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Mauritzio Roberto

Design Ambassador

By: Hind El Ramly

Next year, Milan's infamous Salone Internazionale del Mobile will celebrate 50 years. The International Furniture fair, also referred to as Milan Design Week, is the largest trade fair in the world dedicated to interiors and decoration in general; exhibiting the latest trends and innovations in the field from all over the world. Since 2001, there has been a new kid on the block: Zona Tortona by DesignPartners, a design event which has been attracting thousands of visitors during Milan Design Week. FLAIR caught up with Maurizio Roberto, CEO of DesignPartners to discuss the exciting new project his company has cooking for Cairo and of course, the world's hottest design event, Zona Tortona.

DesignPartners uses creativity, design, strategic thinking, and groundbreaking content to drive business and establish creative economies. With a fresh and innovative approach, DesignPartners aim to partner with clients to find the most appropriate strategic and creative solution for their business and the most engaging way of reaching their audience, whether through using one of their cutting-edge proprietary platforms or something totally bespoke and new. DesignPartners is uniquely dynamic, internationally-inspired and offer lifestyle-focused design expertise born of Italian roots and a collaborative and open-minded way of working.

What brings you to Cairo?

I was approached by the Egyptian Furniture Export Council (EFEC) The Egyptian Furniture and the Industrial Modernisation Centre to come to Cairo and launch an innovative event, an urban design event similar to Milan to take place during the same time of Furnex (Egypt's International Furniture and Home Furnishings Trade Fair from June 3 to 7 June) It would include mostly local products aiming to give the event a local flavour.

What about international exhibitors?

The event will include international items selected very carefully to match with local products. We have been reviewing over 100 companies for months in order to decide and choose which ones to feature in Cairo. We will narrow them down to nearly 30 companies.

What is the aim of +20 Egypt Design?

We would like to showcase local projects in an innovative way. Also we see this as an opportunity to put Cairo on the international map of design because it has a mix of tradition and innovation. We want this to become part of a global, multi project of ours that promotes the exchange of business, cultural, as well as social exchange and diversity.

Another aim is that we want to export with us our way of work, our methodology. This will really help Egyptian companies be more on the world radar in terms of design because we will help them with having a strategy.





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Why was Egypt of interest for DesignPartners?

Egypt is very interesting. It is really evolving quite quickly, especially in the field of design. We are here to work on that and develop that aspect even more. There is also so much culture, which is good and interesting as well. Don't forget that design is also a global language and that it is about functionality. We all need design no matter where we are in the world.

Besides +20 Egypt Design, what are DesignPartners' latest projects?

We have upcoming events in India and China, both very developing and booming countries. Now is a good moment for us to be pioneers. We are investing in our abilities and investing in design in developing places that will only get bigger and bigger.

What are your projections for this year's Zona Tortona?

Of course, I'm excited about Zona Tortona. Salone del Mobile might be bigger than us, but we are definitely sexier. When we started it in 2001, no one was thinking of this event. As years went by it became more and more exciting. Intellectual vendors started displaying their work in Zona Tortona and the number of international visitors kept increasing dramatically, which led to Zona Romana. Now more 'off Salone' design events are taking place. With Zona Tortona we became leaders and pioneers. We have filled a gap that was much needed in the market. Next year is our 10th anniversary and we are going to plan something huge to suit the event. As always, this year and the next we will dedicate to an "Out of the box" idea.

For example this year we have a very interesting film about Zona Tortona that will be played in cinemas. It is a documentary titled "Seven Days of Design" which demystifies Milan Design Week. It was filmed during last year's event and features some of the most celebrated designers including Marcel Wanders, Arik Levy, Dror Benshetrit, Maartan Baas, Matali Crasset, Gabriele Pezzini and Karim Rashid, sharing their opinions on the current mood and their attitudes towards contemporary design.

How did DesignPartners make the move from Milan to international arenas?

The success of Zona Tortona was great. When the Financial Times dedicate a whole feature to your project, people tend to notice. Our first international project, Meatpacking Design will be in May in New York's Meatpacking district. Next is Istanbul Design Week in September, and there will be an event in Istanbul. Each of these events is different because each has their own local flavours and very varying participants. We will also launch design events in Moscow and Shanghai.

What is the best thing about your job?

I love my job! It is a lot of hard work. I spent almost 15 months flying from place to place, which makes it a particular kind of life, but I still enjoy it all very much.

