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Ride the Tide

Crossing the Laguna with Luca Nichetto

Luca Nichetto is one of the few thousand natives who still survive on the 114 islands in the lagoon of Venice, transformed in the last 50 years into one of the richest and most beautiful theme parks in the world. Among the natives, excluding the master glassmakers of Murano, those who engage in industrial design while continuing to live on the islands can be counted on the fingers of one hand.



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In his own way, Luca Nichetto is an heir to the great Venetian craft tradition. Today only 34, with over 50 items in production for companies such as Foscari, Moroso, Fratelli Guzzini, Bonaldo, Casamania, Skitsch, Salviati, Venini and Offecct, he is one of Europe's most successful young designers. There are two reasons for his early success: he started young and he started from the material itself.

As a child Nichetto grew up on Murano, where his mother was a glass decorator and his grandfather a master glassmaker. 'I spent almost every day at the kiln with my grandfather and sometimes I saw the people who came with sheets of paper and talked to him. He told me they were "designers" and I was fascinated by this encounter between the person who designed and the one who made. I always enjoyed drawing and as a boy attending the Art Institute, when summer came I would put a roll of paper under my arm and do the rounds of the glassworks to see what they were doing and sell my designs to the glassmakers. With the upshot that by the time I was 16 years old I already had experience in cutting deals with manufacturers.'

The Willing Worker

In 1998, while he was finishing his degree in Industrial Design in Treviso, he began working in the Salviati glassworks back on Murano. The art director was Simon Moore. 'I used to go in the afternoons, whenever I could. I was a general shop hand and I was willing to do anything to make myself useful. One of the attractions was that some great characters used to turn up there, like Ross Lovegrove, Ingo Maurer and Tom Dixon, and I was often involved in the dialogue. After two years of apprenticeship in 2000 I managed to make the vase Millebolle. It was a best seller and boosted my confidence.'

On Murano he saw the birth of matter, primordial alchemy, the irresistible beauty of fragile glass. In the meantime, after completing school he gained work experience at Foscari, where one of the two owners, Alessandro Vecchiato, entrusted him with research into new materials and product development. Since Foscari precludes no material - blown glass, silicone, paper, wood, plastic, metal - in fashioning its lamps, it became his second training ground for knowledge, and on it he built his small fortune: knowing not just what

Otto, 2010, for Venini (above, left)
A collection of vases where the skill of master glassblowers lies with their ability to shape glass with simple and natural gestures: here, beginning with the archetypal concept of the cylindrical vase, they first obtain a truncated conical form and then make a clean cut at the top to reveal the object's eight layers of glass, thereby making visible the diverse chromatic tones of its interior.

Photo: © Archivio Venini

Paolo Da Ponte and Luca Nichetto in their 'Venice car', that each day takes them from their homes to the design studio. (facing page)



Troag, 2010, for Foscarini (above)
Troag is the Swedish word for a canoe-shaped wooden bowl used for crushing fruit. During a trip to Lapland, Nichetto was introduced to this object, which is passed on from generation to generation and it has provided the source of inspiration for a longitudinal hanging lamp designed to illuminate work areas like long tables or large open spaces.



Poliart table, 2010, for Casamania
will be released during this year's Salone del Mobile in Milan (top, right)

Plinto, 2010, for Skitsch (right)
Plinto is a hybrid object that functions either as a stool or as a small table. Its form was inspired by the parallel pipe-shaped blocks of concrete frequently used on construction sites.



Robo, 2010, for Offecct (right)
The concept of dismantlement provided the spark for Robo's design, which found inspiration in the Icelandic singer Björk's 1999 video for the song 'All Is Full of Love' directed by Chris Cunningham in which the main protagonists are robots that take on human characteristics. Robo is stackable and made out of plywood, recycled P.E.T. acrylic felt and metal structure.





to make and the mood to aim for, but which materials to use and how to produce it.

Today, 10 years later, our native of the lagoon has come a long way in the design world. Yet, by good luck and good management, he did not need to go far. His parents still live on Murano. He moved to Venice, in San Nicolò di Mendicoli, and opened a studio at Porto Marghera. In practice, he lives and works at both ends of the bridge that links Venice to the mainland, but the best way to get from one end to the other is still by boat!

Robot Concept

The studio is in a mixed district where new activities have ousted obsolete tertiary industry, but the oil terminal and some petrochemical plants continue to function not far away. Near his studio is the legendary 'Iron Beach' - a small black strip from which on windy days windsurfers set sail to tack between the cathedral of oil and that of San Marco. At the atelier, Nichetto works on his 2010 projects, like the Robo chair, presented at the Stockholm Furniture Fair this February and inspired by Bjork's famous video *All is Full of Love*. Nichetto has managed to embody the robot concept in furniture, as he himself relates: 'For some years I've had a Swedish girlfriend and whenever I go there I'm fascinated by the simplicity and elegance of their design. Two years ago

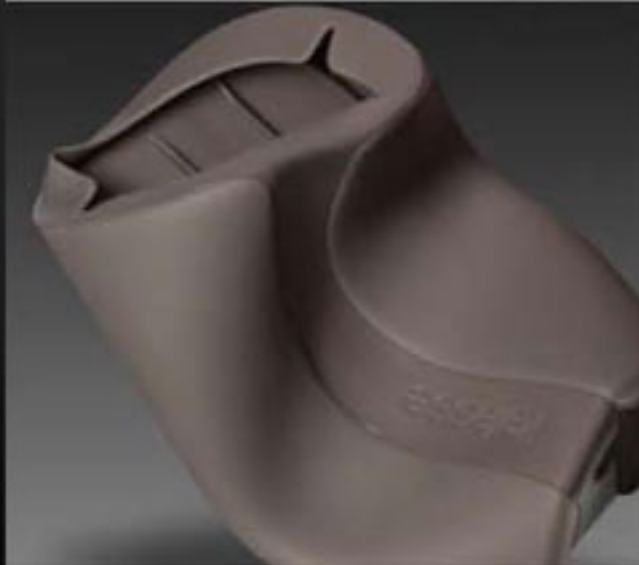
Offecct contacted me and they asked me to think about a chair for communities, but one that would also be comfortable in the home. They turned down the first model I presented because it took up too much space in transit, so it wasn't "sustainable". Their attention to detail stimulated me to think about a chair that would be easy to dismantle. Making it wasn't easy but we finally succeeded by combining their expertise with that of an expert chair manufacturer in Friuli. We created an original rigid-soft combination using plywood and the felt they use in Sweden for soundproof panels. To finish the prototype last August we didn't sleep for three nights and then I flew to Stockholm on holiday with the chair in my suitcase!

Material Man

Another innovative project, to be presented in the Triennale forecourt in Milan during Design Week, is his work on Refin ceramic tiles. The project is titled Three-Dimensional Square and also involved Massimiliano Adami and Lorenzo Damiani. Here Nichetto reinterpreted the hidden side of the tile, the one that comes in contact with adhesives, mortar and walls, using it both as decoration and to give an ecological message, because the paste used to make stoneware tiles recycles the detritus from other tiles and even the cathode tubes from old TVs.

Essence, 2010, for Bosa
This collection sets about reinterpreting some of the most representative tools employed in artisanal glass and ceramic craftsmanship.

Photos: © Roberto Bandiera



BCool, 2010, for italesse
(top and middle)

Inspired by countries with very hot weather, this mini cooler is designed for 33-cl bottles.

Photos: © Massimo Gardone / Azimut

Alle, 2010, for Skitsch (top right)

Created to serve many uses, Alle is a revisit of the tubular chair, but with an innovative twist. The chair consists of a tubular metal structure into which a curved plywood seat is fitted, so both components are made of simple, commonplace materials.

Layer, 2010 (right)

The idea of generating tables of different heights through the repetition of a single building block is what informs Layer.



Venti4, 2010, for Italesse
(middle, right)

Designed to be used at any time of day, the Venti4 set is versatile enough to adapt to every need.

Photo: © Massimo Gardone / Azimut

Icesac, 2010, for italesse
(above, right)

The concept of the Icesac was born from the traditional way bartenders have always crushed ice by placing the cubes in a tea towel and banging them on a flat surface.

Photo: © Massimo Gardone / Azimut

Notable among the other projects presented at the Salone del Mobile is a lightweight concrete stool for Skitsch, a family of tables high and low for Gallotti & Radice, and a curious wooden lamp for Foscarini. 'I was inspired to do this chandelier by a very distinctive Lapp bowl, found in practically every home and marked with the initials of the family. It's made of curved wood and it becomes more and more beautiful with the passing of the years.' Finally, because spring will return after this long winter and we will again be longing to down cold beer, the stalwart Venetian has designed the refined

BCool for the Italesse firm in Trieste: a mini glacette for holding 33-cl bottles, made of silicone, with flanges inside to carry off the heat, inspired by the ones in personal computers.

www.lucanichetto.com