

# MODERN REBELS

*By launching new designers and continuing to produce some of the world's edgiest pieces, Sawaya & Moroni remain at the forefront of contemporary furniture design*



Everyone is silent at Sawaya & Moroni's showroom on Via Manzoni in the center of Milan. A hushed conversation is taking place on the upper floor about Salone del Mobile, the world's leading design fair, set in Milan every year in April.

Tony Eliech, Photo Archives Sawaya & Moroni



The Sawaya & Moroni showroom at Aishti Home Solutions in Antelias

The conversation is about the design projects of two of the world's hottest architecture firms – Snøhetta, based in Oslo and New York, and MAD Architects from China – both of whom were asked by Sawaya & Moroni to design new pieces for 2018's Salone del Mobile.

For architect and designer William Sawaya, co-founder of Sawaya & Moroni Contemporary Furniture, the styles of Snøhetta and MAD couldn't be further apart, yet they both fascinate him and, in his opinion, complete Sawaya & Moroni's wide panoramic design view. "We live every edition of the Salone as a challenge, as a permanent research of new concepts, aiming to come out with innovative and unexpected ideas," says Sawaya. "Through the intellectual creative capacity of Snøhetta, we are investigating today's Scandinavian design. It is becoming more difficult to design evergreen archetypes that survive over time. Nowadays, very few companies still have the will and the courage to take on such projects."

Sawaya is the creative soul of the firm, and his partner Paolo Moroni takes care of the business and communication aspects. Besides being the main designer of the company, Sawaya, who was born in Beirut where he also completed his studies, oversees and investigates every design detail. Although most of the Italian design production is made abroad, both partners continue to manufacture all of their products in Brianza and Northern

## "LUXURY IS FIRST A MENTAL ATTITUDE"

Italy, the world's leading hub for furniture production and home to skilled craftsmen, even though the cost there has become a bit prohibitive. The end designs, which range from masterpieces by major architects to avant-garde items by rising designers, are exhibited in Sawaya & Moroni's Milan showroom.

The great variety of furniture offerings is the reason behind the immense amount of work and the frenzied atmosphere that overtake the firm when time for the Salone del Mobile approaches. "Every year, the sector becomes more and more chaotic, and unfortunately lots of companies do surrender to the general vulgarization



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of the production panorama in order to satisfy the request of the new economic and commercial markets," says Sawaya. "The larger distribution requires and imposes lower prices, which automatically affect the design concept and impoverish the quality of the product." That said, Sawaya admits that he needs the stress that surrounds the annual fair in order to come up with his out-of-the-box designs. "I can only create under pressure," says Sawaya. "Relaxing only makes me lazy. And when I start designing, I often begin with a specific idea, but the final product might become completely different than the initial one."

The Sawaya & Moroni label was launched in 1984. "When William suggested to form our brand and start making furniture, I asked him if he had suddenly gone crazy," recalls Moroni with a laugh. Prior to that, the two men had been working together at their architectural practice, founded in 1978. Their interior design projects required specific types of furniture that weren't always available on the market. "The residences the studio was building were for selective people, so the furniture had to be equally selective," says Moroni. "But we couldn't always find the highly sophisticated products we were looking for. I am a businessman, and William is the creative architect. So from my point of view, to become an industrialist seemed to me kind of complicated."

At the beginning, few people believed that the two young men would succeed in creating a new design furniture brand. In a way, they were defying the old established Italian companies and setting their own course. But naysayers had to quickly change their tune when, thanks to a remarkable instinct, Sawaya & Moroni scored one hit after another. Over the past three decades, the company has been able to capture

an important share of the top-end niche, both in terms of market share and creative designers, many of whom now stand in line for the coveted opportunity to be produced by Sawaya & Moroni.

In addition to presenting the work of famous architects such as Jean Nouvel, Dominique Perrault, David Adjaye, Daniel Libeskind, Ettore Sottsass, Ron Arad, Toni Cordero, Toshiyuki Kita and John Maeda, among many others, one of Sawaya & Moroni's biggest successes was the two-decade-long collaboration with the late Zaha Hadid, who produced some of her best designs for the Italian brand. "She was an inspiring leading figure, an icon, a genius," says Sawaya. "All those who initially criticized her are now taking inspiration if not copying her."

The two partners describe their brand as a design hub. "Although most of our production, especially the limited editions designed for collectors and museums, are conceptually elevated for large distribution," says Sawaya, "we do our best to introduce some semi-industrial production in order to appeal to all types of customers. Luxury, beside being quality craftsmanship, is first a mental attitude."

*Sawaya & Moroni furniture and accessories are available at Aishti Home Solutions in Antelias.*