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Salvagni designed the interiors of the superyacht Aurora for shipbuilders Rossinavi



by Italian firm Dedar, chosen for their deep roots to the Italian arts. A Laguna Spider chandelier hangs overhead, its stalactite-like glass droplets suspended at the ends of burnt orange-patina arms. Murano glass features throughout and engraved reliefs show inspiration taken from Phoenician art.

As I talk to Salvagni, my eyes stray to a 200-year-old portrait mounted on the wall behind him. This, he explains, is of an ancestor on his mother's side. The painting was placed there to reflect the spirit of Venetian interiors. 'I wanted to recreate a small touch of an intimate Venetian palace, so I moved it from Rome to here,' he says.

'My designs often refer to a historic moment or a connection to the past,' he elaborates, 'but it's always a subtle connection – whispered. It's like modernity needs to have roots in the past for it to become timeless.'

This perspective can be seen in his previous projects, such as the science fiction movie-inspired Apollo collection,

and, more recently, in this Laguna collection, which was unveiled in the autumn. Laguna epitomises the approach Salvagni takes in fusing modernity with tradition. Venetian-inspired contemporary designs incorporate the work of traditional craftsmen (such as Murano glass blowers) into furniture, accessories and lighting.

'For me, Laguna is about experiencing the way glass can be shaped and how this material can be the source of your inspiration,' he says. 'Each piece has a story of its own and they're all dedicated to this traditional design industry.'

'The Italian DNA is very strong in my process,' he continues, 'and to find the right quality, I need skilful craftsmanship.' This dedication to Italian craft is one of the designer's signature traits. His bronze work is made in the same workshop that has served the Vatican for over five generations, he works with the

traditional stone carvers of Carrara and the nuns of a convent near Rome embroidered the textiles for his recent Apollo collection. 'You can't see the nuns face to face,' he tells me. 'But you can talk to them through a screen, as if you were in a confessional.'

'I found it fascinating to connect with this tradition,' he enthuses. 'I like discovering and reviving crafts that are slowly disappearing. I started with bronze then moved to wood. I moved from wood to stone, stone to parchment and parchment to glass. Now I am testing other possibilities. The embroidery, the hand stitching; these are traditions that can easily disappear in this very chaotic world.'

His reverence for traditional craft comes with a bold design approach and a sense of playfulness. Bubble wall sconces reminiscent of a design he originally conceived for Jeff Koons feature in his Apollo collection; the nuns also embroidered rocket and Martian sketches drawn by his children onto the collection's cushions.

STORIES WITHOUT WORDS

Achille Salvagni talks to **Lauren Hill** about the intricate creative process behind his story-led interiors and fantastical furniture designs

'I never create for the sake of beauty itself. I have... to be driven by a story, by an experience, by creating a portrait of someone or something. I need a story to base the creative process on.'

Achille Salvagni, the celebrated Italian designer whose work spans residential design, furnishings and the interiors of superyachts, sits back in one of the chairs he designed himself, wrapped in thought as he explains the process behind his creations.

We meet in his Mayfair atelier where light streams through the floor-to-ceiling windows looking out to the townhouses just off New Bond Street. A photographer is in the process of shooting the intimate space, which has just been restyled to house items from his autumn 2019 Laguna collection. A fuchsia pink Frangipani chair with cast metal feet sits in front of decorative gold wall coverings



Achille Salvagni sits beneath a pair of Diamond onyx and bronze wall lights



foreword written by the influential gallerist and partner at Maison Gerard, Benoist F Drut.

Now Salvagni is delving into a series of new projects. In New York he's in the process of reimagining a landmark townhouse, as well as designing the public space of a condominium on the Upper East Side; he is also working on a new waterfront house on the Intracoastal Waterway in Miami. He's in the midst of designing a large-scale compound in Mumbai, and on top of that he's always working on the interiors of several customised mega-yachts.

Never one to ponder on what's just been achieved,

Salvagni continually looks towards his next project. 'I'm always looking forward to what's going to happen tomorrow,' he concludes. 'What really intrigues me is the creation tomorrow can bring.' ■



Achille Salvagni is available now (£50, Rizzoli)

'Modernity and tradition can easily find a balance,' he says, 'even though they belong to completely different eras.'

Despite being known for marrying traditional craftsmanship with modern design, Salvagni doesn't want to be identified with one style. Instead, he strives for continual growth and the generation of new life. 'I am more fascinated by the process,' he explains. 'It may follow certain rules and have certain milestones, but the result is always different. The process becomes more refined.'

This pursuit for constant change gives the designer's work a characteristic element of surprise. 'When I meet a client, the first challenge is to gain their trust,' he says. 'The second challenge is to astonish them. If you ask me for a lamp, the challenge for me is to create something that is completely unexpected but still fitting your aesthetic.'

Items from the designer's recent collections can be seen on display at his ateliers in London and Rome, and sourced through Maison Gerard in New York City. In October last year, the designer also released a monograph, simply titled *Achille Salvagni*. With text by Pilar Viladas, this book debut documents Salvagni's most recent residential designs, yacht interiors and furnishings, looking into the process behind his story-led creations. Photography, sketches and colourful illustrations bring each double-page spread to life, with a



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Laguna collection Ad Maiora cocktail table in onyx and bronze, with an Emerald multi-faceted side table; Salvagni likes to surprise: this Gae armchair has crafted bronze feet but its design channels '60s sci-fi in a Japanese tea room-inspired setting; the designer's inspired blend of modernity and tradition is unique to each project, like this Rome interior