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DUO ITALIANO

Italians seem to excel at design. Stacey Sheppard caught up with the latest young design duo from Italy to be making waves in the bathroom

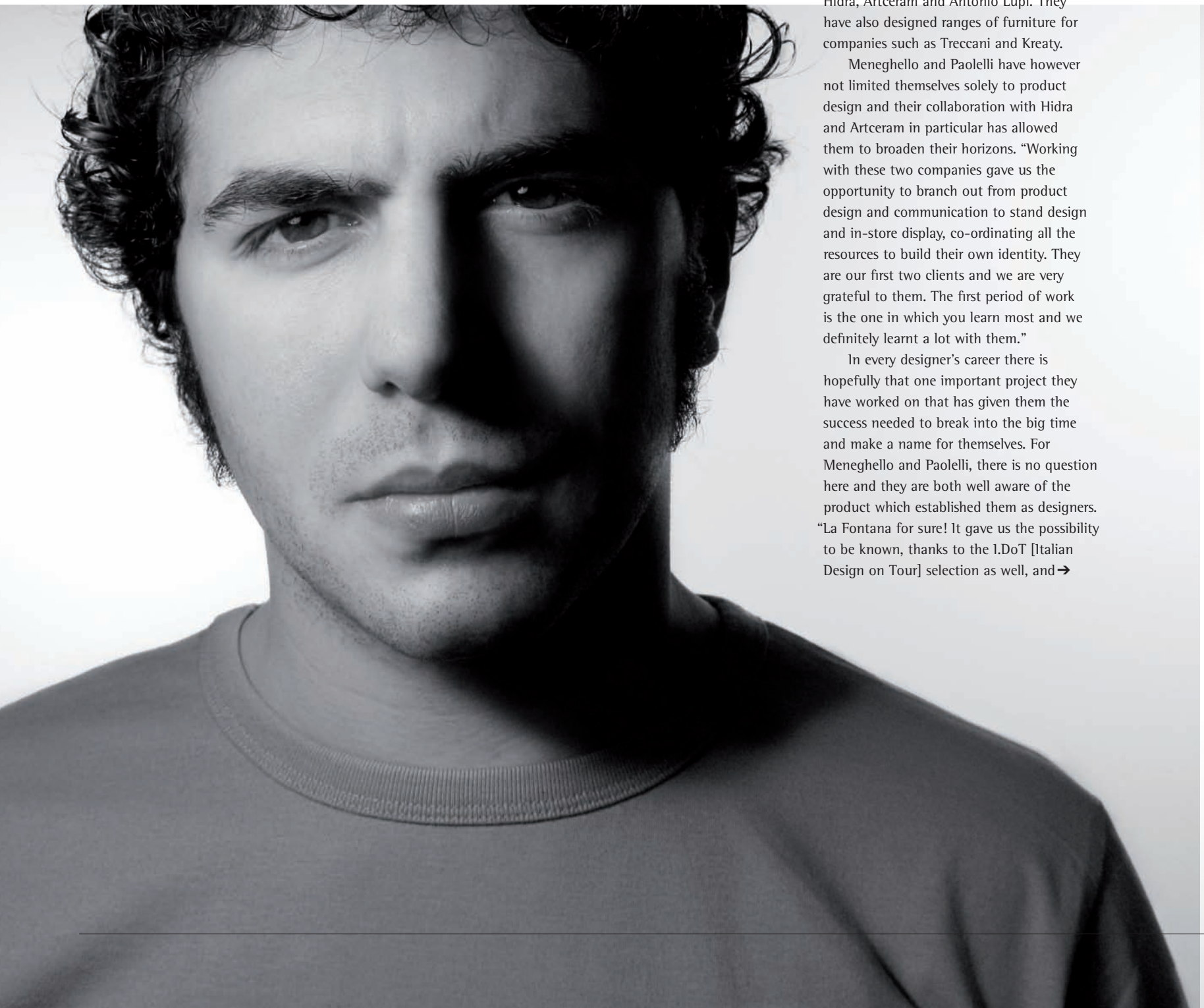
OVER the years Italian design has become synonymous with unprecedented style, beauty and luxury. The country has carved for itself a reputation on the international scene as something of a design leader and global trendsetter. Many of today's freshest design talents in the industry look to the titans of Italian design for their inspiration. Antonio Citterio, Claudio Silvestrin, Matteo Thun and Roberta and Ludovica Palomba have all made a considerable contribution to Italy's design output over the years. However, the latest generation of creative thinkers is gently starting to make its mark on the bathroom industry.

Sandro Meneghello and Marco Paoletti both graduated from the Faculty of Design at the Politecnico di Milano in 2004 and ended up working together. "It was kind of a coincidence, we didn't plan it," Meneghello says. "It just so happened that for a period of time we were living in the same flat, we got a project and *voilà!* It happened by chance and after that we kept on working together, working very hard with a strong determination and focus on building something, right from the beginning, which goes beyond a single product."

Since 2005, they have embarked on numerous successful collaborations with various bathroom manufacturers such as Hidra, Artceram and Antonio Lupi. They have also designed ranges of furniture for companies such as Treccani and Kreaty.

Meneghello and Paoletti have however not limited themselves solely to product design and their collaboration with Hidra and Artceram in particular has allowed them to broaden their horizons. "Working with these two companies gave us the opportunity to branch out from product design and communication to stand design and in-store display, co-ordinating all the resources to build their own identity. They are our first two clients and we are very grateful to them. The first period of work is the one in which you learn most and we definitely learnt a lot with them."

In every designer's career there is hopefully that one important project they have worked on that has given them the success needed to break into the big time and make a name for themselves. For Meneghello and Paoletti, there is no question here and they are both well aware of the product which established them as designers. "La Fontana for sure! It gave us the possibility to be known, thanks to the I.DoT [Italian Design on Tour] selection as well, and →





Left: Hidra's 2008 collection includes the free standing washbasin Miss

Above: Table designed for Kreaty

Right: La Fontana for Artceram in 2006 established Paolelli & Meneghello as designers



“THE FIRST PERIOD OF WORK IS THE ONE IN WHICH YOU LEARN MOST AND WE DEFINITELY LEARNT A LOT WITH HIDRA AND ARTCERAM”

it is actually the only one that got three different Chinese copies – probably the most flattering form of recognition!” Paoelli says.

“La Fontana is a complete contained space bathroom system which includes within it four distinct items. It consists of a washbasin, lighting, mirror and cabinet. It is a full project that represents our first step into the design world and it is still a valid business card for us.”

The contemporary design of Fontana is simple yet intriguingly powerful and combines crisp, clean lines with gentle curves. The approach taken in the design process of Fontana is, according to the two young designers, a good example of how they generally tend to tackle each new design project. “Our approach to design can be described as a mix between two elements. On the one hand we work very hard on the formal aspects of the product, trying to find a balance between clean lines and character. On the other hand we focus on the possibility of improving the function of objects. We think that today the market looks ready to acquire some serious innovations, not only formal but also typological,” adds Meneghello.

“A good example of our approach is La Fontana Sanitaryware back-to-wall. The new generation of back-to-wall sanitaryware has highlighted the lateral walls, forgetting what there is inside it. This project goes

beyond, giving the possibility to access under the sanitaryware through the lateral doors. This allows us to use a space that has never been used in our bathrooms, but also lets us reach the pipes without removing the sanitaryware.”

La Fontana may have been the project that catapulted these two into the limelight, but their creativity seems to know no bounds. Their portfolio now includes a multiplicity of collections ranging from the elegant and graceful to the more unusual and eye-catching. In 2006, the pair designed the Dune basin for Antonio Lupi as well as the highly functional Slide-Side System for Hidra and Artceram. Slide-Side permitted Hidra to branch out into a previously unknown terrain, that of bathroom furnishings. Dial is a simple yet elegant design for Hidra that revolves around the transposition of the shape used on the faces of Swiss watches to the field of bathroom ceramics. It is a classy and stylish shape that aims to find the seemingly impossible balance between a square and a circle.

This year’s offerings for Hidra include a curvaceous and sinuous collection named Miss which has a very ergonomic and flowing feel to it. In contrast to this, Hi-Line – also for Hidra – displays Meneghello and Paoelli’s more characteristically formal aspects and clean lines. It is a much more dynamic-looking collection and really helps

Right and far right:
La Fontana is a complete contained space bathroom system which allows access to the pipes without removing the sanitaryware



Sharp is a free-standing washbasin for Artceram’s 2008 collection





“OUR YEAR ABROAD WAS CRUCIAL IN HELPING US TO BECOME LESS ITALIAN AND MORE EUROPEAN!”

to showcase the versatility and flexibility of these two young design dynamos.

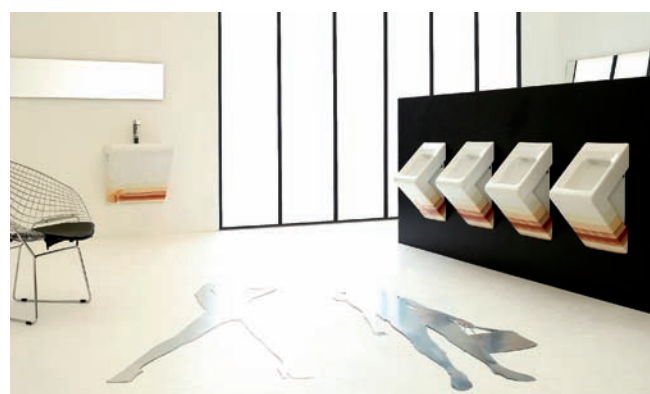
A further example of this versatility is their latest contribution to the 2008 collection for Artceram. Sharp is a multi-faceted washbasin, with a certain glacial elegance to it and it relies strongly on sharp, geometric lines to give it a strong architectural feel.

But where do Meneghello and Paoelli draw their inspiration to come up with such vastly different designs? “This is difficult to say. We are influenced by everything we see and come in contact with: people, nature, companies, news, feelings. Our work is really enjoyable because you can get inspiration from everywhere, you can’t explain exactly where a specific idea came from,” Meneghello explains. “Sometimes it is really funny going out with friends when we start to notice something that apparently has nothing interesting about it and we stare at it for ages. They definitely think we are psycho-freaks – and I must admit that sometimes they are right.”

For two self-confessed ‘psycho-freaks’ they certainly seem to be drawing their inspiration from the right places. Perhaps their educational experience played a vital role in setting them on the right course? They did after all have the opportunity

to study for a year under the guidance of Roberto Palomba and Paolo Rizzatto. “We studied under Palomba and Rizzatto only in our last year. They were the tutors for our final projects [Rizzatto for Meneghello and Palomba for Paoelli]. Our university was really full of subjects and input, very different from one another. Sometimes we didn’t even understand what some of the other courses were for! By contrast, Palomba and Rizzatto are both very concrete and pragmatic – they don’t just teach, they actually work as designers and so we learnt from them how to deal with products and companies. They both have a clean and sharp mind and I remember thinking ‘this is the job I want to do’,” explains Meneghello.

Despite Italy’s apparent dominance in the design field, these two were under no illusions and were well aware of the effects of globalisation on this market. Design has a much more international feel to it today that crosses cultural boundaries. A year spent at Central Saint Martins in London for Meneghello and a year at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim for Paoelli ensured that both designers approached things with a broadened mind. “We were both very lucky to have the opportunity to experience a different approach to design studying abroad



Above: **La Fontana** back-to-wall sanitaryware

for a year,” says Paoelli. “The Politecnico di Milano, a five-year degree – too much! – gave us a ‘multi-tasking’ education involving cultural and technical studies, while Central Saint Martins and Trondheim gave us a more practical and craft-based approach to design.

“That year abroad was crucial in helping us to become less Italian and more European! England and the Scandinavian countries are both key nations for trends, design and lifestyle. We like Italian design and we are glad to have been born there. Milan is definitely the key city for our work, but we know all the limits of our culture and our way of doing things.” **designer**

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