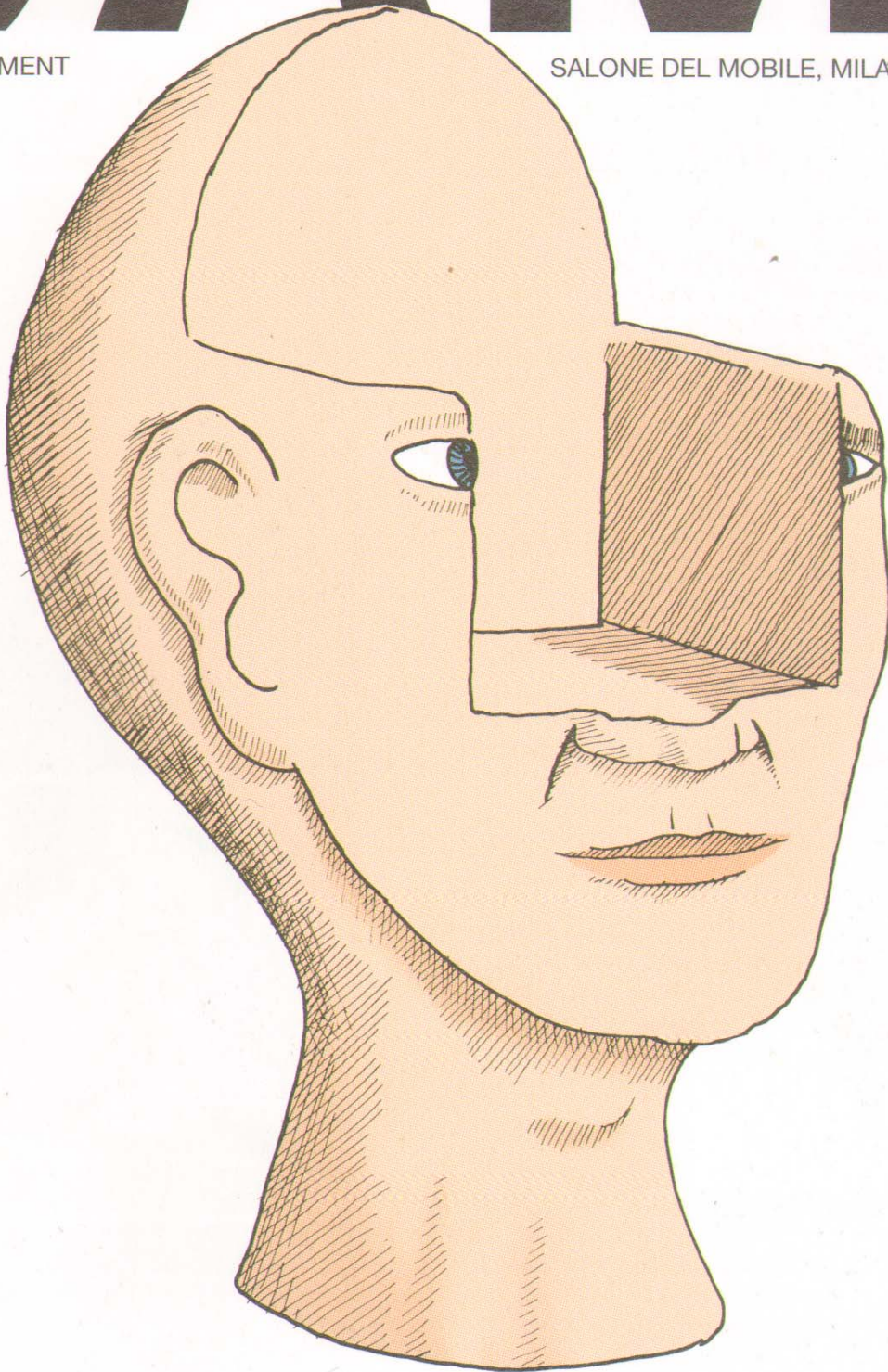


DAMN^o

FREE SUPPLEMENT

SALONE DEL MOBILE, MILAN APRIL 2008



Italian Design David Byrne
First Supper Productivity



Stefano Giovannoni reveals the table sculpture: Jasper Morrison's Air Chairs for Magis

The First Supper

DINING WITH DESIGN DISCIPLES

It's enough to make mouth-watering sound like a dry idea. As part of this year's Salone del Mobile's cultural programme, the prospect of Peter Greenaway bringing Leonardo's Last Supper back to life in a Babel of languages consisting of art, cinema, poetry and new technologies is surely enough to excite jaded minds. The relationship between food, design and art is a never-ending menu of tastes and desires, and so an invitation to dine at the home of Stefano Giovannoni – who alongside his design talents is also a well-known gourmet, fisherman and seafood cook – was too tempting and coincidental to decline. Leaving aside the design cathedral setting, our supper performance was more modest in tone, but the 'High Mass' of Design that is the Salone, was the perfect guest ingredient.

Text by Virgilio Briatore photos by Francesco Radino

Elisa Gargan with young Rocco; the living room with the two large On the Rocks sofas from Edra, reflected in the window of the garden; Giovannoni leans against his own work, a great big red bookcase, while a piece from the Bharata collection by Ettore Sottsass provides the contrast.



The setting is stunning and it would be satisfying to think that the simpatico Greenaway would have been amused: Stefano Giovannoni, his wife Elisa Gargan and their two sons, Rocco (15) and Vasco (9) are a true holy family. Giovannoni has been consecrated by both Alberto Alessi and Andrea Branzi as the supreme representative of Super & Popular design, and its distinctive figure is impeccably dressed in black Yohji Yamamoto, endowing him with the authoritative and good-natured appearance of a priest of design, smiling and universal. No one was in Judas mood, so there's just 11 of us at the table.

Before supper we tour the house, one of those places that fashion magazines describe as 'Home Galleries', and which are loaded with the aesthetic codes, passions, lifestyle and general affluence of their owners. Fabio Novembre, one of the guests, calls it the most beautiful house in Milan. Perhaps that's just one of his endearing and amiable exaggerations, but the house certainly falls into the impressive category. And it's not just a matter of content display, the location, architectural setting and dimensions all add to the unique mix.

Idea Factory

Situated over six floors in Milan's super-trendy Tortona district, the building's corner tower imbues it with the sense of a proto-industrial cathedral. It was actually the test chamber of the Riva Calzoni hydraulic turbine factory: an empty parallelepiped set on a base covering some 400sqm x 18m high, with a tower in the corner for a waterfall 26m high. From here the water used to be forced through ducts into a tank in the basement, where the turbines would be baptised. Today the tank is a swimming pool made spectacular by a window embedded in the ceiling. This allows those on the ground floor to walk two metres above the water. The large ground-floor space is intended as a location and often gets rented out for making movies or holding parties and exhibitions.

On the third level there's the 'ideas factory' of Giovannoni Design, employing some 15 people. And when the orange elevator finally stops at level four, we enter what its owners call home. The door opens onto a large living room where Gargan, a designer of products and interiors who worked with Studio De Lucchi between 1989 and 1995, wel-



Main photos: images of the studio; other pictures show view of the living room; the turquoise bathroom; the staircase down to the pool; and the master bedroom with a Cinquecento Crucifixion and Proust armchair by Alessandro Mendini, produced by Cappellini



comes us. Together with her husband she oversaw the whole makeover of the house, designing wardrobes, beds, bathrooms, kitchens, terraces and gardens. From the corner of the legendary Prato Pratone by Gufam, Gargan helps us take in the space: a rectangle measuring 23 x18m that holds within its middle a small courtyard garden around which the reception rooms run. In winter dinner is served in the living room on a table carved out of a single massive tree trunk by a French sculptor living in the Philippines. It stands before a celebrated portrait by Giorgione pixelated on a computer by Giovanni then veiled with micromesh and finally framed in an authentic 16th century frame. Light is shed on the diners from a glass chandelier designed by Johanna Grawunder.

tive refrigerator made out of dung and mud from Rajasthan. On the end wall is a coruscating great canvas by Daniele Innamorato, barely touched by the light from three Big Shadows, floor lamps designed by Marcel Wanders for Cappellini. Besides the white living room, there's plenty of colour. First there's the red bookcase in Giovanni's study, which he designed himself. It contains his collection of 'puppets' from many parts of Japan. Then there are the bathrooms: a large turquoise one, with a square whirlpool sunken into the wooden floor, then a blue one and an orange one for the boys. In the middle is the master bedroom, with a striking Cinquecento Crucifixion, and the bedroom shared by the two boys like good brothers.

Dung and Mud

The trail continues as we settle down on two large snoozing dinosaurs, in reality Edra's On the Rocks sofas designed by Francesco Binfarè. On one side we observe an ancient Chinese closet, on which towers nonchalantly a 17th century Madonna from the school of Parma, and on the other a primi-

Having completed our tour we return to the starting point, passing through the kitchen. There are two technical walls (with Gaggenau and Miele ovens, Siemens and Electrolux appliances) and in the middle an incredible table made wholly from mirrors. We now find we still haven't seen everything, so we climb up to the fifth level where a large wooden terrace, furnished with various chaises longues and a dining table shaded by a pergola



At table, with tartares of hake and tuna, sketches and prototypes of the new Orientales collection, designed by Giovannoni for Alessi. Bottom right: Fabio Novembre and his wife, the Argentine model Miss Candela



evokes long pauses for relaxation and convivial living. A second kitchen, with a big steel trough and a Zanussi professional kitchen is practically monopolised by Giovannoni. He's a true deep-sea fisherman and loves to clean and cook the big game fish himself. Beyond the kitchen is the tower laid out on two floors with the guest rooms.

Big Numbers

After this feast of the branded and brandless, the tinkling of glasses signals it's time to eat. Giovannoni is naturally seated in the middle of the table, with on his right Hikaru Mori, the Japanese designer responsible for the extension of the winery Feudi di San Gregorio. On his left sits Rosa Tessa, editor of the new magazine e-Look. Opposite him is Paola Manfrin, creative director at McCann Erickson's Luxury Box, and Fabio Novembre, the only young star of Italian design. Sitting at one end of the table is Gargan, and on her left is Kaoru Tashiro, a design journalist based in Milan who writes for Axis, Casa Brutus and Vogue Nippon, and one her right the divine Miss Candela, an Argentine model and Novembre's wife. The chair at the other end of the

table is occupied by the photographer, Francesco Radino, the master, with the writer on his right and the Japanese musician Gak Sato, much loved on the Milanese scene, on his left.

Supper begins with a dish of tepid squid on a bed of artichokes. The wine is a white Blangè from the Piedmontese Ceretto winery, Radino and Giovannoni, who both fish for dentex, tuna, amberjack and other fish of passage, talk about rods, lines and baits. Giovannoni's boat is a classic American 10m Luhrs with a lookout turret berthed at Calvi in Corsica. We continue with a delicious tartare of hake and tuna, and the more wine goes down the closer the conversation veers off to design. What do you, what do I do, what does he do and what's going to happen at the Salone? Meanwhile, Giovannoni is contrasting himself with Enzo Mari. 'He's someone who gets indignant if a product sells well. I think if it doesn't sell then it's not valid!' Then we speak ill of an editor who has changed magazines. He's very dear to Novembre, hated by Giovannoni, unknown to most of us. And then luckily Signora Manfrin tells us about Permanent Food, Maurizio Cattelan's art magazine which she edits every six months for Vogue Italia. And this brings us back to the Salone.



A sinner of design collapses stricken
on the sacred icon Pratone, designed in 1971
by the Strum Group for Gufram



What's Giovannoni going to present? 'The next best seller! I'm looking for big numbers and I'm not interested in anything else, my Girotondo series by Alessi sold seven millions pieces alone and I don't think any design products have done better than that! Now for Magis I'll be presenting the Paso Doble family of chairs, in extruded aluminum and a patented fabric mesh. Let's hope Magis finally succeeds in taking the step up from an artisanal outfit to a truly industrial scale.'

Armful of Objects

Excellent pasta arrives: little corkscrew-shaped fusilli dressed with oil and lumps of bottarga di Favignana (fish roe). A more relaxed and serene Novembre than usual (paternity seems to suit him) tells us that for Design Week he'll be having a major retrospective at the Rotonda della Besana. Radino, a producer of oil and wine, called Il Silenzioso, the man who in 1972 was one of the few allowed to photograph the great helmsman Mao Tze Dong, reminds him that at the minimum he has just completed 40 orbits around the sun and that perhaps he needs to get a 'perspective'...

The Japanese ladies, courteous as their customs require, ask about the new projects for Alessi and at this point Giovannoni vanishes, only to reappear with the draft of a book he is doing for his new Orientales collection, which stems from a collaboration with the National Palace Museum in Taiwan, together with an armful of objects with almond-shaped eyes that immediately find a place on the table. At this point Manfrin is convinced he's a genius and Novembre says that Giovannoni is the Walt Disney of design. Unfortunately the Orientales invasion has caused the turbot and vegetables to go cold. It is served, like everything else, by a short-haired Mediterranean Mary Magdalene. Then, as we are sipping the passito di Pantelleria, a sleepy angel child appears and wishes us all goodnight. The Salone inspires many first and last suppers, but rarely an early bedtime. #