



SPOTLIGHT: **MASSIMO IOSA GHINI** | by Elizabeth Minchilli



The Bologna, Italy, house belonging to the architect Massimo Iosa Ghini has its original 1930s-facade in front and in the rear, an all-glass exterior that lets the light flood in. All photos courtesy of Iosa Ghini Associati

THINK ITALIAN ARCHITECTURE AND THE MASSIVE STONES OF THE COLISEUM,

the crumbling ruins of Pompeii or the soaring cupola of St. Peter's spring to mind. On the other hand, think Italian design and the adjectives switch gears to sleek, fast and polished.

Architect Massimo Iosa Ghini has been one of the leaders of the Italian design scene for the last 20 years, and his visual vocabulary breaks the bounds of Italian tradition to encompass a new set of standards that speak of novelty and excitement.

A visit to Iosa Ghini's offices in downtown Bologna only emphasizes the contradictions inherent in bringing contemporary elements to a history-bound country. The massive, crenellated Palazzo Pepoli Vecchio, dating to the 14th century, is located on a narrow street in the heart of the city's historic center. Yet ancient bricks and porticoes are left behind once you step inside the building and enter the Iosa Ghini studio, whose sleek lines, glass walls and spot-lit cases of design mockups could easily be those of a designer's loft in Berlin or New York.

Massimo Iosa Ghini is hard to define. An architect? Yes, and a trained one, responsible for such well-known projects as the Ferrari Factory store in Serravalle Scrivia, Italy, and the car company's stores worldwide; the Alitalia departure at various airports; and the sleek chain of Superga shoe stores. A designer? Certainly, working with big-gun Italian furniture producers like Moroso, Flou and Cassina to produce highly acclaimed couches and chairs. "Actually, I am a draftsman," he proclaims as we sit down to chat in his office. "While I was studying architecture at the Politecnico University in Milan, what I was really focusing on was drawing. I loved to draw and was fascinated with comic books. After graduating, I started working with fashion designers like Versace and Ferré, producing elaborate, detailed drawings of their collections."



When renovating the IBM Software Executive Briefing Center (2010) in Rome, Iosa Ghini took inspiration from the company's classic striped logo.



The St. Petersburg Tower, 2011, in a new mixed-use business district of Moscow.



Iosa Ghini and the Bertrand desk (1987), one of his best-known designs for the Memphis group, the seminal Italian design collective.

Those drawings, which were eventually shown in an exhibition in Milan in 1986, caught the eye of Ettore Sottsass, a founder of the Memphis Group, the Italian design and architecture collaborative famous for its colorful, postmodern products like Sottsass's Carlton bookcase and Masanori Umeda's Tawaraya boxing ring bed. "It was Ettore who encouraged me to join the group, but with a very specific idea: that I make a drawing that would eventually turn into an object," Iosa Ghini says. "For me it was usually the other way around, the object came first, then the drawing. This inversion gave me huge freedom as a designer, which continues to make my work incredibly fluid, and quite different from what anyone else is doing."

Iosa Ghini's best-known work with Memphis includes the Otello chair (1986) and Bertrand desk (1987), which both display the curved lines and sense of movement that made his furniture stand out from some of the other, more blocky Memphis creations.

The thing that probably defines my work the most is that I don't produce objects for the 'market,' " he explains. "My ideas come first, and usually respond to a specific, personal experience. In other words I'm creating an object for myself. And I think that this approach is what accounts for my success. That and the happy fact that the public usually ends up liking what I do." As an example, Iosa Ghini created couches and chairs for Moroso that started out as abstract sketches but developed into his popular Newtone and Dinamic collections.

The interiors of the new Ferrari showrooms that have begun opening around the world are completely designed by Iosa Ghini (there are locations in Los Angeles, Beijing, Hong Kong, New York and

Bahrain). Even though the stores are each designed to suit the location, they all display common graphic elements that Iosa Ghini used to translate Ferrari's racing personality into architectural terms. Asymmetrical, fluid surfaces greet visitors and seemingly pull them into the cherry-red interiors as fast as a 458 Italia. "They're the perfect client," he admits, "They appreciate what I do, and give me complete freedom and confidence to produce unique interiors that reflect their spirit." Iosa Ghini used a similar sense of movement and flow in creating the Executive Briefing Center for IBM in Rome. He gave the interiors ethereal white surfaces, repetitive recessed lighting and technologically inspired decorative themes, which create an overall luxurious and somewhat cerebral feel that reflects the company's power and success.



The Newtone sofa for the furniture producer Moroso (1989).



The New York City showroom for Ferrari (2010), which Iosa Ghini calls the "perfect client."

Domestic clients and private houses? Not so much. "It's difficult, with the incredibly personal way I work, to collaborate with a private client who also has his own ideas," says Iosa Ghini. His iconic work for furniture companies like Cassina and Poltrona Frau make their way into homes all over the world, but as far as designing a private residence, his most recent work in this area has been focused on his own new house in Bologna.

Located in a more modern section of the city, the 1930s building has been completely restructured. The deco-style facade was deemed a landmark and remains the same, but the back wall was blown out, and is now completely glassed in, flooding the home with light. As Milena Mussi, the architect's wife and business partner, shows me around the house, the surprising marriage of intellectually inspired abstract design and true comfort is apparent in the style and furnishings and overall feel. And so another aspect of his design process is revealed.



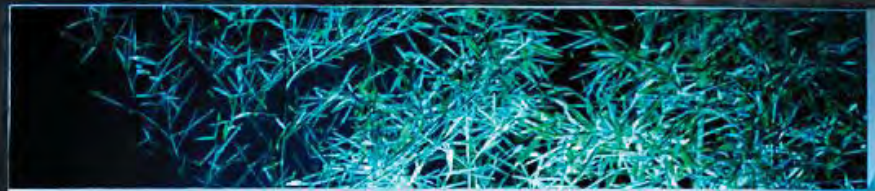
Iosa Ghini's home blends abstract features, practical comforts and sustainable design.



While we were working on this project there were many elements that we designed from scratch: the fireplace, the doors, the windows and other things like lighting, fixtures, et cetera," she explains. "Almost all of them are now in production. So objects that were born of a very specific and personal need have been transformed into something that we've turned over to the marketplace."

While many of Iosa Ghini's projects are obviously luxurious, he is also very conscious of sustainability. For instance, the indoor pool that stretches the length of his home would seem completely hedonistic until you realize that it forms an integral part of the house's heating system, acting as a thermal cogenerator while storing heat that is used throughout the building.

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The Cannettata lamp for the Italian lighting company De Majo (2011).

A rendering of Iosa Ghini's solar-powered monorail, nearly completed, which will connect Bologna's new train station to the airport.



Iosa Ghini's newest project is one he's very proud of. "I've had my entire career in Bologna, but it's only now they've finally commissioned me to do something," he says, laughing. The design is for a solar-powered shuttle that will travel from the soon-to-be-completed central train station in Bologna (designed by Arata Isozaki) to the airport. The tracks, which stretch just over three miles, will run through three stations, each also designed by Iosa

Ghini and will traverse an unspoiled (up until now) agricultural landscape. "Rather than drop something in with no relationship to the setting, I've tried not only to make it blend in, but to take advantage of the southern exposure in terms of sustainability," says Iosa Ghini. Energy-converting photovoltaic panels line the south side of the rails and a local agricultural university is helping to cover the platforms in a living green shade.

A large, stylized blue letter 'W' graphic, composed of several parallel lines, serving as a drop cap for the first word of the text.

hile viewing a model of this project, I note that it looks more like a sculpture than a building. "Yes," agrees Iosa Ghini, "Even when my projects are purely architectural, and must have a real and dependable function, they end up looking like abstract objects. That sums up my work exactly."



Iosa Ghini, architect, designer and draftsman. Photo by Elizabeth Minichilli