

# 10 Questions With... Matteo Thun



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By Mairi Beautyman



Cala Beach Club at Hotel Cala di Volpe in Porto Cervo on Sardinia. Photography courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.



A holistic approach to nature and wellness drives Matteo Thun's built projects. The award-winning Italian architect and [Interior Design Hall of Fame member](#) co-founded the iconic Italian design and architecture collective the Memphis Group with [Ettore Sottsass](#) in 1981, before striking out on his own, forming [Matteo Thun & Partners](#) in 2001. Thun's happiest designing something new, he admits, and his firm's creative eye, honed out of a headquarters in Milan and an office in Shanghai, is behind a long list of high-profile hospitality and healthcare projects spanning the globe.

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Most recently, summer saw the reassembly of Thun's temporary beach structure, [Cala Beach Club](#) on the breathtaking Emerald Coast of the Italian island of Sardinia. Situated at Hotel Cala di Volpe in Costa Smeralda, a playground for the rich and, at times, famous—many of them yachting enthusiasts—Cala Beach Club is an environmentally sensitive structure only accessible by foot or boat. In summer it hums with private parties, with clientele seduced by the stunning natural landscape. *Interior Design* sat down with Thun to hear more about the Cala Beach Club, what toy kicked off his imagination at a young age, and which project reachable solely by cable car he considers a career turning point.

**Interior Design: What was your overall design goal for Cala Beach Club?**

Matteo Thun: Cala di Volpe is a beautiful beach in Sardinia. We wanted to create a shady oasis just between the woods and the sea. Restaurant, bar, and treatment rooms have been designed to melt within the landscape, to respect the charm of this special place.

**ID: What was particularly challenging about this project?**

MT: This property is reachable only by boat or on a path through nature. Since it serves only for the season, we designed a removable structure that is easily to assemble and dismantle.



Cala Beach Club at Hotel Cala di Volpe in Porto Cervo on Sardinia. Photography courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.

**ID: What materials did you use and why?**

MT: The structure unites with the beach vegetation, terraces value the inclination of the land, and views are open to the sea. We only used natural materials that integrate with the surroundings, such as chestnut wood and bamboo. All colors are natural and warm.

**ID: What else have you completed recently?**

MT: We like to bring nature inside and believe in concepts that emphasize an overall healthy lifestyle as a main approach. Healthy architecture and interior design guarantees physical and mental well being, allowing a relationship between humans and the environment. In Obbürgen, Switzerland, the [Waldhotel at Bürgenstock Hotels & Resort](#), which opened at the end of last year, is a space for wellness and medical services. It's made from local stone and wood, and nature will take over in a few years so that the building will melt with the mountain. As with most of our projects, we also designed the entire interior.

Another recent project is the new headquarters for [Davines](#), an Italian beauty company dedicated to sustainability and based in Parma, Italy. Here, we grouped traditional rural shapes and innovative volumes around a greenhouse that serves as a restaurant for the employees. Maximum architectural transparency with a minimum amount of masonry elements provides every working station with a view of the green areas.





INTERIOR DESIGN  
The Waldhotel at Bürgenstock Hotels & Resort in Obbürgen, Switzerland by Matteo Thun & Partners. Photography by Andrea Garuti, courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.

### **ID: What's upcoming for you?**

MT: The [Waldkliniken Eisenberg](#) outside of Leipzig at the largest university orthopedic center in Europe. Waldkliniken means 'hospital in the forest' in German, and the new hospital building and rehab building connected to it will transform the hospital campus into a health center with a hotel character. This project represents our idea of a healing environment, an architectural and organizational structure that helps the patient and his relatives endure stressful situations caused by illness, operations, treatments, and sometimes pain.

Another hospitality project, a health bathing spa with medical treatments and maximum comfort, is underway in Bavaria, at Tegernsee, a resort town on the banks of Germany's Tegernsee Lake. Nature is also the point of departure here and was key to the project. The landscape design integrates the existing flora and references the natural presence of water, allowing a direct communication with nature without interfering with the privacy of the patients.





Waldkliniken Eisenberg outside of Leipzig by Matteo Thun & Partners. Photography courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.

**ID: Is there a project in your history that you feel was particularly significant to your career?**

MT: I designed the [Vigilius Mountain Resort](#) in South Tirol more than 15 years ago. It was one of the first design hotels, made from local larch wood and reachable only by cable car. The owner and I shared the same vision: to create a hotel that fuses with its surroundings, a place where you can breathe and relax instantly. Now, after all these years, the wood has a beautiful patina and the hotel a constant influx of international clientele.

**ID: What are you reading?**

MT: I very much like to read books in parallel: such as German philosopher Martin Heidegger with a novel or short story by Italian journalist and writer [Italo Calvino](#).



The Vigilius Mountain Resort by Matteo Thun & Partners. Photography by Serge Brison, courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.



**ID: How do you think your childhood influenced your design thinking?**

MT: My parents took me regularly to the [Venice Biennale](#), so I became familiar with art and architecture at quite a young age. I grew up in nature, in the mountains near Bolzano, Italy, where my mother worked with pottery. She gave me clay to play with—so I had to use my imagination to have fun with it. I was always very close to material and materiality.

**ID: How do think the Italian design culture influences your overall approach?**

MT: In Italy, architecture is approached holistically. Let me quote Italian architect and writer Ernesto Rogers: 'From spoon to city.' This means working on a chair, on a lighting product, and on a house at the same time. We've worked like this in my office since the beginning, and the different teams of architects, interior designers, and product designers perform across disciplines.

Another big strength is Italian craftsmanship. At [Salone del Mobile 2019](#), we launched a wood chair collection produced by [F.lli Levaggi](#), a small manufacturer in Liguria, Italy, and work regularly with the glassblowers from Murano, such as [Venini](#), [Barovier & Toso](#), and [Seguso](#). We very much believe in 'Made in Italy.'



The Vigilus Mountain Resort by Matteo Thun & Partners. Photography by Vigilus Mountain Resort, courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.

**ID: Is there a person in the industry that you particularly admire?**

MT: Ettore Sottsass, chief designer of [Olivetti](#). I first worked for him as an assistant, then we formed [Sottsass Associati](#) and in 1981 we co-founded Italian design and architecture collective Memphis Group. Memphis had an important formative influence on my career, and provided a platform to experiment with the challenges of constant innovation. Ettore designed the first Italian computer—in the late 1950s.

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The Vigilius Mountain Resort by Matteo Thun & Partners. Photography by Florian Andergassen, courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.



The Waldhotel at Bürgenstock Hotels & Resort in Obbürgen, Switzerland by Matteo Thun & Partners. Photography by Andrea Garuti, courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.





INTERIOR  
DESIGN

The alpine suite at the Waldhotel at Bürgenstock Hotels & Resort in Obbürgen, Switzerland by Matteo Thun & Partners. Photography by Waldhotel, courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.



INTERIOR  
DESIGN

The pool at the Waldhotel at Bürgenstock Hotels & Resort in Obbürgen, Switzerland by Matteo Thun & Partners. Photography by Waldhotel, courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.





The Davines headquarters in Parma, Italy by Matteo Thun & Partners. Photography by Andrea Garuti, courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.



The Nudes seating collection by Matteo Thun, launched at Salone del Mobile 2019. Photography by Marco Bertolini, courtesy of Matteo Thun & Partners.