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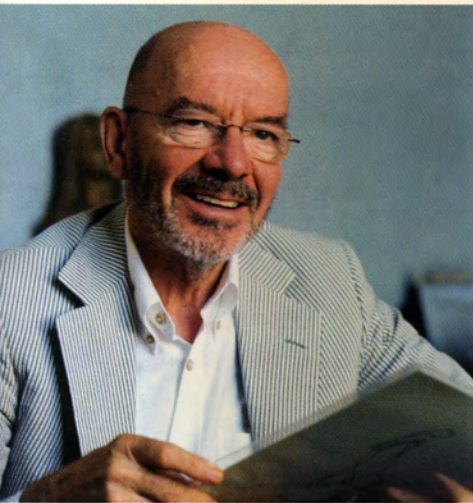
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INTERIORS ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

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PARK + ASSOCIATES' NEW OUTLOOK

KERRY HILL ARCHITECTS | HOLLAND ROAD HOUSE BY TEH JOO HENG ARCHITECTS
VICTORIA THEATRE AND CONCERT HALL BY W ARCHITECTS | WILD ROCKET BY PRODUCT



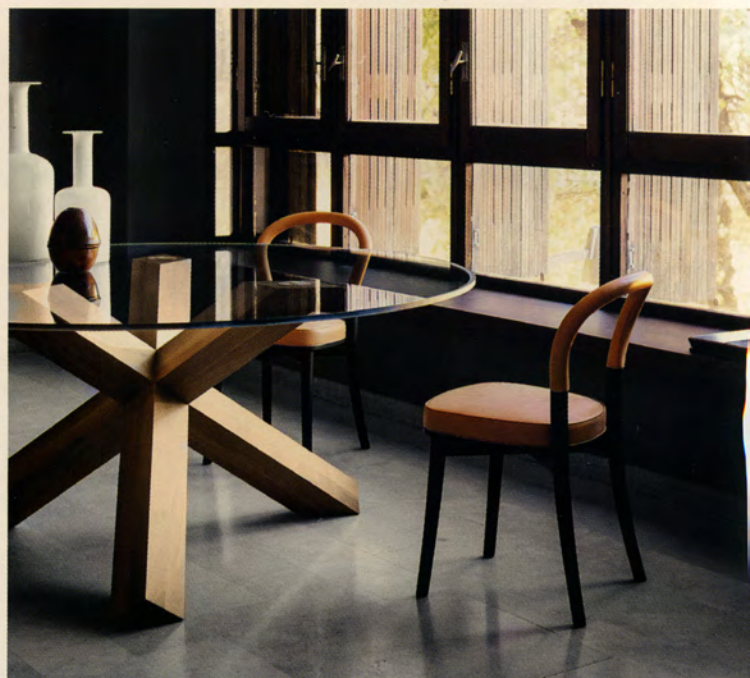
TEXT » STEPHANIE PEH
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EXPERIMENTAL PROCESS

MARIO BELLINI'S CREATIVE PROCESS IS FUELLED BY A MIND THAT NEVER CEASES TO QUESTION. HIS INNOVATIVE DESIGNS FOR CASSINA ARE A CASE IN POINT.



Top left: At age 79, Mario Bellini is still curious and questioning



Bottom Left: The *Cab* chair for Cassina (1977) has leather upholstery zipped over a steel frame

Right: The *La Rotonda* table for Cassina (1976) references architectural structures with diagonal timber supports

MARIO BELLINI was dressed in his signature look – a grey-striped blazer, crisp white shirt neatly tucked into black pants, and a tan leather belt. The celebrated Italian architect had spent his day touring our sunny island. This was officially his first visit (discounting the hundreds of times he had passed through), and he seemed satisfied. Having designed renowned architecture worldwide, from Europe to Australia, Japan, the United Arab Emirates and the United States, Bellini has been telling stories of cities through his profound creations since the 1980s. “We saw preservation fighting with new buildings – I am happy to see that Singapore has decided not to destroy its roots. Buildings in the city are like furniture in our houses. Layer by layer, they tell us, and our future generations, how we lived through evolutions of successes and failures as citizens,” he commented with regard to Singapore.

Despite having accomplished just about everything an architect would ever dream of, and beyond, with eight Compasso d’Oro prizes under his belt, dream collaborations with the world’s most cutting edge brands, and works gracing the permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Bellini (aged 79) still believes in the constant questioning of the impossible. When asked about his relentless motivation, he explains, “Curiosity is the spring that moves humankind. When an engineer tells me that something is impossible, I will ask, ‘Why is it impossible?’ and we will discuss. This is not maniacal but functional behaviour because it takes us further.”

To Bellini, seeds of inception can be expressed through primitive means. Hand sketching since he was at a tender age, he has never stopped working with his hands. The Department of Islamic Arts at the Louvre, for example, was first designed by Bellini using a piece of paper and a flexible metal material, before the conversion to a parametric format. “We use technology as means of study, but we do not glorify it,” he says. However, for a period of time in his life, Bellini was dedicated to designing machines. He eventually moved away from this sector, explaining: “Machines perish after a year or two, so why should I lose my life designing them? I went on to designing furniture because it belongs to our history. A chair is a chair since three thousand years ago. They have not been invented by designers or architects.”

His love for objects of humankind is apparent in his longstanding collaboration with furniture heavyweight Cassina. Having met Cesare Cassina in 1963, a young Bellini had taken his Compasso d’Oro-winning table to Cassina and was invited to design for the coveted brand. During the 1960s and ’70s, Bellini worked closely with the research and development department – an independent republic that existed outside of the company, bearing extensive capabilities in metal cutting, welding, woodworking, foam sculpting and more. The sky was the limit and Bellini did not waste the opportunity. He was able to execute the most original of ideas that would become important innovations, even until today.

“I was designing for Cassina without having the company on my shoulders, telling me what to do. Nobody asked me to design a chair, of course, not even a leather chair because the idea itself did not exist then. I remembered the saddle on a

racing bike that was very strong and I said, ‘Let’s use leather.’ It took not a few minutes but many following days and weeks. And a chair was born,” he shares. The *Cab* chair has sold more than half a million pieces. His architecture-inspired tables for Cassina, *La Rotonda*, *La Basilica* and *Pantheon*, also achieved iconic status as storytellers of important processes and moments of innovation.

Setting aside his impressive credentials as an architect, designer, curator, editor and teacher, Bellini is an inspiration himself – an incredibly grounded individual who does not believe in taking the easy way out. “Most of the time, I start from nothing and then I do it by doing it,” he says. “There is the involvement of trying, touching and doing through experiment, and this is my design process. Trial and error.”

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“CURIOSITY IS THE SPRING THAT MOVES HUMANKIND.”

• MARIO BELLINI

The *La Basilica* table for Cassina (1978) has stave-like legs in groups of three or four