

# THE BEST OF SALONE

Lounge curates the top 12 picks from the 2017 edition of the Milan Design Week and the Salone del Mobile, the biggest annual celebration of design and interiors in the world

BY CRISTINA PIOTTI

In the fall of 1961, a small trade fair, the Salone del Mobile, was put together by a group of furniture makers in Milan. Fifty-six years later, it has become one of the biggest exhibition-cum-trade fairs in the world, bringing together the best of global interiors, lighting, furniture, wall art, textiles and more within one sprawling district. The fair is the principal attraction of the Milan Design Week, with collateral exhibitions spread across the city.

Warehouses get redesigned, stores and galleries display new collections, open areas become temporary galleries for ephemeral installations, parties and cocktails fill the nights, and a sprawling display area of over 345,000 sq. m becomes a hub of creative activity. This year's edition was held from 4-9 April and about 343,600 visitors viewed the works of over 2,000 exhibitors, according to the event's official statement.

From the fascinating diversity that was on offer, *Lounge* picks the top designers—some who have become tastemakers and others who are emerging as designers to watch out for.

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## MAARTEN BAAS— THEATRICAL BY DESIGN

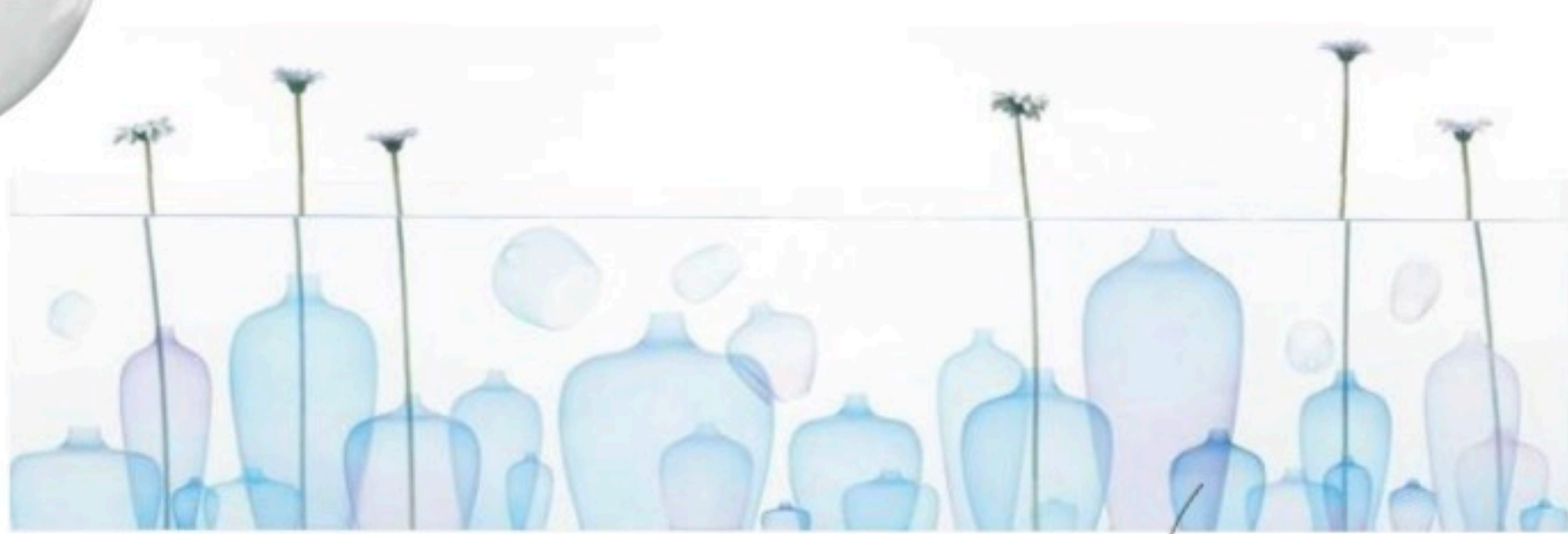
Baas has gained a reputation for being one of the most artistic and subversive contemporary Dutch designers. His work is marked by an uncommon, theatrical and rather radical approach to design. He achieved instant fame when he launched his 'Smoke' collection, in which he had charred found objects, including classics by designers like Ray Eames and Ettore Sottsass.

For the Salone, he presented the 'May I Have Your Attention Please?' installation, which won the Milano Design Award 2017 for Best Concept. Baas filled one of the old warehouses of Central Station—adjacent to one of Italy's busiest railway stations—with 101 chairs, designed for Dutch design house Lensvelt, and megaphones that continuously whispered sounds, words and phrases. In his signature theatrical way, he parodied the desire for attention at the design week, as well as in our everyday lives.

## KONSTANTIN GRIC—IN PURSUIT OF SIMPLICITY

Acclaimed Munich-based industrial designer Konstantin Gric constantly refers to simplicity as a value in his designs. Research-led, centred in function and formality, with a strong inclination for technology and innovative material, Gric has created classics over the last 25 years—like the sculptural *Chair\_One* for Herman Miller. His latest, the 'Noctambule' lamp for Flos, debuted at the Milan Design Week last month. The cylindrical modular glass system appears invisible when switched off and reveals itself by night with a soft meditative glow, powered by LED.

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## MATTEO CIBIC + SCARLET SPLENDOR—THE HUMOUR IN LUXURY

Kolkata-based luxury design house Scarlet Splendour, run by siblings Ashish Bajoria and Suman Kanodia, debuted at the Milan Design Week in 2015 in collaboration with Italian designer Matteo Cibic. This year, they displayed at Spazio Rossana Orlandi, a trend-setting design house in Milan. The collection, '88 Secrets', featured a rose blush bar-cabinet.



## PATRICIA URQUIOLA—THE EMOTIONAL QUOTIENT

Spanish designer Patricia Urquiola set up her studio in Milan in 2001 and, in just 16 years, has worked with most of the significant design houses in Europe, including Moroso, B&B Italia, Flos, Kartell and Axor. At the Salone, she launched her outdoor living collection, 'Garden Layers', designed for Spanish rug-making company Gan. It is inspired by her visit to India. The design invites lounging on rugs, mats, bolsters and cushions, and allows for various arrangements.

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## NENDO, OKI SATO— CONCEPTUAL MASTER

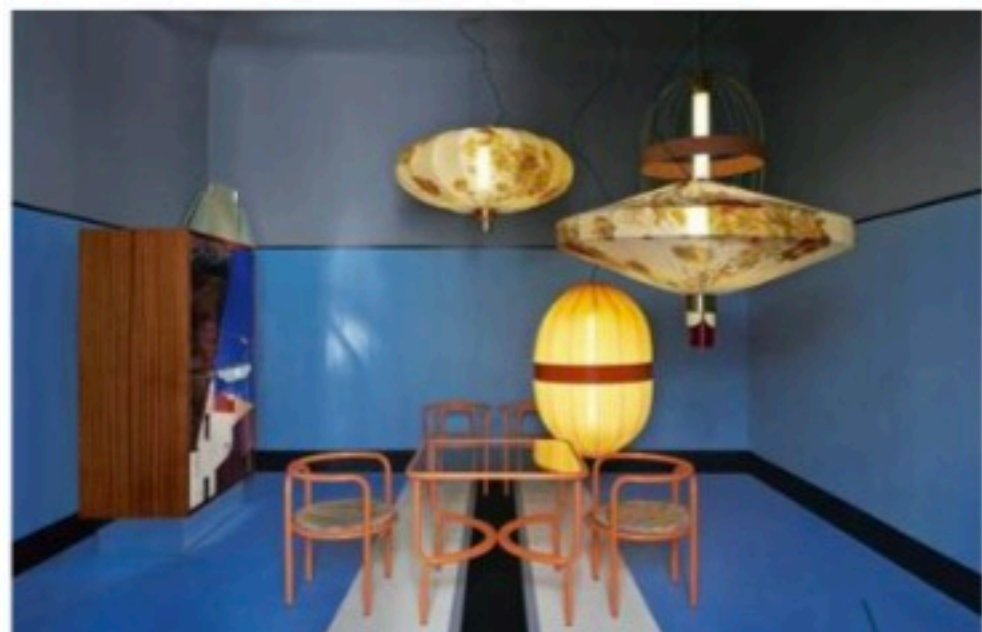
Nendo, the Tokyo-based house founded by Oki Sato, has represented the best of Japan at the Salone every year. It is known for creating meditative, minimalist and highly conceptual designs. For this year's edition, Nendo's exhibit, 'Invisible Outlines', was shown at the Jil Sander showroom—16 installations that blur established perceptions of objects, by manipulating outlines. The most talked about piece was the 'Jellyfish Vase'. Ultra-thin, transparent silicone pieces were set into an illuminated aquarium. Set against an all-white backdrop, these inky-blue vases wobbled gently like jellyfish and highlighted the relationship between vase and water; rigidity and fluidity; and form and material.



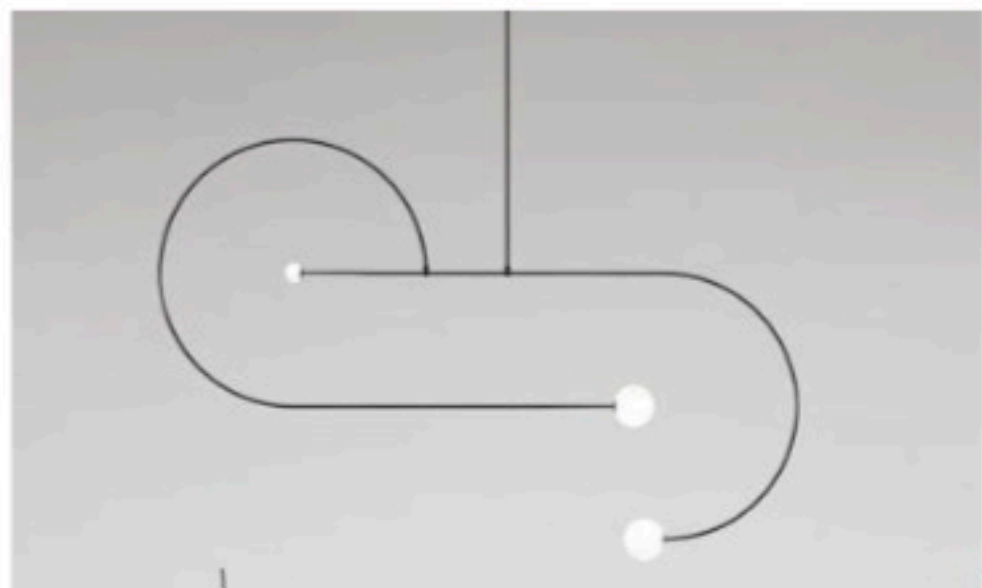
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## STUDIO JOB—THE ENFANTS TERRIBLES

Studio Job is a creative studio founded in Antwerp by Job Smeets and Nynke Tynagel. Their work combines fine craftsmanship with excessive ornamentation and, often, a tongue-in-cheek message. They shaped the peeled-banana lamp first in 2015, for an exhibition at the Samuel Vanhoegaerden Gallery in Belgium. For the Salone, they decided to make them affordable and accessible to a wider public and launched the 'Un Limited Banana Lamp' editions for the Italian manufacturer Seletti. The new lamps are a subversive yet playful comment on the notion of exclusivity. The three slightly different versions in this collection are titled 'Huey', 'Dewey' and 'Louie'.



**7 DIMORESTUDIO—AN ODE TO MAXIMALISM**  
Milan-based Dimore Studio juxtaposes the old with the new, dark with light, eclectic with quiet elegance. At the Salone, their collection, 'Progetto Non Finito', included bedroom wardrobes, mirrored-top coffee tables and decorative lamps.



**8 MICHAEL ANASTASSIADES—POETRY IN GEOMETRY**

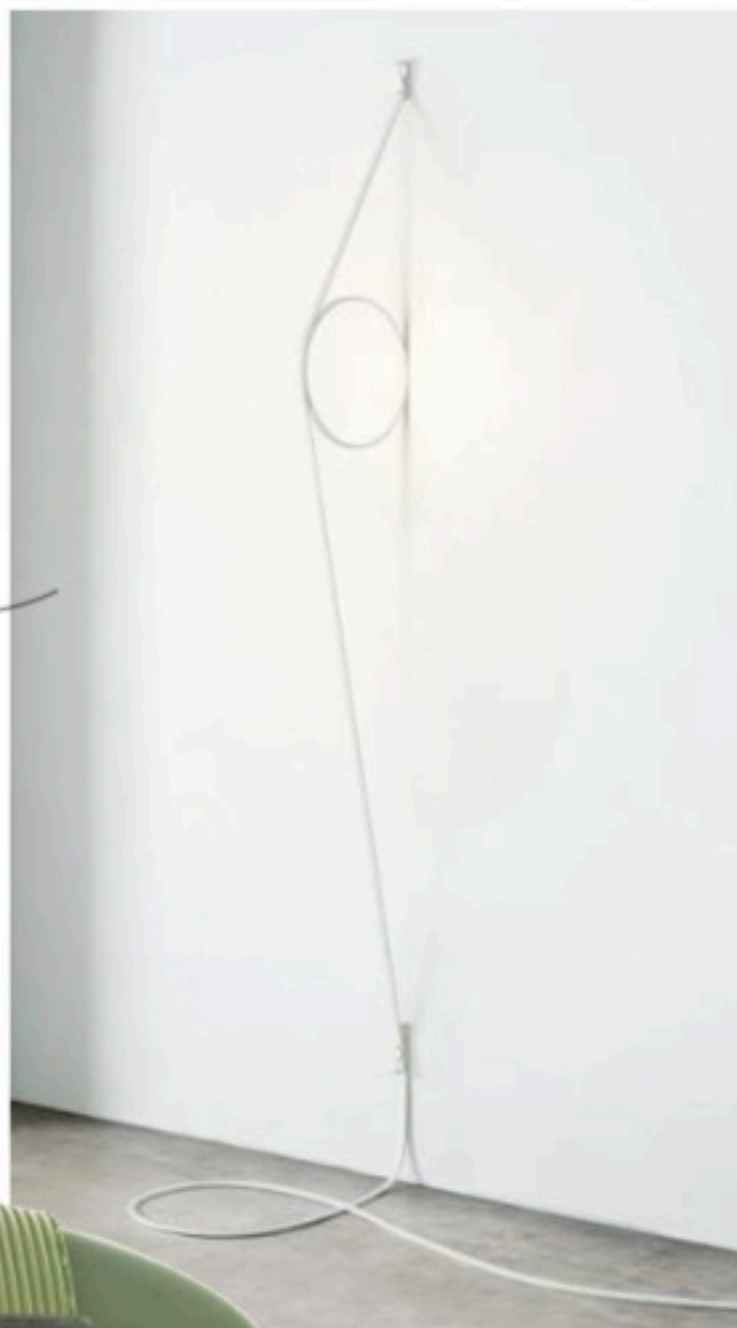
Cyprus-born, London-based designer Michael Anastassiades' clean lines, classic shapes, and semi-circles of light are known to create a poetic atmosphere, with a utilitarian function at their heart. He launched four collections at Euroluce, the lighting show within the Salone. One among them, the 'Mobile Chandelier' series, is a light system that precariously balances horizontal lines with delicate semi-circles.



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**RON GILAD—PLAYING HYBRID**

Israeli-born Ron Gilad is known for his eclectic, witty design language. After spending a few years in New York, he now divides his time between Tel Aviv and Milan. Early this year, he was appointed creative director of the Italian design company Danese. At the Salone this year, Gilad presented for Molteni&C, an Italian design house, a sculptural storage unit called the 'Teorema'. Made with American walnut, its several drawers can be used as a single unit or stacked in various, endless arrangements.



**11 MARTINO GAMPER—GOING BACK TO BASICS**

Martino Gamper is a multifaceted Italian-born, London-based artist-designer. He is renowned for his 2016 project '100 Chairs In 100 Days'—he repurposed 100 found chairs. For the Salone, he presented the 'Arco Outdoor Chairs' designed for Moroso, which were part of the exhibit titled 'Back To Basics'. A sleek iron frame holds the tautly woven rope seat, creating bouncy, comfortable chairs for the outdoors.



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**STEVE LEUNG—SEEKING JOY IN DESIGN**

Architect-designer Steve Leung is an advocate of the joyful touch in contemporary design. His work is designed with an intent to provide pleasure, to create a moment of warmth and relaxation. Hence the curved form, velvet upholstery, fully coated leather heel and double-lined elliptical headboard in the 'Princess Bed' that he presented at the Salone, designed for Italian company Visionnaire's Nature Jewel Box collection.

Q&A | Aldo Colonetti

# Here's what Italy shares with India

On the sidelines of the Salone del Mobile 2017, Aldo Colonetti speaks about trends that would have an impact on the design of the future

BY CRISTINA PIOTTI

There is no design without functionality, no functionality without ethics," says Aldo Colonetti, a man notoriously difficult to define. Philosopher, professor at Politecnico di Milano, historian of art, design and architecture, former scientific director of the Istituto Europeo di Design (a leading design school with campuses in Milan, Rome, Turin, Venice, Florence, Madrid, Barcelona, São Paulo), member of the scientific committee of the Italian National Council of Design—Colonetti's life has been devoted to the ever-changing field of design. During the Salone del Mobile in April, he presented *Marmo* (marble in Italian), a magazine brought out from 1961-71 by Italian marble quarrying and processing company Henraux, which had boomed in that era and is now making a return to the cultural debate on architecture, art and design. Seated in the café at the Triennale Design Museum, the Milanese temple of architecture and design, Colonetti spoke to *Lounge* about the materials of the future, the increasing focus on the social aspects of cities, and on architects working as activists. Edited excerpts from an interview.

**Hi-tech seems to be the direction modern design is headed in, yet you bring back an age-old material like marble.**

There is no such thing as an old material or a new material. Traditional resources like limestone, ceramics, glass, wood, stone continue to present incredible potential and are considerably linked to innovation and the future of architectural vision. Every century takes a fresh



STEFANO BOERI

approach to construction. That is why you see so-called old materials combined with modern and scientific construction techniques. Ceramic, for example, has become an unexpected vehicle for new experimentation. Take the Vertical Forest, architect Stefano Boeri's latest project in Milan, with another one coming up in Nanjing, China. Its walls have black ceramic panelling. It will certainly influence tower design in the decades to come.

Highly experimental research tries to find the right material for the project. Look at the recent construction of Indian temples across the world. The BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London is an extraordinary example of elaborate use of marble, in particular Italian *carrara* and Indian *ambaji* marble, in enchanting ways to blend tradition with the contemporary landscape. Using the marble as a structural material is so modern. And yes, marble has recently been rediscovered and revived as a trend.

**There are so many new materials being created for architecture. What are your thoughts on those?**

Consider Litracon, a product developed by Hungarian architect Áron Losonczy by mixing concrete with optical fibre. Or graphene, a thin layer of pure carbon that is one of the thinnest materials ever created. Great ideas, but they still need time to enter the market, and to prove their structural properties to be as good as conventional concrete. While architecture has to support innovation, I think the primary goal is to enrich the human experience.

**Nowadays private projects are ofteneared towards a public experience. Is this a new trend?**

Community and collaborative design are playing an increasingly important role in the future of our cities. The director of the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, Alejandro Aravena, champions "participatory design", a multifaceted concept but it's not entirely new. To some extent, it's not far from the so-called participative architecture by Otto Königsberger (the German architect who worked as the chief architect and planner of Mysore state from 1939-48) or the architectural experimentation of Charles Correa, who built



(top) The Vertical Forest by Stefano Boeri, a pair of residential towers in Milan; and Aldo Colonetti.

within the context of post-independent urban India. Yes, we are returning to an incremental approach and to social housing to tackle scarcity of means, but you have to consider that architecture has always been a collective practice. It's an expression of needs from the government, private and community sectors. This also means that we cannot depend entirely on the community for answers, instead find out what are the right questions to ask, as architects have their own ideas and identities. It's about coming up with a concept while being inclusive about the various aspects of social life. Look at Oriol Bohigas' participatory urbanism in Barcelona (Bohigas was the chief planner of the Spanish city and responsible for its modern, inclusive plan) and Italy (he developed the urban plan of the southern Italian city of Salerno). Or look at Rahul Mehrotra's *Kumbh Mela: Mapping The Ephemeral Megacity* (a 2013 book on the temporary infrastructure that comes up during the Kumbh Mela in a highly democratic and organic way). I do believe that in the future we will see more and more landscape recreations as well as the social activism of architects.

**In terms of social health and wellness, how are architectural and industrial design mixing holistic experiences with customer expectations?**

As I said, there is no design without functionality, and no functionality without ethics. Design has to be at the service of the community, experimenting with new ways of solving human problems. I admit that a number of approaches come under this definition. In a building, some architects consider staircases over elevators to promote physical activity, or plan a fitness centre with a wellness area. Apartment living in recent years focuses increasingly on bigger common spaces, designed to accommodate gatherings. Designers need to meet the challenge of a rapidly ageing society—avoiding isolation, supporting healthcare centres, promoting accessibility to mobility aids. Design is for humans, not only for users, so it also means products for left-handed people, cutlery for kids, room to accommodate those with special needs. There is an international association focusing on

this aspect, Design for All Foundation, which exists in India as well.

**The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) unveiled a 3D-printed optically transparent glass during the Milan Design week. How strongly do you think digital fabrication is going to affect the future of architecture and design?**

The MIT research unit Media Lab, with architect Neri Oxman at the helm, presented a series of 3D-printed glass lighting structures that hint at the capabilities of printed objects. 3D technology allows one to easily draw up plans, test and provide new solutions in quality control and safety. However 3D products cannot be mass-produced as of now. That requires heavy investments, so I don't think there's going to be a demise of mass production.

Also, this year at the Salone, we saw references to worldwide traditional folk-craft objects and historical objects. We observed that there was a tendency to rework specific pieces from the past, like the 932 chair by Mario Bellini for Cassina, or historical pieces from Gio Ponti. Yet it's not a matter of plain historical revivalism. It's a way of interpolating the past effortlessly into the present. It's a matter of celebrating the plurality of local heritage and environment. That is something that Italy shares with India, and it's an extremely valuable trait.

**What, in your opinion, is the future of Indian design?**

I'm not an expert, but we see a generation of young, home-grown talent like Ashish Shah, focusing on everyday objects, a contemporary use of local and natural materials, and a strong balance between traditional aesthetics and functionality. From the Milan Design Week, look at the work of Nipa Doshi and Jonathan Levien with Moroso. Or the Scarlet Splendour studio that presented a unique blend of Indian craft and Italian twist at Spazio Rossana Orlandi, the famous independent design showroom.

They point to the future of Indian design. Ikea's first store in India may have an impact, not only on furniture, but on how we consume design at large.

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