

FROM THE PENCILS TO THE PENCIL POT

Beirut is awash with creative talent and Milan wants a piece.

WORDS: Lucy Knight

Perched on a chintz sofa in a makeshift, typically old English sitting room, in the centre of the Eklekta store in Corniche el Nahr, Beirut, Italian architect and designer Dante Donegani explains why he moved from one to the other, "At the time I graduated it was a bad

moment, in my opinion." It was the early 80s and a degree in architecture was fast proving to be the training for something else entirely – product design. For Donegani, also, the training was too constricting and not open to any of the changes he could see around him in society. At that time there were no schools of design, only fine art and architecture were on offer. So, taking the lead from his own 'gurus', Donegani moved over to product design.

Following in the footsteps of designers like Vico Magistretti and Achille Castiglioni, he proved yet again that his path was not an uncommon

one, for in Italy, architecture and product design go hand in hand. "Magistretti explained to me," says Donegani, "that in post-war Italy he was building modern homes but trying to furnish them was impossible, so he designed the objects to go inside them." The famous Italian architect and critic Ernesto Rogers succinctly described how his

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countrymen approached the discipline, 'From spoon to the town', - if you do one, you can most certainly do the other.

So, it is from the design path that Donegani has rarely strayed and all the while, hand in hand with his design partner, Giovanni Lauda. For the past twenty years, after meeting at design school in 1986, the two have worked side by side with their company D&L Studio. Designing exhibition spaces and setting up trade fairs, they have also designed home and office ware for companies including Rotaliana and Luceplan. An example of their penchant for the simplistic and tidied away, is the 'Passepartout' for Edra, a contemporary furniture design company, >



Donegani and Lauda's
Passepartout.



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:
The pair's famous Multipot;
Donegani and Lauda sharing
brainwaves; The Pergolato,
a result of their research
project for a 'living kitchen'.



› now on display at the Triennale di Milano and San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art. "When you work in a team you can verify everything. And for me, the idea of designing anything without Giovanni is difficult," says Donegani.

Like so many other great partnerships and friendships, it all began at college - Lauda and Donegani became friends at the Domus Academy during the 80s. Founded in 1982 it was the first post-graduate school offering a wide variety of design specific courses. And it was on behalf of the academy that Donegani, now the Chair of their design department, found himself sitting on the chintz sofa in Beirut - encouraging the budding design talent of Lebanon to make their way to Milan.

The ease with which architects move from the discipline to product design seems indicative of an importance we are increasingly placing on items and pieces, rather than those that house them. For Donegani, the words of one of Domus' founders, Andrea Branzi, ring true more today than ever before: "The modern city is defined by merchandise". And in Italy this has been embraced, with Donegani saying, "It's common to see the name of an architect on a product, and not just from Italy, from all over the world." So, no reason then why some Lebanese names shouldn't be finding themselves onto some chaise longues and lamps. ◆



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