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A STRONG FOCUS ON CUSTOMISATION, CRAFTSMANSHIP AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IS THE SECRET TO ITALIAN FURNITURE BRAND MISURAEEMME'S RAPID INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION.

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IMAGES » COURTESY OF MISURAEEMME AND MARQUIS

It was way back in 1902 that MisuraEmme was founded in Italy's famous furniture-manufacturing district of Brianza. At that time, it was a humble family workshop producing custom-made furniture. In due course the distinctive name of the brand was forged from *misura* (Italian for 'tailored') and the Italian pronunciation of the initial of founder Giovanni Mascheroni's last name.

In addition to its custom service, in its early years MisuraEmme was known for collaboration pieces with international architects and design luminaries, who had each played a significant part in the history of modern design. Among them were Alvar Aalto for the *AA1* sofa (1932), Alfred Roth for the *ARI* bar trolley (1932) and Giuseppe Terragni for the table and chair models *GT1*, *GT2* and *GT3* (1934). MisuraEmme made its debut in Milan's furniture tradeshow in 1939 (a precursor to the Salone del Mobile) and has been a regular exhibitor since. The brand was one of the co-founders of the first edition of the Salone in 1961.

Now in the hands of third-generation family owners, MisuraEmme has flourished into an industry leader for furniture systems in Italy. It boasts a 35,000-square-metre production facility and over 100 years' worth of industry knowhow. With these resources in its arsenal, the company made a daring expansion to the international market in the early 1990s. By 2014, the brand was carried in 250 locations in Italy and 236 overseas (180 locations in Europe and 56 elsewhere) – almost a 50-50 ratio of domestic to international. Today, the ratio has shifted in favour of the international market, with only 35 per cent of the brand's products being sold domestically. MisuraEmme aims to further conquer the international market with its 2018 target, which will see 80 per cent of its business outside Italy.

Designed to suit international tastes and produced with a strong focus on customisation and

environmental sustainability (the company receiving the Grandesign Etico award for a revolutionary water-based lacquer system in 2014), MisuraEmme's contemporary systems collection has played an important role in its successful expansion. One important collaborator in this collection is celebrated Italian architect Mauro Lipparini. Serving as MisuraEmme's Creative Director since 2002, Lipparini is responsible for the design of MisuraEmme's flagship showrooms around the world, as well as many of the brand's best-selling contemporary furniture systems.

Company owners Gianni Borghonovo and Daniela Mascheroni first approached Lipparini in 1999. "At that time the European market and our domestic Italian market were in a good shape. But that wouldn't be the case over the next 20 years. Everybody has a house or two filled with furniture that will last for decades, and we don't create that many new families. So [the owners] wanted to start developing collections for the international market," shares Lipparini, who was recently in Singapore to present MisuraEmme's new showroom at Marquis (which he designed).

Lipparini's extensive portfolio of product, interior and architecture projects (completed under the banner of his architecture practice Studio Lipparini) spans the globe, with an established clientele in Japan. He admits that Japan's pared-down and *wabi-sabi* aesthetics have informed the way he designs. Many have associated Lipparini's work with minimalism, but he begs to differ. "I prefer the word 'essentialism' over minimalism," he suggests. Borghonovo and Mascheroni considered Lipparini the right person to develop, as he puts it, "an Italian style with an international appeal."

Lipparini explains the shift in aesthetic for the international market as follows: "The domestic market at that time liked more of a Mediterranean feel in the product

– more colours and a lot of wood. When we decided to tackle the international market I thought it needed to change. The lines needed to be sharper, and the form cleaner – a little bit more architectural and timeless. Chic over shock."

Among the brand's latest offerings is the self-bearing *Palo Alto* wardrobe system, which does not need to be anchored to the wall or floor. Says Lipparini, "Now that we only have one market, which is the international market, we design to fit the international lifestyle – and that includes moving around more than we used to."

Different approaches are used for showrooms in different countries. He gives examples: "In some part of Asia, like Jakarta, people prefer system furniture like walk-in wardrobes and sliding doors because they like their interior to have an impression of permanence. In China and Japan, people prefer loose furniture because they don't like to drill holes in their walls and floors. In Singapore, it's a combination of both." Customisation, however, remains a strong focus.

Some of MisuraEmme's best-selling furniture systems have been around for some time. The *Tao Day* system, for example, was launched in 2002. Every few years MisuraEmme will launch an upgraded version with a new finish, optional elements and a range of accessories. Another example is the *Argo* sofa, which, in its latest reissue, features a C-profile table element that can be clustered with the seating elements to create a number of different configurations.

"A product is like a child to us. We nurture them to grow – we don't want to lose connection with them," Lipparini says. "*Tao Day* is 14 years old, and if you compare the first *Tao* and the newest *Tao*, it's like seeing a child grow. It looks different but you can see the resemblance in the look and the personality."

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» MAURO LIPPARINI



Top: Mauro Lipparini has been MisuraEmme's Creative Director since 2002. He runs Studio Lipparini with partner Michelle Richter in Florence. Photo by Alberto Ferrero

Top: Lipparini designed the *Tao10* system (an update to the earlier *Tao Day* system) for flexibility. The elements can be arranged in numerous ways and finishes are variable

Bottom: The *Argo* sofa, designed by Lipparini, is a system that can be tailor-made to suit individual requirements. A table element allows for multiple configurations