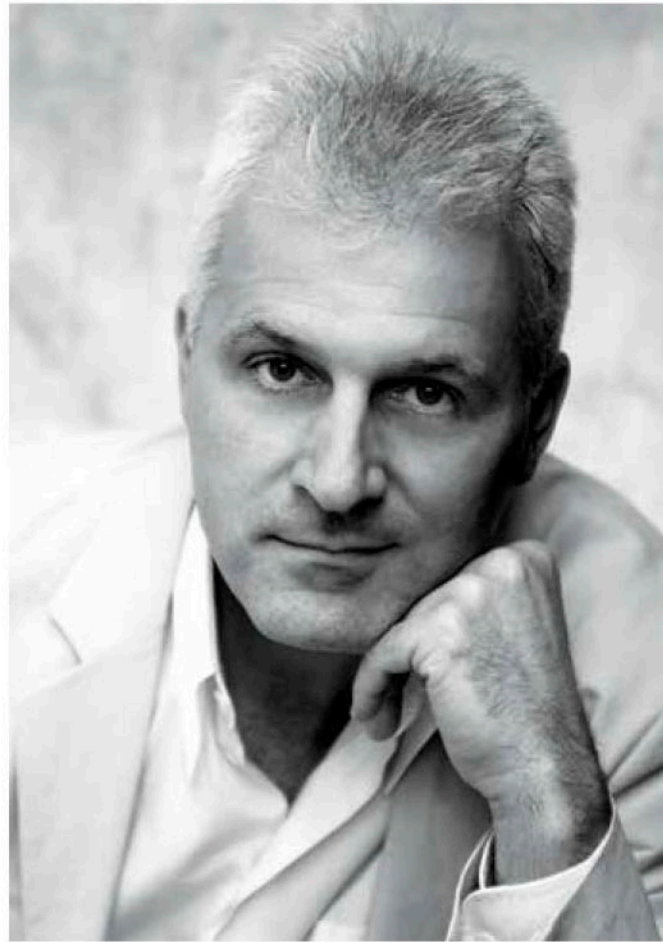
**OPEN
YOUR MIND**

INTERVIEW WITH
AR. MAURO LIPPARINI

**DESIGNS THAT
DEFY TIME**

SANKALPAN





OPEN YOUR MIND

Ar. Mauro Lipparini broadens the palette of classic minimalism through his plentiful works by freely employing bold colors, organic textures and imaginative visual concepts. In a detailed conversation with Ar. Sukanya Balaji, he expresses his thoughts and principles on creativity and architecture, the responsibilities of an architect, the joy of creation and the significance of possessing an 'open mind'.

Your 'singular influence' is very much appreciated by your clients and admirers. What inspired you and gave you the courage to begin your career?

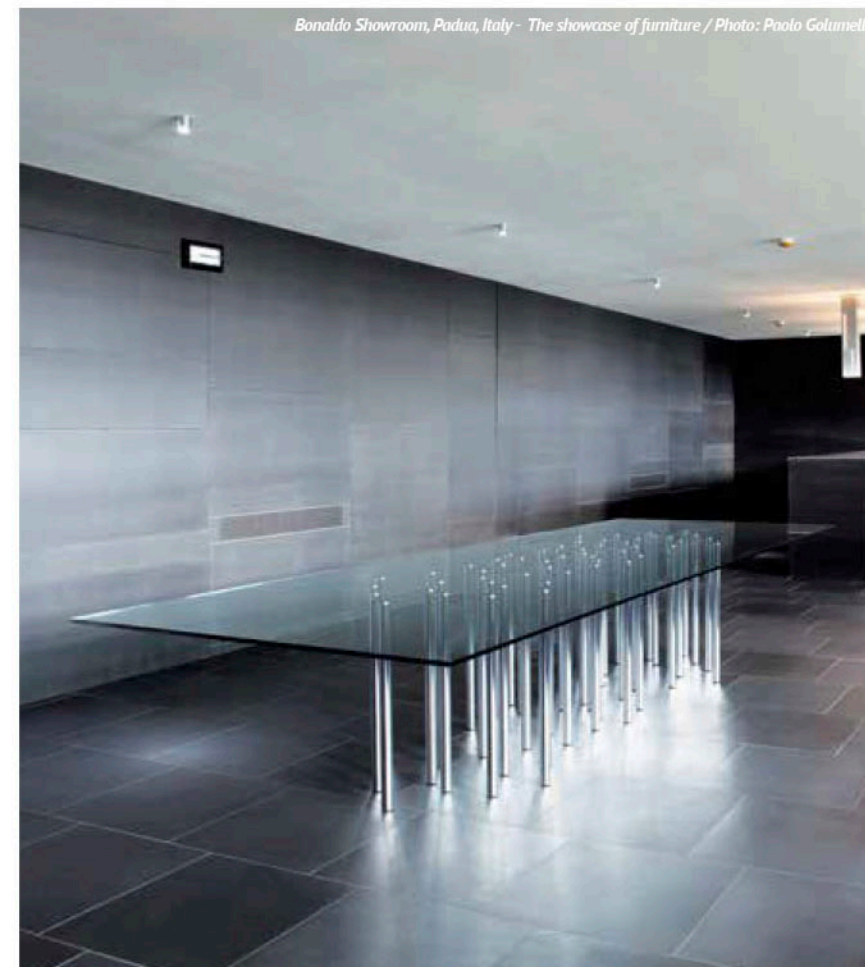
ML: The inspiration and drive was motivated by what was happening during the 80s, in industrial design, in Italy, just as I was launching my career. Everything that was happening in this sector was innovative and part of an avant-garde movement as far as research, technology, and the relationship between producer and consumer were concerned. At that time in Italy, very little experimentation was going on in the field of architecture compared to industrial design. Architecture was stagnant with scarce opportunities for young university graduates. Large-scale projects were rife with politics and I didn't want to have to make political compromises just as I was beginning my career. I developed a passion for industrial design from the outset, which also coincided with Italy's national interest in design: fashion, furniture and

car design that attracted architects during the early 80s, I began designing furniture for Europe's leading brands. It's important to remember that architects in Italy helped to develop industrialized product design. The characteristically intellectual approach of architects defined the 'Made in Italy' industrial design sector whose products reflected the social and cultural customs of the time. Together with a real passion for research and development of new materials, innovative and iconoclastic furnishings were introduced into the domestic environment. The professional goal of most architects is to constantly innovate. Since the sectors of fashion, furniture and automobile design in Italy developed at a much quicker pace than architecture, industrial design was a logical launch pad for my career as an architect.

Other than these factors, as a small child I loved to paint, assemble, and construct with just about any material I could get my hands on. During my high school studies at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma, I began focusing my attention on design, and while completing my university studies at the Università degli Studi di Firenze (University of Florence's



Bonaldo Showroom, Padua, Italy - The facade with glass blocks / Photo: Paolo Golumelli



Bonaldo Showroom, Padua, Italy - The showcase of furniture / Photo: Paolo Golumelli

Architecture School), I learned how to design in all scales, from large to small: architecture, interior design, and industrial design. Industrial design involves aesthetics, ergonomics, both traditional and innovative materials, engineering, industrialization, productivity, set design, marketing, communications and the list goes on! All of these challenges are at the center of my profession and are what allow me to confront the design process without fear, preconceptions, or limitations.

'Natural minimalism' is known to be your design philosophy. Could you explain what your major objectives are?

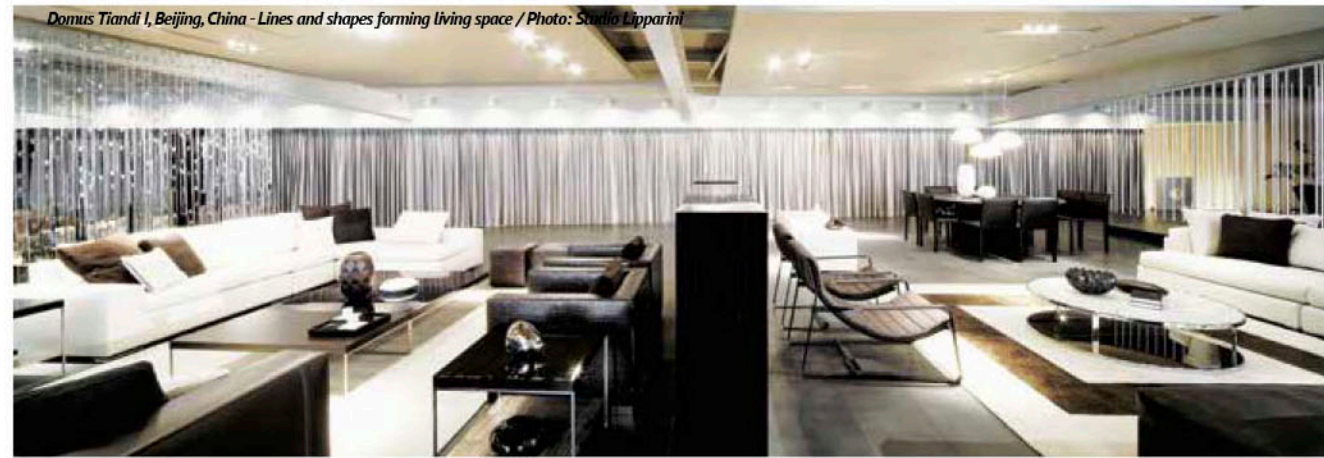
ML: A 'major objective' I would say is to be proud and convinced of what I do, and to be an active part of an evolutionary process in my field of work, and ultimately, to be recognized for innovation. For sure, we live in the Zeitgeist of 'Archistars', but I'm convinced that once that level of fame is reached, it's difficult to continue to



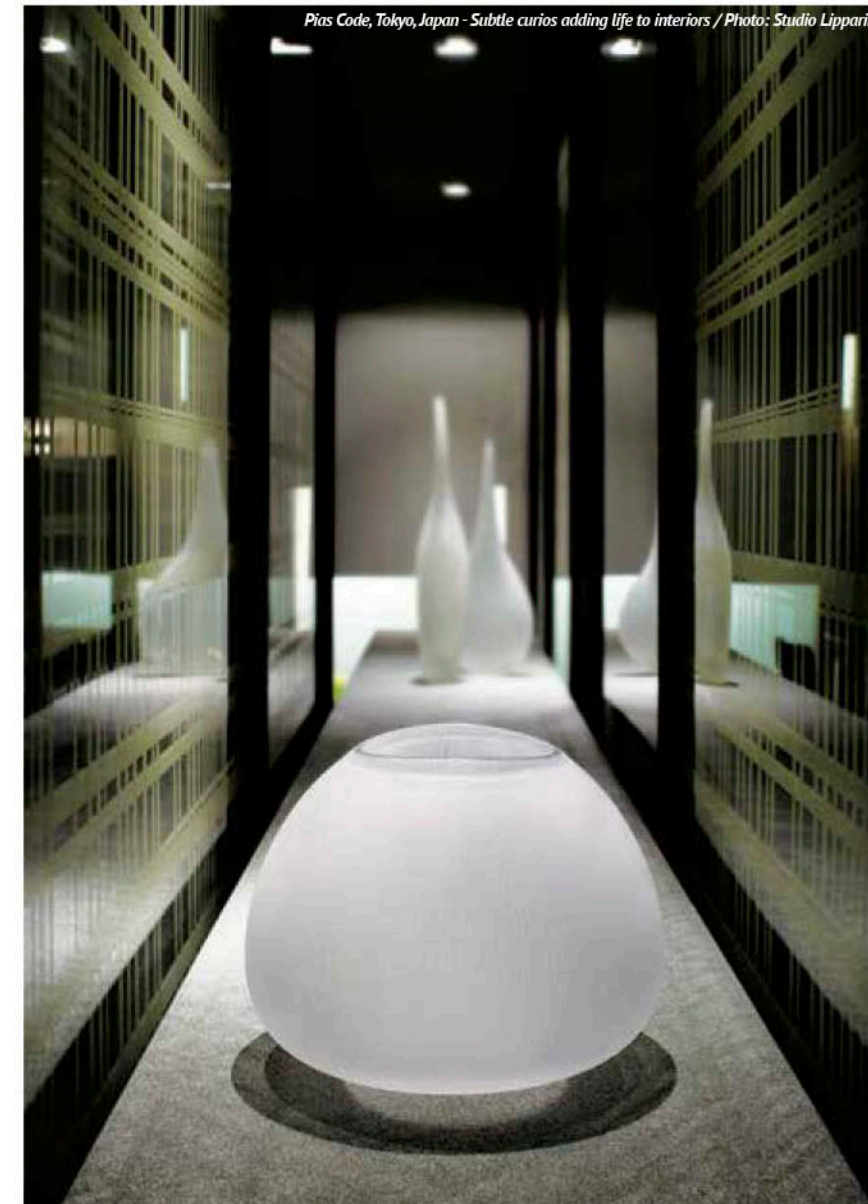
Pias Code, Tokyo, Japan - Employing wide contrast of color / Photo: Studio Lipparini



Domus Tiandi II, Beijing, China - Sculptures becoming element of interest / Photo: Studio Lipparini



Domus Tiandi I, Beijing, China - Lines and shapes forming living space / Photo: Studio Lipparini



Pias Code, Tokyo, Japan - Subtle curios adding life to interiors / Photo: Studio Lipparini

innovate, but easier to repeat oneself in a stylistic exercise that can become a cliché if the architect isn't careful. 'Success' in a sense should be the opposite—to never let go of a self-critical state that allows us to evolve.

Minimalism has, of course, informed my style but does not represent my stylistic ideal because of its inherent limitations. If I had to categorize my style, I would call it 'essentialism'—with an idiosyncratic mix of rigorous, yet eccentric, extroverted forms. Graphically powerful lines, delicate and refined chiaroscuro, material contrasts of solid and empty spaces, transparency and opacity: all of these are elements with which we can obtain a creative, progressive balance between 'form and function' or aesthetics and function. Of course I avoid

conventional expression—risk-taking is an active and indissoluble part of designing pure form.

Cross-dissemination or 'contamination', as I sometimes refer to it, is crucial when designing in different scales as the interdisciplinary exchange is vital. To see, touch, or use a piece of furniture, a retail store, a building, or a public square, always requires a careful analysis of the end-user. When I design, I project myself through my imagination into whatever it is I'm designing. While the genesis of an idea is an individual act—a singular process linked entirely to the designer—the process of developing the idea and the inevitable end product is an act or process of communal thinking.

When did you realize that the interiors, including furnishing, lighting and textures, were an inevitable part of architecture?

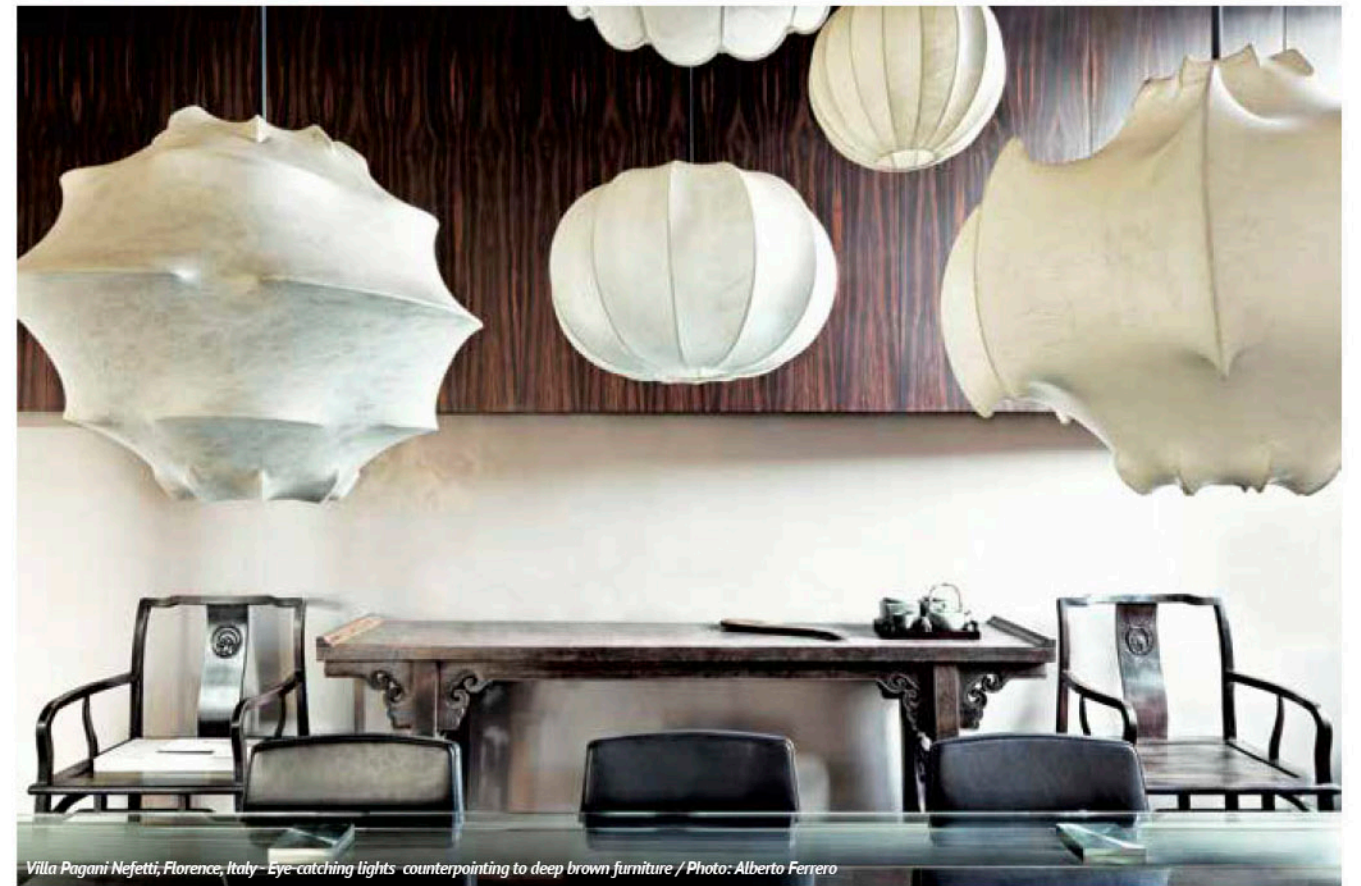
ML: I realized very early that subtle geometries defining both filled and empty space, contrasting graphic lines that highlight form, materials and their finishing are all elements that create intriguing interiors, and when set in either natural or artificial lighting specifically designed for that piece of furniture or interior, become integral elements of architecture.

The Bonaldo Showroom is one of your prestigious creations. What was the driving idea behind its design?

ML: With the Bonaldo showroom project, my priority was to confer a strong corporate identity on the Bonaldo brand. The site's surrounding area had already been sufficiently compromised with industrial constructions, yet at the same time, an agricultural feeling with a strong rooting in the net-like construction (hence 'reticolato', the Italian word's etymology) of the ancient Roman road networks permeated the site's surroundings. I couldn't modify the surrounding infrastructure, but I could



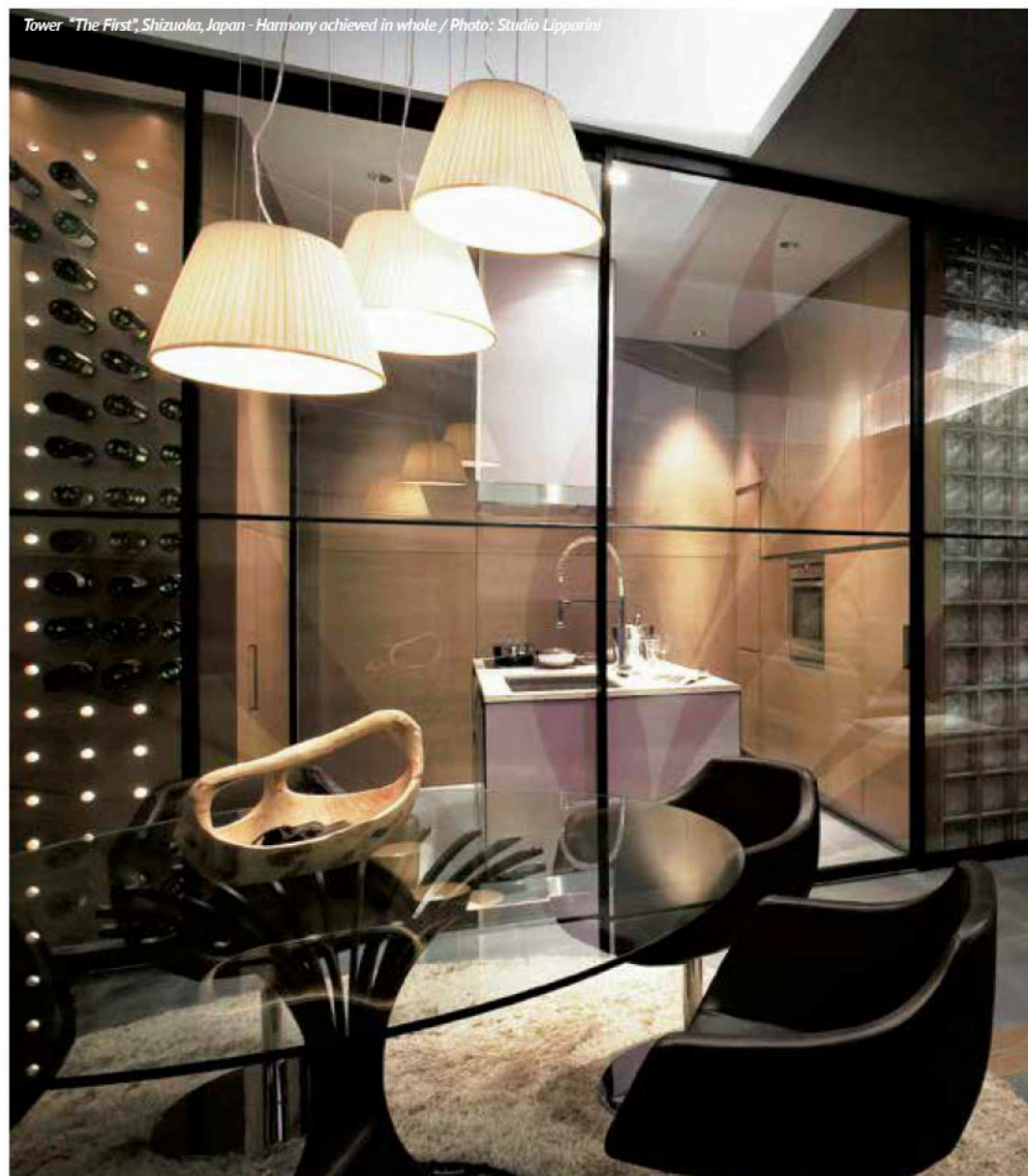
Crescent Tower, Kanagawa, Japan - Flowing living space molded in white / Photo: Studio Lipparini



Villa Pagani Nefetti, Florence, Italy - Eye-catching lights counterpointing to deep brown furniture / Photo: Alberto Ferrero

give an entirely new identity to the pre-existing building. My primary exterior architectural intervention was to give it a 'new skin' capable of expressing Bonaldo's dynamic force and new branding strategies—a touch of eccentricity in the middle of the site's somewhat mundane surroundings. The facade of the building is particularly striking and the central drama of the project is the way in which it reflects light. My intention was to create a translucent luminescence during both the day and night, as if the building magically emerges from the ground's pyramidal 'trunk'. I wanted the project's landscaping to accentuate the long and thin facade composed of glittering 'jellyfish'. I proposed different materials in order to redefine the facade, but the glass was chosen as the facade's final construction material—an ancient material capable of referencing the past, yet connecting us to a more futuristic vision. For me, the glass block represents Bonaldo's solid past and growing dynamism. The peculiarity of the glass's undulating surface offers a wonderful contrast of lighting effects during both daytime and nighttime. Bonaldo is constantly evolving, yet continues to be rooted in Italy's world-class history of furniture making. It is one of the most dynamic companies in the furniture sector.

The project is like a layered box: the first layer being the facade's undulating glass that allows for a natural lighting, both sophisticated and intriguing; the second layer is the interior patio garden which runs the width of the building, dividing



Tower "The First", Shizuoka, Japan - Harmony achieved in whole / Photo: Studio Lipparini



Royal Garden, Shanghai, China - Light and transparency in interiors / Photo: Studio Lipparini

while simultaneously connecting the hospitable and work-related areas from the showroom/exhibition space; and the third patterned with a graphic design of black wall panels. Between the two areas, the patio's interior garden doesn't actually separate, but its transparency and vital greenery, creates a connection—a more human feeling. One doesn't feel like they're in a corporate environment, but in an avant-garde building that places a high value on the physical and spiritual comfort of its occupants. The patio symbolizes the environment's sense of well-being.

Which material you've worked with has evoked greatest curiosity?

ML: Certainly the glass block described above (and patented by the Italian brand SevesGlassblock©) drew a lot of attention. However, in general, my design attitude, often defined as 'natural minimalism' as we discussed earlier, harmonizes with natural materials as I prefer natural materials over synthetic ones. Some of my favorite materials—hardwoods, various metals, glass—are of course architectural

in themselves, but their finishes play an equally crucial role in my choices. Finishes affect, for example, how light is absorbed and reflected on the material's surface, how the material's color, visual appearance, and texture can be modified, etc. Finishes can change the visual and tactile experience of materials: change them from something glossy to matte, smooth to rough, etc. These are all aspects of architecture's formal language that allow me to create sophisticated interiors styled in different themes like 'timeless', 'contemporary', 'natural', 'high-tech', and a sensitivity for which, I believe, I am recognized on an international scale.

Do you have a dream project on your mind?

ML: Yes, a project in India!

From your long-term experience in the field, what were the major changes in the industry that has helped/hindered your design process?

ML: Market demand 20 years ago was very different from today's and any good designer has to take into consideration what the market-place is looking for, before engaging in the creative act. My sense of modernism or minimalism has always sought a balance between contemporary style and timeless aesthetics. My goal is to generate forms and spatial relationships that humans find comforting and pleasing and to create something they want to keep forever, despite technological advancements. On the one hand, the industrial design sector's production times



Italdizain "Luxury of Men", Baku, Azerbaijan - Exhibits / Photo: Studio Lipparini



Tiandi The Bund 6, Shanghai, China - Coherent Interiors / Photo: Studio Lipparini

have accelerated, thanks to 3D processes, yet at the same time, there is a demand for luxury expressed through exquisitely handcrafted furniture. I participate actively in both processes, so I have been fortunate to evolve with current technologies, but have the know-how of the craftsmanship of the past. Ultimately, we want to feel deeply human; not humanoids controlled entirely by technology.

If you were asked to describe architecture, how would your reply be? And what do you think is the most important rule an architect/designer should always follow?

ML: Architecture is of course a process that uses space, light and material to affect our moods. Space can be designed by means of graphic shapes and signs, through art, music, and poetry. It is the architect's responsibility to make it three-dimensional and livable. I try to think and design without adhering to clichés and by avoiding a stereotypical language and methodology; the true creative act has no limits and is not made up simply of 'style', but real concepts. Why create according to a restrictive code or pseudo-stylistic canons that become aesthetic manners, void of any real significance or meaning? Think about how beautiful it is to manipulate the void—to focus the energy of a space inward, making it cozy and protective, or to direct that energy out, making it communicative and dramatic. In any case, I loathe aesthetic redundancy and



Tower "The First", Shizuoka, Japan - Varying levels of screens and materials / Photo: Studio Lipparini



Villa Pagani Negli, Florence, Italy - Exteriors and interiors linked visually and physically / Photo: Alberto Ferrero



Royal Garden, Shanghai, China - Calm colors creating ease at home / Photo: Studio Lipparini



Royal Garden, Shanghai, China - Insides extending to the open / Photo: Studio Lipparini

the architect Michelangelo captured the essence of this in his famous expression: "Every block of stone has a statue inside it; it is the task of the sculptor to discover it." The same applies to architecture.

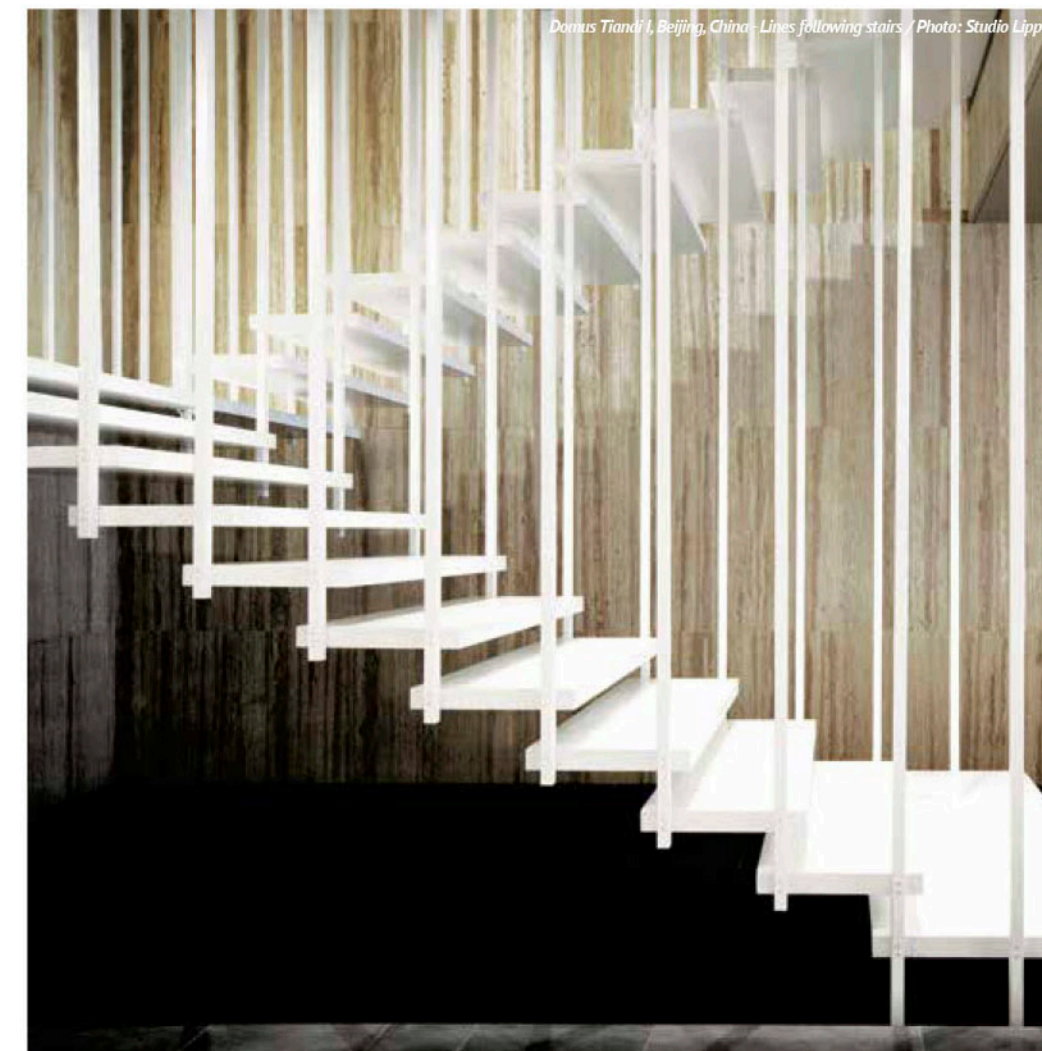
An architect has to be concerned with and respond to a countless amount of questions. The most difficult question of all is responding to the unknown, in other words, forecasting a development that we can intuit, but that is also subject to sudden change. Architects can't always predict these changes, in large part, because architecture and urban planning occur on varying scales—architecture and planning superimpose one another as time progresses, and society develops in sometimes unexpected ways. In any case, the individual is certainly at the center of my attention and imagination when I design. Large-scale architecture celebrates community and the scale in which mankind lives in cities. Mankind, at the same time, lives in smaller-scale architecture and therefore 'celebrates' a more select group of people and I suppose my fascination with these varying scales and dimensions brings my focus to a smaller, at times microscopic scale: the individual and the details which surround him/her.

My preamble regarding the 'most important rule', although I have no set of dogmas, is: every project needs to take into consideration the client's personal history, idiosyncrasies, and needs. Of course all are filtered through the architect's vision, sense of style, and cultural background, yet, each project is unique to the client who

has commissioned it. In my experience, it's not the architect or designer who 'asks' something of the market-place, rather he/she has to understand the market-place's needs, particularly considering how saturated it is with offerings.

Having worked in different countries, what were the diverse experiences you had? And if one day you happen to work in India, what are your expectations?

ML: For sure I have been very fortunate professionally because I have been able to follow my career independently. This independent path has been extraordinarily dynamic. My clients have also contributed to this dynamism; my fortune lies also in having found clients that have challenged me in new and different ways and on an international scale. With clients all over the world, the challenges and issues are multiple. Each project has its own complexities and each culture has of course its own way of developing solutions. I have to be open with each one of my projects and this open-mindedness is an intrinsically dynamic process. My personal motto is 'Open Your Mind'. I have gained an understanding of the world, of its myriad cultures and customs and unrepeatable experiences; thanks to an open mind.



Donus Tianli I, Beijing, China - Lines following stairs / Photo: Studio Lipparini



Tiandi The Bund 6, Shanghai, China - Reflections of interest / Photo: Sergio Lipparini

Just as an example, China is characterized these days by its incredibly vast potential, unprecedented in terms of architectural development. The opportunities for an architect nowadays in China can be compared with, in terms of size, research, development and investment, to those built during ancient times in the West—for example, ancient Rome and Egypt, or with the United States' modern history. Of course the cultural context of both Europe and America is close to my own Western origins, whereas working in Asia requires a different sensitivity. One of my characteristics as an architect and designer is this ability to create a subtle fusion between both Eastern and Western

cultures. When I first started designing in China, I had assumed that my research into the history and customs of the country would play a much larger role in my designs than it actually has. In other words, my clients have been interested in 'importing' my Italian and European style, and my interpretation of Chinese culture and aesthetics is much more subtle than what I had originally expected.

India, among the world's most ancient civilizations, has always intrigued me and I've fantasized about what merging an Italian vision with India's amalgamation of thousands of distinct and unique cultures differing from place to place could be like.

My 'expectations' would be an experience of great intrigue—one in which deep cultural roots could inform an emotionally-charged design experience. I would hope to realize this dream soon!

Your advice to the young designers?

ML: My advice would be to never stop dreaming, to feel passionately about your profession, and to sustain a strong, personal identity without being fettered by what you think others expect of you or want. Never lose your sense of adventure in the field of architecture and design! 