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Keeping it REAL

For its first collaboration, Victoria + Albert Baths has called on the expertise of Meneghello Paoletti Associati

Words: **Sophie Baylis**



This is a defining moment in the history of Victoria + Albert Baths. That's not to say it hasn't notched up a few before now. The much-replicated, never-duplicated low-slung Napoli bath remains one of its best sellers. As does the Amalfi, which is a perfect expression of the company's trademark transitional design, taking a historical design – in this case the slipper bath – and refining it for today's audience. However, for the first time in its 18-year history, Victoria + Albert Baths has sought the expertise of external designers for its latest creation.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that Victoria + Albert Baths is suffering from designer's block. Not so. Its new Maru 42 basin – designed in-house and gracing the pages of this month's Style Selector (p32) – puts paid to such an assumption. That said, the value of a fresh perspective should never be underestimated, which would explain why Victoria + Albert Baths has invested almost two years in the development of Amiata.

Victoria + Albert Baths found its perfect partner in Meneghello Paoletti Associati, founded by Sandro Meneghello and Marco Paoletti in 2005. They are relative young guns on the design circuit but are already credited for bringing the perfect blend of expertise and creativity to the projects they have worked on, including those for Art Ceram, Horm and Antonio Lupi.

Fittingly, Victoria + Albert Baths debuted Amiata at the recent Salone Internazionale del Mobile in Milan. It was here, two years ago, that they first met Meneghello Paoletti Associati. For their part, Sandro and Marco were already well acquainted with Victoria + Albert Baths. "We had a friend who spoke very well of them," explains Sandro, "and he was particularly enthusiastic about the Quarrycast – a blend of volcanic limestone and resins – that Victoria + Albert Baths uses to hand make its products."

The brief to Meneghello Paoletti Associati was to create a timeless piece that is suitable for a 'real bathroom'. "Victoria + Albert Baths gave us a lot of creative freedom," recalls Sandro. "This was very important to us." Certainly Victoria + Albert Baths's trust was well placed. The resulting bath – to borrow a well-worn phrase – is classic with a contemporary twist, neatly satisfying our desire for something that is both yesteryear and contemporary. More than just a pretty face, though, Amiata was also carefully crafted in relation to the curve of the body to ensure that the shape is conducive to a comfortable long soak. ▶

Above left: Sandro Meneghello and Marco Paoletti of Meneghello Paoletti Associati.

Left: Amiata bath and basins, Victoria + Albert Baths.





"Of course Quarrycast has its limitations," continues Sandro, "but this is our job – to work with its limitations and to see what we can do. If you have complete freedom it's not a designer's job, it's an artist's job. So, although we were a little wary because we didn't know the material, we worked hard to understand it."

Cue regular emails between Meneghello Paoletti Associati's Milan-based studio and Victoria + Albert's technical director in South Africa where its factory is based. Their combined tenacity paid dividends. According to Victoria + Albert, the transition from the original drawings to manufacturing Amiata was "almost seamless".

Ostensibly, tenacity is the common theme that runs throughout Meneghello Paoletti Associati's short history. "It was hard work," says Marco, who recalls setting up their studio post graduation in 2006, and "suffering" for the first three years. He laughs, "We learnt a lot though! I think the first years of work are more important than all the years of university and study combined."

Sandro nods in agreement. "Products need time to develop so the first few years were difficult because we didn't see any results. Now we are here and we are seeing them."

Indeed they are. New to market is the Sofa freestanding bath for Glass, which looks to have taken its inspiration from the classic chaise longue (see p32), and Sotto Sopra for Art Ceram, a ceramic bar that seemingly melts into the architecture of the bathroom and can be customised according to the needs of its user with towel rails and soap dispensers, plus toilet roll and brush holders.

Not surprisingly, along with the new launches come the accolades. Meneghello Paoletti Associati's Schema radiator system for Ridea recently scooped the Red Dot Design Award for environmental sustainability and aesthetic innovation. Its flexible tube, which is part of the hydraulic circuit, has been clad in leather and serves as a stylish towel holder.

Awards aside, the fact that Art Ceram was among Meneghello Paoletti Associati's first clients, and remains so, speaks volumes. "Like Victoria + Albert Baths, Art Ceram manufactures its own designs," says Marco. "We prefer this because we have the opportunity to push a design to its real limits. That is what we love to do."

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Top left: The Schema system for Ridea has recently won the Red Dot Design Award.

Above: Amalfi bath, Victoria + Albert Baths.

Top right: Sotto Sopra for Art Ceram.