

A question of succession

Esquire's resident design expert
CYRIL ZAMMIT on the face-off
between heritage and creation



I write this column on my return from Salone del Mobile (Milan Design Week). It's the first full edition (after a 2022 relaunch) and much was uncertain about how many buyers would be able to travel to Italy. The past week brought back all the love and hate I often have visiting the most important design shows on the planet, namely massively expensive mediocre hotels, traffic jams, an overwhelming line up of events, breakfasts, lunches, dinners and the inevitable Bar Basso—where crowds takes over the street, if not the entire square for a spritz.

On the plus side, Milan is a bit of an annual reunion. In one event on the first night, I reunited with my peers from Australia, Austria, Japan, Hong Kong, France, Switzerland, Portugal, and UK all the way to Argentina and Brazil. It was also a place where I met direct neighbours from Saudi Arabia (Ithra) and the UAE (Ithri, Modu by Omar Al Gurg and Kameh) and was left with a proud feeling that our region now holds at the international event.

But these types of gatherings are also good opportunities to (re)evaluate the furniture of the host. What is kitsch and could be discarded? What would be great to keep beyond the sentimental? Of course, the show displayed a plethora of new pieces including carpets, furniture and more, but there was an unshakable feeling that a clash of titans was in the air. The battle of heritage versus creation.

If you attend fairs like PAD in Paris/London or Design Miami, you notice that classic icons of the 20th century are strongly present. It was the same in Milan. Vintage remains strong. But why does it remain so important?

Ultimately, vintage was contemporary design at the time it was released, so I would not confront the two so simply. It has a classical, inspirational touch associated to the values of craftsmanship and time-honoured techniques. It also demonstrates that class is timeless. Look at the Barcelona Chair by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe back in 1929 or even the Eames Louge and Ottoman in 1956. In Milan, ETEL Design was celebrating the seamless and elegant Brazilian design by masters like Joaquim Tenreiro, Jorge Zalszupin, Lina Bo Bardi, Oscar Niemeyer and many more.

But Salone is also a time to discover new talents, new techniques and to consider a greener approach for our planet (perhaps a paradox when traversing the globe for a five-day show). Unsurprisingly, the main

**AI CAN
TRANSFORM
THINGS IN
WAYS THAT
THE PREVIOUS
INDUSTRIAL
REVOLUTION
COULDN'T**

topic was AI and how it could challenge human creativity. While the initial reaction of many is fear (a doubt echoed through the ages during any moment of technological breakthrough), for me, it is a chance to rethink elements of society. AI can help transform major organisations in ways that the previous industrial revolution—which substituted mechanical repetitive movements—simply couldn't. This is because AI will target intellectual jobs; the ones we thought safe, at least for a little while longer.

It's a thrilling moment, when you think about it, with the key to success being the desire to integrate and move forward. The UAE knows this, being the first country in the world to appoint a Minister for Artificial Intelligence way back in 2017. Now it's simply a matter of rest of us embracing a brave new world, too. As Albert Einstein once said: "The measure of intelligence is the ability to change." 🧠

Cyril Zammit is design consultant and design expert based in Dubai. Follow him @cyrilzam; cyrilzammit.com