

Interviews

## Designing Emotions

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Masters of the chandelier, Lolli e Memmoli will present their latest creation at this year's Euroluce. **Helen Fletcher** gets to grips with the duo's inspiration and how working with crystal is an art in itself.

For Italian architects Ivan Lolli and Mario Memmoli, light is space, colour, imagination and emotion. It is the sign of time passing by, a language of symbolic references and philosophical reflections on which the duo has laid the foundations for their personal vision of lighting design.

Since the early 90s, the duo have worked alongside their team of 20 at their 'lighting laboratory' in southern Milan to widen their collection of light sculptures, all defined by the 'Made in Italy' stamp of approval.

"We try to set ourselves apart by reinventing the classic chandelier design, hiding the heavy metal structure in order to convey the visual effect of an object made completely of crystals," Ivan tells **darc**. "The materials gain an unusual light and a softer feeling through our individual manufacturing techniques."

"During the first few years of our career we focussed our attention on the object itself," adds Mario. "We started to develop our own designs while completing our studies at the Polytechnic of Milan. We wanted to revitalise the chandelier's prestige. Over the years, a new trend brought the chandelier back into the limelight and in some of the most prestigious interior design projects it became a bit of a cult object; it was even considered an 'essential' element of a room in some cases."

It was thanks to the keen eye of talent agent Teresa Ginori that Lolli e Memmoli's stunning designs were first noticed; one of their blue crystal chandeliers had been installed as part of a renovation project in Milan. Curious to learn more about their work, Ginori offered the designers the opportunity to work on several more projects and together they developed an exclusive chandelier that would later feature in Moschino showrooms all over the world.

This was the catapult to further success for Lolli e Memmoli, going on to complete lighting projects around the world, including: the Plaza Hotel in New York; the Radisson Hotel in Dusseldorf; the showroom for well-known fashion brand Escada; as well as the famous jeweller Graff Diamonds, which chose their lamps to light up stores all over the world.

"We've also worked on the meeting rooms at Abu Dhabi Ministry of Environment and private houses of several American artists in Los Angeles and New York," says Mario. "It is a rewarding feeling knowing that our creations are a part of some of the most prestigious interior designs in the world."

"Our most recent work in the contract market later became a source of inspiration for the creation of a product specifically designed for this market, which we introduced at Salone del Mobile 2016. It was an extremely large chandelier, designed for the new A.Roma Lifestyle Hotel in Rome. Its exceptional size forced us to design a modular system made of a thin crystal net. We designed it in such a way that it can be customised with endless combinations to fit even wider spaces."

The 'double curl' technique is at the base of Lolli e Memmoli's assembly process for their crystal pendants. An ancient union system of two pendants, made by two small curly spikes in order to create a moving link within the crystals, it is a system as old as the history of crystal pendants themselves. It requires manual skills and specific knowledge that lends a lightness to the object that can't be reached with industrialised systems.

"With crystal we invented a new assembly system using the material as if it were a textile," says Ivan. "sometimes elastic, sometimes as a dropping drapery, or woven in order to create a weft and a warp."

It is difficult to think of another material so suited to light. Crystal pendants are born with the aim of gathering the light and reflecting it in a spectacular way. "The story of crystals is one that is five centuries old and has been passed down to us in the form of heritage techniques and materials," continues Ivan.

"When realising a new model we make use of our artisan experience in order to better emphasise all of the material's characteristics," says Mario. "All parts of the product, from the electrical system and the suspension, to the crystal and metal structure, is manually assembled in our lab, following our own guidelines for every model. The finishing process is made with personalised aesthetic criteria, which makes every lamp different. Every single product has its own identifying mark, reproduced on a hologram and recorded in our personal archive."

Commenting on design trends within the lighting industry and how this shapes their work, Ivan tells **darc**: "Lighting design has changed dramatically over the years. In the '90s, the main light source in a room was being overlooked and interior designers were opting for spot lighting, with the addition of floor and table lamps. The source of light wasn't even being taken into consideration. Today, pendant lighting has become an essential decorative object filling the empty space of minimalist interior designs. Trends will change again though as lighting design looks to blend memory and technological innovation."

And, with a shared passion for travel, particularly to the Far East, Ivan and Mario draw inspiration for their designs from all around. "We are the kind of travellers who will stop in a place and delve deep into its culture and habits of its population," Mario says. "The Far East has become our second home with Bangkok the city we know best, we've also been visiting the Strait of Malacca a lot recently. The contrast between eastern and western culture inspires new projects in us. Sometimes, it's the west creating a new eastern aesthetic and sometimes it is the other way around."

At this year's Euroluce, Lolli e Memmoli will once again be back in the spotlight with their latest pendant lamp U-Line. A unique project, extraordinary and consistent, that came to life thanks to the company's creative approach of turning light into a sensory experience, it is a masterpiece featuring the highest quality manufacturing. Drawn from traditional artistic chandeliers, reinvented and stylised to reflect the enchanting light of gleaming crystal drops, U-Line is a horizontal line floating lightly in space. Crystal drops are freed in random harmony from a dense wire mesh covering the source of light yet revealing, as if by magic, the extraordinary play of light multiplied by a myriad of sparkles within the crystal's clearness.

Available in different lengths and colours the chandelier can be combined in pairs or in compositions of different elements to illuminate large areas, while still conveying its sculptural force. The careful selection of crystals, the uniqueness of each design and the skills of master craftsmen reveal the unparalleled value of the 'Made in Italy' stamp.

With one eye on tradition and the other on the future, the work of Lolli e Memmoli offers a new, erudite interpretation of the past, transforming it without destroying its original character.

