

# INTERIOR DESIGN MASTERS



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ROUTLEDGE

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## Thun, Matteo



292.1 **Matteo Thun**

Source: Photo by Nacho Alegre.

Born: Bolzano, Italy, 1952

Location: Italy

Occupation: architect, interior designer

Movement: postmodernism, twenty-first century

Matteo Thun attended the Salzburg Academy and the University of Florence. He co-founded Sottsass Associati and the Memphis Group with Ettore Sottsass, working as partner of the firm from 1980–1984. He designed numerous objects including ceramics, lamps, and vases in the Memphis tradition. The group's co-founders, admirers of pop art, sought a focus for products outside of "good design," and explored color, shape, and proportion as a means to create visual excitement. Sometimes they used forms arbitrarily, which garnered attention if not always admiration. The movement was famously described as "a shotgun wedding between Bauhaus and Fisher-Price."<sup>132</sup> Thun designed a bed that resembles a boxing arena, and a light fixture with represented bolts of electricity. It was an audacious short-lived movement that relied heavily on shock value. Thun's work since then is, in comparison, restrained, sleek, and contemporary. He started with a studio in Milan and formed Matteo Thun & Partners in 2001, focusing on architecture, interior, and product design.

The firm increasingly focuses on sustainability and long-lasting solutions, with material selections that are locally sourced and natural. Projects range from hospitality, health care, and commercial interiors to installations and product design. The playful Tam stool for Magis (2002) is a modern interpretation of African furniture. Its bright colors, bold geometric forms, and synthetic material show a relationship to his earlier Memphis style work although more refined. The Vigilius Mountain Resort (2001–2003) is a complete departure with the incorporation of nature, use of clean-lined linear elements, and natural materials.

Thun's work synthesizes multiple influences that seem irreconcilable, including a sophisticated modernity, scrappy vernacular traditions, and his Memphis roots. The Tortona 37 Complex in Milan (2009), a twenty-first-century take on a retail arcade, is a streamlined combination of showrooms, labs, and offices that has double height spaces, extensive spans of glass, modern materials and plenty of



white. In contrast, for the Longen Schlöder Winery/Hotel (2013) he worked in an agricultural vernacular tradition, with stone and wooden structures that feature pitched roofs, and rolling barn doors. His interest in sustainability comes to the fore in his Bio Mass Power Plant (2009) in Schwendi, Germany. The building confirms what he wrote on his website that “burning wood and safeguarding nature are perfectly compatible.”<sup>133</sup> A circular core of glass and steel is contained within a delicate lattice of larch wood, a detail that he has employed on multiple projects.



292.2 **Vigilius Mountain Resort**

Source: Courtesy Vigilius Mountain Resort.

The designer's Memphis roots occasionally reveal themselves in iconic uses of form. He can prominently locate a showerhead or a simple tree in the middle of an exceedingly formal composition (Binder Executive Pavilion), thereby drawing attention to an overlooked piece of hardware or botany. To look at his industrial designs, vases, teapots, and frying pans, design history informs his products as much a blank slate approach to functionalism. His Reggia tableware, with silk screens of Bernini's Apollo & Daphne, is pure Fornasetti. His Swarovski chandelier is not a fresh take on formal lighting; it looks like a chandelier. Thun has worked with Alessi, Flos, and Kartel, and as an art director for Swatch. He has taught design at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. The firm has been awarded Compasso d'Oro awards, Red Dot Awards for product design, and has been featured in numerous publications.