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## **Shared Living. Fresh concepts for co-housing**

Leading retailers enter the wellness arena. Luca Nichetto rejects style. Formafantasma reveals five turning-point moments. Furniture manufacturers tackle transient times

**In his mini memoir, Luca Nichetto reveals how Murano's glass industry heightened his *appreciation of production*, which he believes is inherently connected to design.**

Words **Floor Kuitert** Portraits **Antonio Campanella**

# Blow by Blow

**LUCA NICHETTO:** 'I felt as if I was living like Tom Sawyer when growing up. I was born in Venice but raised on Murano, a super-small island. Because of the water surrounding us, my friends and I would imagine we were pirates. Looking back, I think it was a perfect environment.'

'Murano is known for its glass industry. My grandfather was a glass-blower, my mother a decorator. At least 95 per cent of the people I was connected to in Murano were linked to the glass industry, so creativity was something absolutely normal to me. Probably what I'm doing now is because of being raised amid all that activity. I never *decided* to become a designer. I just went with the flow and started designing glass pieces.'

'My mom was into design. She furnished the house with very interesting products. Our sofa was B&B Italia's Coronado, and our table was the Tulip by Eero Saarinen, in marble. I didn't understand their significance when I was a kid, but I do now.'

'Drawing and history were my favourite classes in primary school. Even before I started school, one thing that really attracted me was the mask of Tutankhamun. My dad had a book about it. I must have read it a thousand times to understand how it was discovered. It helped me to get a feel for beautiful things. I still think that mask is one of the most beautiful objects in the world.'

'I'm not the kind of designer that builds a story after the product is finished, even though the design scene changes and communication has become very important. When I design something, I want it to have a reason – to show why I've done certain things. There is always a story behind those reasons. It could be something very romantic or just pragmatic.'

'As a student, I was very much against people who obligated me to do something that I thought was unnecessary. I know that's not good, but as I think back on my classmates – the very good ones – I see that they are not successful as professionals. On the contrary, »



some of the bad ones did become successful. I think that's because we have this soul, which pushes and drives us to do what we really want. When you are in school, there is always someone telling you what to do, but the real world is different. No-one tells you what to do. It's *you* that needs to decide.'

'If I could change something in design education, I would close half the schools. There are too many promises made to young designers. Fake promises. We don't need the number of designs that come out each year. That's a big problem, because young people believe that there is space. But it was, and still is, difficult for me. For them, it is a thousand times more difficult. I'm not talking about geniuses, but how many geniuses in one generation do you have?'

'Age is moving in a way. When I was 23, I was probably much more mature than guys that age now. And look at my mom. She was married at 21. In 20 years' time, it will probably be totally fine to start your studies at 25. But when you only enter the market at 30, the time you have to *do* something is short. To do something, you need to build your own career, and to build a career you first need to try things and make mistakes. Talent is not the only thing; it's about experience, knowledge and luck too. University does not tell you this. And you know why? Because I truly believe university is the only money machine in the design industry right now that is not affected by the crisis.'

“**There's a lot of confusion right now about what design needs to achieve**

'People say it's very difficult to understand what the Luca Nichetto style is. I really like that, because I don't want to have one style. To me, style is not design. Design for me means dealing with production, limits and the history of your client's company. Take Castiglioni, for example. Now you look at his products and think – *ah, this is Castiglioni* – because he spent 50 years building a career based on his way of doing things. But he doesn't *have* a style. We *call* that his style. When I'm not here any more and someone mentions “the Luca Nichetto style”, it will mean I did a good job, but if my style is recognizable today, it means I'm doing things to boost my ego. It's not my way of thinking about design.'

'You need to be able to match who you are with the DNA of the company. If I were to do the same sort of project for Cassina and Offecct, the results would be totally different. I don't want to be the designer that obliges a company to do something. That way the company disappears, so to speak. It would mean I don't respect them. I'm here to help my clients move on, so the matching part is very important.'

'There is a lot of confusion right now about what design is and what it needs to achieve. There is art design, interaction design and so forth. It's important for “design” to be more than a word. Yes, design should be spread, but what makes it difficult is that there are no more filters, no more boundaries. This complicates design – for me, but especially for young people having to decide what to do.'

'I never go looking for brands, although maybe I should start doing that. I did in the beginning, of course, but currently brands are coming to me. Sometimes I say yes, sometimes no. It's not a matter of big or small, Chinese, Chilean or Italian. The interesting thing is to think what I can do for them and what I can learn from them. If these two things have a positive answer, I will do the project. If I have some doubts, I won't.'

'I learned a lot working for Foscarini. I think my design process is still strongly connected to what I learned there. I was very young, and they pushed me to research material and process, to select samples and to ask for quotations. They taught me about production costs and what they mean to the retailer. I learned more from working than from going to school. Every collaboration is a learning process. That is the beautiful part of being a designer: every project is a new lesson. Good or bad.'

## Luca Nichetto

**1976** Born in Venice, Italy

**1998** Receives degree in industrial design from Università Iuav di Venezia, after studying at the city's Istituto Statale d'Arte

**1999** Begins professional career with Murano-based glass-maker Salviati

**2000** Designs first product for lighting company Foscarini, marking the start of a long-term collaboration

**2001-2003** Works for Foscarini as product research and development consultant

**2006** Establishes his own practice in Venice

**2011** Moves to Stockholm, Sweden, and opens a second studio there

**2016** Presents furniture for Casamania, Arflex, Offecct, Verreum and Ethimo at Milan Design Week

'Language has been the biggest obstacle in my career. Five years ago, I didn't speak English. It's not fantastic now, but I can communicate. I'm not chauvinistic enough to think that design is only in Italy, so one day I told myself that I needed to learn English in order to travel and visit foreign companies. After a while I was able to communicate. That moment opened so many doors for me – it gave me a feeling of freedom, like receiving a driving licence.'

'In the last ten years, the production side of design has seen little innovation. The focus shifted from *how to make* a product to *how to sell* a product. Of course 3D printing is an amazing tool, but it's just a tool – that's it. Ten years ago it was carbon fibre that was going to change the industry, but has it, really? It wasn't like polyurethane foam or stretch

materials, which completely changed the sofa in the 1950s and '60s. Perhaps the only innovation has been the LED lamp, which changed the shape of lighting completely.'

'My son is probably the best thing I ever designed, but I say that because I became a father only recently. I'm different now and my priorities are different. You need to be very focused, because time becomes shorter and shorter every day. In a way you become more effective, but it's also complicated. I'm travelling a lot, and sometimes I miss a milestone in his life. He says “papa” and I'm in China. It's not something you can get back.'

'The decision to open my own studio was a very practical one. In 2006 – I was still a freelancer – I received a shocking tax bill. I asked my accountant and a lawyer for advice,

and they suggested that I buy and open a studio: a tax-wise investment. So I did.'

'Opening a second studio in Sweden was because of love. My wife – then my girlfriend – is Swedish. We met in Venice, where she lived for eight years. She received a very good job offer that meant moving back to Sweden. She's working at an opera house, doing costumes for theatre. At first I travelled back and forth, but it was frustrating, because everything was moving at a fast pace in Italy at that time. In Sweden, I felt as if I was starting all over again. But after a while I started to see it as an opportunity.'

'If you understand the space and create the atmosphere, you also design better products. The result is a ping-pong effect between the two. If you want to become an even better

designer, you need to understand the stage you are designing for. That piece of knowledge was what pushed me to enter different disciplines.'

'I would advise aspiring designers not to aim for the status of “star designer”. Aim for a sector where design can make a difference. There is not a lot of available space here, so look at emerging countries with big opportunities, where you can do what is difficult to do in Europe. Many young architects have gone to China, because it's impossible to begin at home. I think it will be the same with design.' ●

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