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PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Designer and architect Achille Salvagni's globally coveted work draws on a philosophy that looks both forward and backward

Achille Salvagni is a designer as well as an architect; a student of both Roman classicism and Swedish modernism; a man who describes his dress sense as 'classic with audacity'; and a gourmet 'obsessed with the quality of food' who 'can't eat rubbish'. Perhaps it is these discerning characteristics that have led to commissions from the global super-rich on projects ranging from yachts to furniture, and to exhibitions of his pieces everywhere from New York and Miami to London, Paris and Mumbai. Or perhaps it's Salvagni's different way of looking at design that appeals to his clients – for example, he considers yachts as pieces of furniture in their own right.

Whatever the key factors may be, they are working. Salvagni is a unique and sought-after talent in the worlds of both architecture and interior design. How did he achieve this? The answer lies in his family history. 'My father was a general contractor who specialised in wineries,' he recalls. 'I used to go on sites with him and smell the dust of concrete, steel and wood. I probably was four years old when my father gave me a hammer, a screwdriver and some tools to work with. I remember going to bed and putting these tools under the pillow.'

To be a good architect, it is crucial to appreciate not only the function of a material but also its innate beauty and potential – insight which usually comes with age and experience. Because of his childhood experience of construction, Salvagni's desire to become an architect began at an early age; he cannot remember a time when this ambition wasn't abundantly clear to him.

Despite having fostered Salvagni's desire to construct and create, however, his family and their business were initially an obstacle. His father was the owner of a large company and Salvagni

was expected to take up the mantle and move the company forward. This pressure was removed by the clarity of his ambition and his refusal to join the family business was one of several key decisions that contributed to the architect's success. He says, 'I always told my father, "Listen – I will be an architect and I won't join you. I'm sorry, but this is the situation."'

The next step in forming his unique design aesthetic came after Salvagni completed his undergraduate studies in Rome. He was offered grants to study at both Oxford and the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm: the former a classicist's paradise, steeped in elaborate architecture, history and potentially stifling tradition; the latter an emerging hub for 20th-century design and somewhere Salvagni saw as 'fresh, new and plain.' He chose the latter.

In Stockholm, Salvagni was impressed by naturalistic constructivism, as well as 20th-century modernism. Adopting these philosophies, and combining them with the classicism of his native Italy, would prove central to his work. 'I started to approach architecture with an international perspective, because looking to Italy from Sweden made me completely change the perspective,' he explains. 'All my contemporaries in Rome used to see architecture, restoration and design in the same way. I had the privilege to look at it differently.'

Salvagni admires architects from the 1920s and 30s, who, he says, were able to 'foresee the future without denying the past' – he believes that many architectural movements fail due to their refusal to reckon with history in their attempt to approach the present or future.

His personal design philosophy is a combination of his own experiences, the experiences of others and his ambition. Faced with a problem, he thinks

INSTAGRAM: @ACHILLESALVAGNI





about what his architectural forbears would have done, draws on his own knowledge and also considers what the ideal outcome would be. 'These three elements together create my personal story, which is never the same, because every time there's a new result,' he says.

When Salvagni was asked by a client to work on the interior of a yacht, he was reluctant. If he failed, it would cost his client a great deal of money – unlike residential buildings, which can have their interiors remodelled if necessary, an unsuccessful yacht will lose its value entirely. But with this great pressure came spectacular results. Salvagni's work won a prestigious award at the 2007 World Yacht Trophies in Cannes and his career skyrocketed. His yacht designs became coveted across the globe and led him into a new field entirely. 'From yachts, I moved on to furniture,' he says. 'A yacht is a big piece of furniture because you've got wooden ceilings, wooden walls, wooden floors. You need to create this box with craftsmanship and with attention to detail, as if you were building a small cabinet.'

Salvagni's furniture has made an enormous impact among connoisseurs of interior design. His limited-edition and one-off pieces are, in many ways, the summation of his philosophy – looking simultaneously to the past, present and future.

His interior shows now take place across the globe and each three-month exhibition allows Salvagni to test out the environment and pieces he has created. He is currently balancing 15 of these shows. It is this forward-marching tenacity, coupled with his diverse influences and output, that makes him such a unique talent. WW

Discover Achille Salvagni at the PAD London art design fair, Berkeley Square, W1, 1-7 October 2018, pad-fairs.com.

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ABOVE: ACHILLE SALVAGNI SPIDER BLUE (2018) SIX-ARM CHANDELIER IN 24-CARAT GOLD-PLATED ANTIQUED-FINISH CAST BRONZE, OCEAN BLUE PATINATED CAST BRONZE AND BACK-LIT ONYX

BELOW: ACHILLE SALVAGNI SAHARA SHOWCASE

