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Pushing Back Boundaries

Federico Delrosso tells us more about his life, his work and his design philosophy.

Born in Biella, in the northern Italian region of Piedmont, Federico Delrosso graduated from Polytechnic University of Milan in 1996.

His passion for construction and materials dates back to his childhood, when he spent a lot of time in the laboratory of his maternal grandfather, who was a millworker and used to build wooden models for the manufacturing industry: for him, play has always meant building things.

As soon as he graduated in surveying, Delrosso started working with his father, a surveyor, where he acquired experience in the building sector, on-site practices, building regulations, public and private commissions, construction solutions, and knowledge of restrictions tied to the conservation of historical and listed buildings. After five years of this hands-on activity in the field, when his path seemed already set, he eventually veered off into the direction of the Polytechnic University of Milan and soon after his graduation he began his career as an architect. In 2001 he founded his own studio in Biella and three years later, in 2004, he opened a new space in Milan; then he expanded his presence in the United States in 2012, by opening two reference points in Miami and in New York. In 2014 he has been nominated as inaugural member of the IIDA (International Interior Design Association) of Chicago which selected him as member of jury of its Global Excellence Awards 2015.

Federico Delrosso is frequently invited to international prestigious awards as member of jury, such as APIDA Asia Pacific Interior Design Awards in 2013 and Eurasian Prize Russia in 2014, and to design conferences around the world to be part of the main speakers.

In 2014 he was invited to Mexico City as a main speaker at the ELA/ EDI Expo Design Interiorismo where he held a conference with the title "Moving the Boundaries" and unveiled "Domus Mediterranea", a new concept of single-family home. In the same year he took part to the Biennale of Architecture in Moscow and Construye & Remodela in Ecuador, where he gave lectures with the title "Light and Architecture". Later in 2015 he has been one of the guests at Leaders in Design MENA in Dubai. In 2016 he has been invited as a member of the advisory board and keynote speaker at The Economic Times Architecture and Design Summit in Mumbai, India

and gave a lecture at the 4th Moscer design meeting, held in Istanbul, Turkey. The same year he also took part to the XXI Triennale International Exhibition. Design after Design in Milan, with the exhibition Spazi residuali.

"I am inspired when I am traveling—walking in cities like New York, Istanbul and Milan, or simply driving. I store in my mind what I see and when I get immersed in a new project, I draw out inspiration from what I have seen and start designing. I believe in following your gut instinct."

His first monograph, "Pushing the Boundaries" has been published by Skira in 2013.

"Pushing back boundaries" is a metaphor that aptly describes my lifework and my approach to everything I do. For me, it means constantly seeking that special thrill you feel when you break new ground and overcome your limitations in a given situation. I reckon this urge comes from my passion for racing and the pursuit of competitive sports throughout my life, which I basically transposed to my work and daily activities: it's not just the competitive side – it has helped me grow a sense of responsibility for what I do, and taught me to be truly free to find my limits and take on the risks."

Federico Delrosso Architects, as a studio, work in a very wide range of types of architectural projects, residential, commercial and also temporary exhibitions, always expanding their expertise internationally. They also design furniture and lighting collections, some of which received national and international awards, for various Italian and international companies, including Henry Timi, Davide Groppi and CC-tapis.

Federico Delrosso's early experience in the field has consolidated a talent and a distinctive sensibility for spaces perceived in his projects as an intangible quality, which he calls "the emotional fourth dimension". In his interiors as well as in his architectural projects, the masterful relationship between three-dimensional spaces and the elaboration of surfaces results in a sense of pleasant balance, a typical element found in fine architecture.

"Architecture can elevate the spirit of a place. My design style is very clean and clear, and not



FEDERICO
DELROSSO
ARCHITECTS

too "minimal": I design for those who share my philosophy of luxury. For me, it's not about using expensive materials or following trends. Luxury is the feeling of being somewhere else without feeling isolated. I believe in creating private spaces that exude a sense of intimacy with the surrounding of people, cities, and nature. I collaborate with clients and artists, iterating ideas until we are confident that we have created a space that captures emotion and tranquillity. A space must have its own soul."

The project for his own studio in Milan has been selected in 2012 as one of the finalists of the prestigious "Best of the Year Award" organized by the American Interior Design magazine as was the Notime restaurant interiors in Montecarlo, Monaco in 2008.

Mima lamp (2007, for Davide Groppi) entered the 21st Compasso d'Oro in 2008 and has been added to the ADI's historical collection.

Möebius collection (Henry Timi), Palpebra lamp (Davide Groppi) and Trapezio kitchen (Henry Timi) are amongst the finalists of the Best of Year Awards by Interior Design magazine (USA).

Federico Delrosso's work is predicated on a keen practical sense, in which function is not the preordaining factor but instead is always preceded by the aesthetic priorities that determine the stylistic perception at both compositional and global levels.

"When I hit upon what I feel is the perfect solution for a project, I get a sudden flash of euphoria, only for a fraction of a second, but intense enough. That is what I call reaching the threshold, the one which is linked to a given moment or context, which fuses my previous experiences and to some extent annuls them, creating room for diverse new opportunities to be reconnoitred. As for designing objects – which differ from architecture with its set of building norms, structural parameters, geographical features, orientation rules – the act is certainly less limited and allows for greater creative flexibility. I'm interested in pinpointing the outer threshold as I reason through the technological and technical implications, or the properties of the materials I'm using, and once this is determined I then set about defining the forms and functions involved."

The linear geometry is predominant in his work: it reflects more a rational than an abstract background, in which the extreme compactness of the outcome is a combination between a keen determination of reaching and stretching boundaries and generating surprise – in most cases – by the quest for simplicity as an answer to complexity.

Light plays a fundamental role in his projects, a feature meticulously assessed in all its natural variations throughout the course of the day, and the interplay between light and shade when the lighting is artificial.

"To me, true architecture must not restrict itself to the outer surfaces of a house, but should involve inside and outside seamlessly – like a Möbius strip. In my projects the building exteriors always find their "natural" counterpart in the interiors. But rather than a mere corresponding balance between mass and void, I like to explore with two basic interfaces: light and natural materials. I like to work with fewer materials, such as concrete, wood, iron, and stone, and focus on natural finishings where everything is integrated with natural light."

Far from being nostalgic, Federico Delrosso's work affirms a solid sense of the here and now. It manifests his open conviction in the contemporary, which means connecting and constantly merging the things that surround him. He transforms signs and stylistic elements, repurposing and revamping them, applying a requisite global outlook that is more concrete than speculative, which he adopts to dominate and visualise an idea. While free of dominant influences, his personal design trajectory betrays a deference to the modern masters – with Gio Ponti, Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Le Corbusier in the fore – whose idea of the architect was someone who designed "from the spoon to the town", and whose work pivoted constantly on an inquiry into space, which was inherited by Richard Meier.

Federico Delrosso's lamp designs and furniture were originally conceived for specific places. They were born as part of his projects for interiors, yet this does not deprive them of autonomy and aptness in other context. Every object is tied to an architectural project and every form could itself be a piece of architecture.

"What makes a construction special, as with a natural or metropolitan place, is not the architecture per se, but that alchemy that emerges between the constructed space itself, those who inhabit it, and the person who conceived it. A house is truly special when it is independent, that is, when its soul is visible in the details and in the complementary outcomes of the architect's contribution and the expectations of the client. The spirit of the place changes according to who dwells there and lives from memories. Only when this delicate balance is reached can a special place come into being, a place able to transmit the diverse degrees of relation with the context. People need to identify with their own home, to establish a sense of belonging, and appreciate its protective aura. A home is basically an exoskeleton that must provide protection in both a literal sense and an emotional one, a place whose function is primarily to foster human interrelations, and hence also family bonds. This is why it is important to seek that delicate and subtle balance which binds a given space to its occupants."