

SINGAPORE'S LEADING DESIGN & LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

HOME+LIVING

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MASTERFUL TOUCH

Meet architect-designer Mario Bellini

Pow wow!

POPS OF NEON COLOUR CAN ELEVATE YOUR INTERIORS

MARVELLOUS MILAN

Arresting furniture from the design capital

AN Asian AFFAIR

YASMINNE CHENG'S DOMICILE IS AN EXERCISE IN PARED-BACK ELEGANCE

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the. minimal MIND

One of the world's most renowned architect-designer personalities shared his ideas about how design and simplicity is relevant in today's context.

text JOSEPH LIM

the distinguished designer and we gained so much more pearls of wisdom from his storied career.

What does design mean to you?

I try not to think too much about "design" per se, I think one needs to go back to the linguistic root of the word – designare. Design to me is "to make something" and in today's context, everything can be a project. Design correlates to the concept of "drafting" or even "thinking" if you want to look at it conceptually. The word doesn't hold special meaning to me. But it is interesting to know how humankind was one of the "thinking" creatures to actually design, although, birds do design their nests. As humans we cut the stone to make tools like spears or blades and with these tools, we would make other things. I think it's important to focus on design and how it relates to the style of our time. For example, in the 1950s, Italian architects devised furniture and it was wholly made in Italy. However, today, Italian furniture manufacturers appoint Japanese designers to create objects with a different aesthetic. But as a whole, all designers give products shape, meaning and form. Architects and furniture designers think the same in some ways because we design products that revolve around how we live, eat and sleep. One must not be too carried away by designing for the sake of design. Design must fulfil a need, that being said, beauty is a need and emphatic relationship is also a need.



Cassina Break chair

PICTURES COURTESY OF CASSINA

architect-designer personalities and for the 20 minute we were allowed to interview him, he was every bit lively and gregarious and his mental energy was almost palpable. He shared insights about his life and how he views the world through buildings and furniture. *Home + Living* magazine was honoured to have this tête-à-tête with

For a 79-year-old person, one would think he or she would be doddering and possibly not so lucid in thought, however, that's quite the opposite when one is meeting Mario Bellini. The soon-to-be octogenarian is one of the world's most recognised

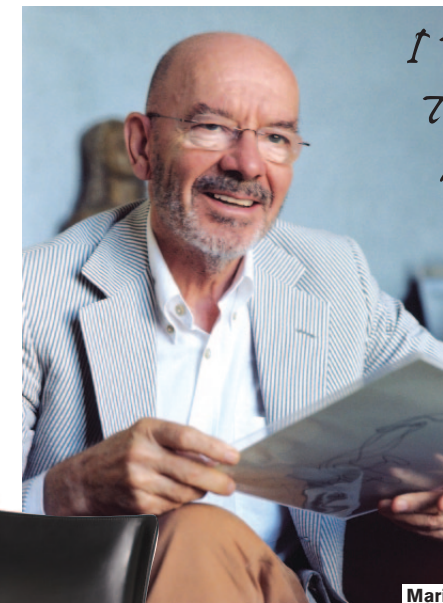
Could you tell us what was going through your mind when you were designing the Cab chair for Cassina?

I think in 1977, I was young and easily influenced but I had strong opinions about how design should be. That year was nothing special to me. Cassina in those years set up a special R&D centre where architects would be put into such a room that included a drafting table and chair. The room was intended to cultivate or at least help young designers in the thought process. You could say it was an incubation room for ideas! Mr Francesco Cassina the founder and owner of Cassina ensured all the designers were well taken care of. We were given free rein to decide what we would like to design. Mr Cassina didn't intervene in our thoughts so we were very happy we worked independently. Creating a product involved a trial and error process and that's a fact every designer must understand. We go through a "Darwinian process" where our thoughts are blurry but through several processes of change and adjustments the final product becomes more realisable. I had thought of designing a "high-tech" chair but realised that Cassina was not the right environment as the company had different values and philosophies. I decided to draw a simple concept of a chair. It was basically a simple chair frame shape hewn from cut steel. But I felt that was not enough so I wrapped felt around it. The final result was not very pleasant looking but the idea of the felt wrapping over the chair's frame was to create a continuous, seamless look. We invited Mr Cassina to have a look and he was very pleased with the "idea" though it had to be refined further.

Today, the "Cab" chair has a zipper at the base and the legs are even



Cassina Cab chair



Mario Bellini

I THINK I WOULD LIKE TO DESIGN A CHURCH AND WINE CELLAR.

wrapped by leather. It eventually sold over 600,000 pieces worldwide and I became very popular for my chair rather than my architecture work!

So are you a better product designer or architect?

I don't see them as separate roles. They are quite the same. I consider myself as a modern, Italian architect. I design products centred on humankind, such our lifestyle, that

is, how we sit on a chair and live in a house. I see buildings as cabinets while a chair is a special object as it concerns our body and how our body contours around the object. It's like microarchitecture. I think the only difference when designing a building or chair is the scale. I don't get confused by scale and perspectives. Distinguishing scale is important and some architects are unable to design a chair. Take for example the famous architect Mario Botta who is recognised for designing some of the world's most prominent buildings but his furniture is not so famous. I think Gio Ponti is both a great architect and furniture designer.

His Pirelli Tower is timeless and including his "Superleggera" chair he designed for Cassina.

What inspires you?

I always try to add humour into the objects I see every day. Since young I would love to "humanise" objects such as I would like to imagine hands and legs on a kitchen funnel. I also try to discover faces in objects around the house! I think the works of the late Le Corbusier is an architect and product designer whom I admire very much. Take his LC2 and LC3 armchairs for Cassina, he basically reversed the idea where the metal structure holds the cushions! I view this as a thought rather than design.

What is one thing that you would like to do but you haven't done yet?

I think I would like to design a church and wine cellar. Many years ago I was engaged to provide drawings for a church but it never materialised. ☺

Cassina furniture is available at Dream Interiors. For more information visit: www.bellini.it and <http://cassina.com/it/designer/mario-bellini>

Cassina Pantheon table

