

Decorating Spaces With Passion

Posted on



He was born in Cesena, a city in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy. He is an Interior Designer by profession. His designs promise a lifestyle unrivalled in sophistication. His “Romagna” roots are strongly evident in his neoclassical approach to design. Having studied Architecture at the University of Florence, Alvin Grassi began his career in the world of fashion. He soon discovered his inclination towards interior design and stabilised himself as an internationally renowned interior designer. Marie Claire Maison Italia defined him as the “Illuminated Visionary” last year.

Words Kulanthi Silva

How would you describe your approach to design?

Fine design is not only about colour, surface and decoration; even though all these play a vital role in creating a space that is worth living. It involves absorbing yourself in the world you are going to create and paying attention to finer details.

It is a sensitive process. Each step of this process has to be developed with passion. If not, regardless how expensive and exclusive the decoration is going to be, it will be a waste of imagination and the expected transformation will not come through.

In this process, a series of re-arrangements will come into light; the real task is not to let the original characteristics get overshadowed. The essence of the design must be preserved.

Today, a common mistake is to draw lines between the colour and the material. In my opinion, it makes no sense. In my designs, colour and material are given equal importance and thought simultaneously. It is a mistake to divide the colours into two distinct classes; cold and hot. The secret is to educate your eye to distinguish the warm white and a cold one; and go from white to other colours.

You have equal capacity to play with the material as much as you do with colours. It is the most fun part of my work.

Knowledge on using shapes, colours and materials comes handy in interior designing, but the true talent lies when one is aware and can identify the energy created, when all these elements get together.

That is my approach.

You have done quite a few major projects around the world. How do you get each of your projects to have its own personality?

My clients come to me to experience something different; something unique. For me, my creations are living beings. I design them with so much devotion and invest my feelings in them.

When the designing of Palazzo Barbarigo in Venice came to me, I reconfigured the palace with a feminine vision. I wanted to give the palace a feminine mood, a ladylike charm and a second life. I designed the palace with sinuous silhouette. The palace has 66 rooms, bathrooms and common areas.

I set the mood. The experience differs from person to person. My strong imaginations help me to live a different avatar each time I work on something; and that reflects on my work.

What has influenced you early in your career to be who you are today?

I started my career in the world of fashion with Alberta Ferretti. Fashion has a great impact on my work and my thinking. I was influenced by several audacious individuals. I learnt and experienced the best. I grew up to be a muse. I appreciate innovation with good taste. My poetic mood is acquired by many experiences I have encountered and readings. It is important to have an authentic attitude towards life.

I left the pret-a-porter world to become an Interior Designer. I have been fortunate enough to collaborate with prestigious companies such as Visionnaire, Roberto Cavalli Home, Gianfranco Ferre Home, Santo Passaia and many more.

Today, I have my own studio and my ideas come to life under my own label.

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What has inspired you lately?

I try to find inspiration in everything and I am fortunate enough to be inspired often. Colours of nature, aroma of certain food, my thirst for research, travelling, church, my own home and most importantly from people I meet in my day-to-day life, inspire me.

Which project has given you the most satisfaction so far?

All my work gives me satisfaction. I don't stop till I am satisfied. Two of the projects I really enjoyed working on were one particular restaurant in Monte Carlo and one private residence in Chengdu in China.

Do you have a particular visual language or material palette?

I have a proclivity for mink and elegant tones of cream and taupe. My choices are influenced by art deco, Victorian London and neoclassical movements. I like things far from austere, a little frivolous and sometimes unusual. Feathers, fringes, plumes play a part too.

What are you working on right now?

I have selected few exclusive clients to work with this year. I only accept a limited number of projects at a time, because my work depends solely on my imagination and I do not prefer to exhaust myself.

Do you have any rules to your designs?

There is a fine line between perfection and banality. The rule is not to overstep this line. The moment you feel that you are about to, you need to look for something new and crazy that allows you to distort the whole situation by adding irrational and exciting elements.

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Is there a place which you find yourself continuously drawn to because of the beautiful interior?

There are many places I love to be and just breathe. It is not fair to name one.

How does fashion influence your work?

For me, the space I am decorating is like a model to be dressed or a canvas to be painted. My projects are like runway shows in which protagonists recite accordingly. The space consists of melodies. They should be played harmoniously.

How do you start your day?

I wake up at seven in the morning and go for a ten kilometre run to Porta Venezia in Milan. This helps me to attract energy and inspiration. After this, I go to my studio in Via Monte Nero 55. Most of the time, I am in the move; to a different city or a country for work. My iPad and my iPhone are my best friends.

You have good fashion sense; clean cut and sleek. Please explain.

Thank you, but I don't believe this is true (laughs). I have a "uniform" style, which simplifies my life. My Dsquared2 blue jeans, tailor made white shirt, Dolce & Gabbana blue jacket and a skinny tie are what I wear regularly. Lately, I have come to love suits; this reminds me of my real age.

You smell very good and it's very unique. What is your secret?

Wow! (laughs) I love the smell of patchouli. I get my own perfume made with patchouli by a Parisian perfumer. I love it.

Tell us how you feel about being Italian.

I am truly an Italian and honoured to be one, but I believe that the most interesting opportunity in life is to be mingled with other cultures. Every nationality has millions of amazing facets and I love to steal fragments from those facets.

