

HOME & DESIGN

A TIMES OF INDIA PUBLICATION

# TRENDS

VOLUME 8 NO 2



## The Designers' State of Mind

ANAND MENON  
ANNKUR KHOSLA  
APARNA KAUSHIK  
IRAM SULTAN  
MANGESH LUNGARE  
ZARIR MULLAN

*Future-ready products and street art in times of Covid*

**Support  
Advocate  
Collaborate**

THE INDIA DESIGN FUND

Design Therapy  
Aesthetic Durability  
New Virtuality

*Before and After  
Covid-19  
with*

*Matteo Thun*

Everything you need to know about

CASAMIA  
PRESENTS

**D/code**  
A Times Group Initiative

**DESIGN  
BIENNALE**

INDIA'S FIRST CURATED  
VIRTUAL ART AND DESIGN FESTIVAL

JAIPUR  
EDITION

CURATED BY  
SHANTANU GARG



A portrait of architect Matteo Thun, smiling and wearing glasses and a white shirt. The background is plain white.

# **L**egendary by nature

Famed Italian architect Matteo Thun discusses the power of nature - its silence and strength, function and fortitude - in the context of his timeless architecture

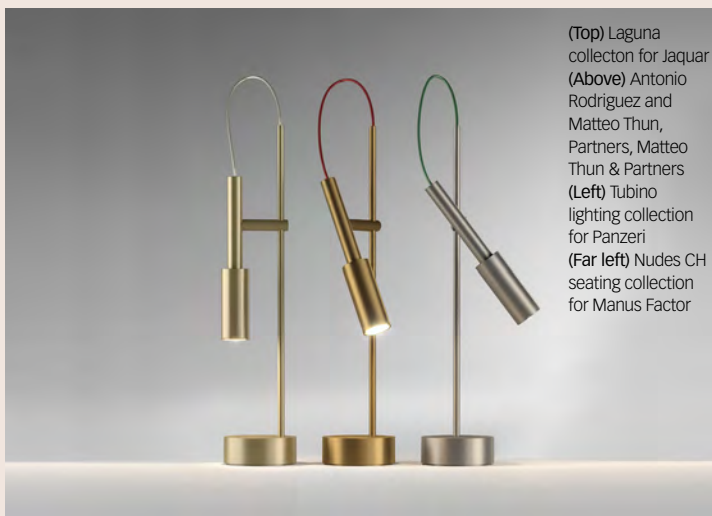
*Text* TINA THAKRAR



*As creatives, we have to make things better in terms of durability and innovation and of course, find ways to save energy. We have to stop expansion and consuming land. We have to re-compact.*

– Matteo Thun

**I**N the early 1900s, Milanese architect Ernesto Nathan Rogers used the phrase ‘From the spoon to the city’ to describe the holistic approach of Italian architects towards designing small and big projects. From one legend to another – the quote has stuck with Italian architect Matteo Thun, whom we spoke to while he was on a train ride in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Things have changed for every single person across the world, and of course, at the most humane level, Thun is no different. But what we do discover is that the way he works, the way he designs his projects, and even the way his offices function, hasn’t changed in many years. What’s even more interesting is that going forward, they probably won’t need to either, since the approach has always been one that’s sensitive to nature, its benefits, simplicity and freshness, and its power to restore and enhance physical and mental wellbeing. The behaviours that many of us may be looking to adopt for the future, have been the basis of Thun’s iconic work since the very beginning of his career in the 1980s. ▶



(Top) Laguna collecton for Jaquar  
(Above) Antonio Rodriguez and Matteo Thun, Partners, Matteo Thun & Partners  
(Left) Tubino lighting collection for Panzeri  
(Far left) Nudes CH seating collection for Manus Factor



IMAGE: MARCO BERTOLINI



“

*Our hospitality and healthcare projects want to be the result of the symbiosis between healthcare and tourism. The strength of simplistic design and a tangible, preventive hospitality vision in which nature plays a significant role, is of utmost importance.*

– Matteo Thun



IMAGE: ANDREA GARUJI



IMAGE: MARCO BERTOLINI



IMAGE: JENS WEBER

(Above) Private Alpine chalet in Austria  
(Above right) Waldhotel Health & Medical Excellence in Burgenstock, Switzerland  
(Right) The Golden Gallery lounge in the multi-sensorial Design Therapy exhibition in Milan  
(Far right) Power Station Schilling in Schwendi, Germany



“

*Matteo and I are very keen to create aesthetic durability, which is why we do simple things. We believe that a product should not be designed to correspond to the zeitgeist but to be timeless and iconic.*

– Antonio Rodriguez, Partner, Matteo Thun & Partners

D1 faucet collection for Duravit



Vigilius Mountain Resort in Meran, Italy

Thun comes from a noble Italian family engaged in the ceramics industry in the city of Bolzano. As a boy, Thun went from wanting to be a heart surgeon to studying architecture under Oscar Kokoschka and Emilio Vedova at the Salzburg Academy, later procuring his architecture degree from the University of Florence. He moved to Milan, the nexus of design in Italy, soon after.

In the year 1981, the design world was introduced to the bold and unapologetic Memphis Group, an architecture and design group headed by Ettore Sottsass and co-founded by Thun, with some other prominent partners. The focus of the group was on post-modern furniture and objects, with quite a radical take on colour and abstraction. It challenged minimalism, the status-quo, with unpredictability, asymmetry and boundary-less design thought. Although the group lasted only a few short years,

it has come to influence a real sense of free and abstract thinking today.

There was one drawback though. The Memphis Group wasn't interested in pure function but a sensorial, which Thun believes was not a long-lasting idea. "At Memphis we pushed the sense of reality to the limits, and functionality was not our starting point. Any good revolution is normally for a very short period. So Memphis, the real Memphis was just about three years. Everything afterwards (until it was disbanded in 1988) was just nostalgic interpretations of the revolution."

Thun took a step back from the Memphis Group in 1984 to set up his own office, and then Matteo Thun & Partners in 2001 with partner Antonio Rodriguez. The two work out of offices in Milan and Shanghai, which is home to many of their projects, from urban design to products. ►



However, the firm’s mainstay has grown to become its nature-inspired, aesthetically timeless hospitality projects. “Matteo and I are very keen to create aesthetic durability, which is why we do simple things. We believe that a product should not be designed to correspond to the zeitgeist but to be timeless and iconic,” explains Rodriguez.

Some of the world’s best architectural landmarks, like the Vigilius Mountain Resort in South Tyrol, Italy, which can only be accessed by cable car; Waldhotel Health & Medical Excellence in Switzerland, the JW Marriott Venice Resort+Spa; and signature product collections for brands like Bulgari, Campari, Artemide, Duravit and Jaquar; all have Thun’s signature stamp. These are designs that start and end with nature, with physical and mental wellbeing at their core.

As Thun says, “Nature, guests and humanness are the protagonists. We aim to merge the aesthetics of hospitality and hospitals by influencing the relationship between physical space and wellbeing. Evidentially, a natural surrounding generates neurological and physiological benefits. Our hospitality and healthcare projects want to be the result of the symbiosis between healthcare and tourism. We think that the strength of simplistic design and a tangible, preventive hospitality vision in which the power of nature plays a significant role, is of most importance.”

In every project and every role (including that of a creative director for Swatch and professor of design and ceramics at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna) over the years, Thun has attempted, and succeeded, in using design for the greater good. “As creatives, we have to make things better in terms of durability and innovation and of course, find ways to save energy. We have to stop expansion and consuming land. We have to create a new density in our cities. We have to re-compact.”

“Our work at the office is about aesthetic, technological and structural consistency. The concept of the 3 Zeros identifies what we do. Zero kilometres: nearness of construction materials and local skills. Zero CO2: energy management and lower emissions. Zero waste: lifecycle-management in the building process and reuse of building materials. We care about the future lifespan of our buildings and products, meaning that a building should still look good after 50 years or more.”

People and organisations around the world have identified with Thun’s sensibilities and approach, resulting in most of his projects winning multiple awards. He himself has been recognised with an induction into the Interior Hall of Fame in New York and a valuable membership with the Royal



IMAGE: MARCO BERTOLINI



Institute of British Architects (RIBA). But to Thun, who likes to travel the world, visit art exhibitions and watch movies, these recognitions are merely background noise when he immerses himself in his true inspiration, nature. His idea is to be sensitive to natural elements, to never overpower, to never control, but to let the building develop lasting durability and timeless form. **H&DT**

(Top) The Active Body gym in the multi-sensorial Design Therapy exhibition in Milan  
(Above) Bar Campari in Vienna



**MATTEO THUN**  
*Architect*

One of Italy's most prolific architects, Thun is the founder of Matteo Thun & Partners, a multi-disciplinary architecture firm with a heavy focus on hospitality projects. Co-founder of The Memphis Group in 1981 with Ettore Sottsass, Thun took a step back and set out on his own a few years later. Today, he's known for infusing his projects with elements of nature, while designing them to be aesthetically durable and timeless.

**All spaces, from homes and offices to leisure and hospitality spaces, will see a seismic shift in how they're designed. What does the future of hospitality look like now?**

One of the biggest projects we have been working on, which was to be completed by May 2020 is the Waldkrankenhaus in Germany. It is the largest University Orthopedic Centre in Europe. We are building the campus including a rehab centre as an amalgamation of the design language of hospitals and hotels that we call "hospitecture". We believe that over the next 10 years, hospitals will become closer in identity and image to hotels – in comfort, design and consideration.

For now, the opening of Waldkrankenhaus has been postponed to Fall. But generally speaking, in particular for hospital projects, stringent hygiene and generous space will be a top priority for interior design. Cleanliness and rigorous hygiene will be, parallel to health, fitness and longevity, ruling the facilities. Besides private treatment rooms, the layout of high traffic social spaces will be revisited in terms of proportions that grant social distancing and an intuitive access to sanitizers and wash basins throughout the design.

Let me also point out some important issues when it comes to hospitality projects:

- The size, location and ventilation of spaces will become critical considerations in keeping guests safe and healthy.
- Immune boosting features will become a focal point.
- We will see the introduction of innovative treatments and super foods in F&B packages in hotels.

- State-of-the-art air purifiers will be integrated and hidden within the architecture.

Overall, the increasing stresses of everyday life, longer work hours, inability to disconnect from technology and the advent of the coronavirus will trigger a shift towards spaces that evoke mindfulness through solitude and self-contemplation. Virtuality will direct our lives – we will use technology to do most things we used to do in person. This is how we have worked in the last few weeks – within our team and with our clients.

We must now bring in safety conscious procedures that will involve modifying layouts to include personal distancing and the need for modularity and flexibility resulting from it, with thermo scanners, touch-free doors and surfaces, sanitized air conditioning units, more indoor greenery, sealed flooring, walls and ceilings, and so much more.

We think that innovation needs time, and innovative new products must add something to what already exists. Salone del Mobile, for example, should be about showing a new approach to design and creation and above all, should present new, original technologies.

In the current and future scenario, the focus on one's inner self will be of high importance in order to nurture and stimulate inner peace rather than social interactions. A warm and humane atmosphere will and can be easily conveyed through natural materials, lush indoor air purifying greenery and of course, timelessness. **H&DT**