

Matteo Thun

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# DESIGN AWARDS 2011

Introducing our coverage of this year's Design Awards finalists...

**WITH** well over 300 entries across our main designer categories, the Design Awards 2011 – now in its ninth year – has once again demonstrated the unrivalled regard in which it is held by the UK's leading kitchen, bathroom and interior space designers.

Once again, there was a big increase in entries for our Living Space Design of the Year category from designers and architects of all types from across the UK.

But it wasn't just about the quantity – the quality in this category and across the board made life particularly tough for our panel of expert judges, which this year included: Alan Crawford, architect and founder of Crawford Partnership; Stacey Sheppard, freelance interiors journalist; Renee Mascari, Chief Executive of the KBB National Training Group; industrial designer Robin Levien; Yvonne Orgill, Chief Executive of the Bathroom Manufacturers Association; and past Design Awards finalists Robert Timmons and Nik Hilton.

On the following pages, you will find each of this year's finalist's entries profiled, along with the details of the gold award winners in our product innovation categories.

We also present an exclusive interview with the winner of this year's Simon Taylor Award for Lifetime Achievement – the hugely influential designer and architect Matteo Thun.

This year's award presentation lunch once again took place at the glorious Lord's Cricket Ground in London. The event is one of the real highlights on the interior architecture/design calendar, and we thank our category sponsors and supporter members for their commitment to working with us to ensure this annual awards scheme is such a success.

But that's not all from the Design Awards this year – see *Designer* next month for photos and reaction from the presentation lunch.



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## THE

complicated thing about pared down design is making it look simple. Some designers have an innate ability to do just that though, and no-one epitomises that more than Matteo Thun.



His approach – what he calls ‘zero design’ – is to seek to achieve an iconic form, stripped back to the essentials to find the essence of pure form and function. It is an approach that has characterised his work and stood him in good stead for a long and distinguished career as an architect.

However, this choice of career was not part of the original plan for Thun. “My mother was an architect but I never wanted to become one. I wanted to be a doctor.”

It all changed in the late 1970s when Thun met design legend Ettore Sottsass who invited him to come to Milan. “That was in 1978 and I’m still here!”

Between then and now, his output has been prolific, and has included projects of all shapes, sizes and categories from public sector buildings to hotels, from kitchen concepts to bathroom basins and taps.

Thun was born in Bolzano, Italy, in 1952. He studied at the Salzburg Academy before taking his degree in architecture in Florence in 1975. He moved to Milan three years later when he met and started working with Sottsass.

In 1981, he was a co-founder of the Memphis group, the design movement that so shaped events in the eighties. From a stylistic perspective, Thun’s work during the Memphis period contrasts somewhat with the more recent designs he has become so well known for. Back then, it was all about expressive, experimental and downright rebellious designs – a kick back against the staid and conformist expectations that had stifled design creativity for so long.

It became all about colourful, abstract creations and it was a movement that arguably did more to influence and inspire the design direction of subsequent years than many people realise.

It was relatively short-lived though. After the Memphis group was disbanded in 1984, Thun founded

his own studio in Milan where he has built up a formidable reputation for superb design. He has since also served as Creative Director with Swatch in 1990-93.

Matteo Thun’s approach stands for long lasting solutions with a holistic approach. For him, architecture means designing the soul of the place. This implies an aesthetic, economic and technological sustainability in which the solution is different, each time. Similarly, product design must reflect the soul of the brand. It is architecture of simple, pure and beautiful gestures to serve a daily need that goes beyond the user’s present expectations.

They are principles that he has applied to his work across numerous architectural projects and product designs. Among some of his more prominent creations are the Hotel Missoni in Edinburgh, the Bio Power Station in Schwendi, Germany, and the truly striking Vigilius mountain resort in Italy.

So where does someone who has inspired so many get his own inspiration from? “From all-over,” he says. “My team is truly international with different cultural backgrounds and we regularly have meetings and discuss things thoroughly, jumping from one product field to another. We call it ‘cross fertilization.’”

Briccole Venezia hardwood table for Riva 1920

# THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

This year’s winner of the Simon Taylor Award for Lifetime Achievement is an architect and designer whose work has continually set new standards in simple yet brilliant design. *Designer* looks at the career of Matteo Thun

"My work is based upon respect," explains Thun. "Respect for the place where we build and for the soul of the brand we design for."

"We try to understand the needs of any company we work with, and try to find the right solution for them. It is a challenge, yes, but a joy as well. I like to find new solutions and step over borders, all the while following Ettore Sottsass's credo: do it as simple as possible – reduce complexity."

It is an approach that has attracted plenty of admirers – recent clients include Dornbracht, Fantini, Catalano, Rapsel, Zucchetti, Duravit, Geberit, Keramag, Febal and Salvarini.

Thun still feels there are lots of challenges to be met in designing for the kitchen and bathroom. One aspect that he is particularly passionate about is creating products that can be highly customised but with the cost benefits of mass production. He also reveals that many of his future projects involve the use of wood as the primary material.

So which category feels like Thun's most natural area of work? Is he first and foremost an architect or an industrial designer? "I'm both," he insists. "I very much share the views of Ettore Sottsass

– and in fact very many other Italian architects – in that we like the idea of designing a coffee cup in the morning and then working on a house in the afternoon. We follow the holistic approach of the Milan School – still very much remaining architects. I love the soul of the place when I do architecture, I love the soul of the brand when I design products."

Thun's past award pedigree couldn't be higher. He has won the ADI Compasso d'Oro Award for design excellence three times and received recognition in last year's *Wallpaper* Design Awards. His Side Hotel in Hamburg was chosen as Hotel of the Year in 2001, the Vigilius mountain resort won the *Wallpaper* Design Award in 2004 and the Radisson SAS in Frankfurt was chosen as best new hotel in the Worldwide Hospitality Awards in 2005.

Thun was inducted into the Interior Hall of Fame in New York in December 2004 and is a member of RIBA.

Other accolades aside though, it is for his long-established track record of continually surprising and challenging existing architecture and design trends – not least in the kitchen and bathroom sector – that Matteo Thun is a very worthy recipient of the 2011 Simon Taylor Award for Lifetime Achievement. →



Onto basin for Duravit



The five-star Vigilius mountain resort in Italy

## THE MEMPHIS GROUP

The Memphis Group was founded in 1981 by Ettore Sottsass and architects and designers from different cultures, including Andrea



Branzi, Aldo Cibic, Michele de Lucchi, Matteo Thun, and Michael Graves.

Born out of an informal meeting organized by Sottsass who created a working group as a reaction to the

style of design that had characterized the emotionless seventies, the designers of the Memphis Group played with colours and shapes inspired by movements such as Art Deco and Pop Art, the kitsch of Fifties and futuristic themes.

It represented a new approach to creative design and had the courage to break the rules to design differently. It also showed an inquisitive mind that constantly creates new extremes of language as an alternative to unimaginative functionalism. The group disbanded in 1988 but the products have since become collector's items.

The work of Matteo Thun during this period, the most active of the group in the field of ceramics, is intimately connected to his childhood, a hobby learned in the clay pottery of his parents in Bolzano. He has pushed the material to new extremes of language, creating limited edition collections of ceramic tableware, a series of puppet-animals, and bird-inspired teapots, milk- and coffeepots which are now highly prized by collectors.

Memphis plays a dual role in the career of designer Matteo Thun. It was a formative influence for his career as well as a real experiment in how to enjoy the challenges of innovation and differentiation. Thun believes that a large part of the creative value of this period was the chance to see how far it is possible to push the boundaries of form without losing the function.

The creativity of the Memphis Group took design into totally unknown areas for the time. Does Thun see examples of similarly bold design ideas or spirit emerging today? "No. It has not yet been found - perhaps Memphis was the last strong design movement. The digital world is dematerialized but today's world is definitely asking for something else." ●

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"I LIKE THE IDEA OF DESIGNING A COFFEE CUP IN THE MORNING AND THEN WORKING ON A HOUSE IN THE AFTERNOON"

The Invisible collector for Rapsel

