

Amiamo l'Italia

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Why Dubai's love affair with luxurious Italian design continues

From Armani to Zagato, Dubai's vibrant consumer market has formed a strong ardour for luxury Italian design. For those with a passion for high-quality furniture, fashion, food and sports cars, there's no other country in the world that promises products steeped in a rich heritage of manufacturing and materials and – as is the Italian way – family values.

In line with its reputation for romance, Italy continues to woo us here in the UAE. It dominated the line-up at last month's Downtown Design exhibition, where the world's most high-end companies descended on Dubai.

This month, 'The Boot' steals the show once again with the Italian Luxury Interiors fair. So, why are consumers here – expats from all over the world – so taken with Italian design? For the 'Made in Italy' marque, asserts fair organiser Ferdinando Fiore, trade commissioner at the Italian Trade Commission.

"'Made in Italy' is a brand, not just a phrase, which is very well recognised and appreciated all over the world," he explains. "When you say Made In Italy you are saying 'quality', and you want to buy quality, that is so important. 'Made in Italy' combines this with a rich history stemming back to the Roman Empire and even before, plus the latest technology for fabrics and materials.

"You can find Italian flavour everywhere in Dubai. If you go into Dubai Mall you will see so many brands from Italy, whether that's food, jewellery shops, furniture, fashion and accessories. The Italian flavour is a particular way of living; it's a particular Italian lifestyle because it contains a dream for the customer. So when you buy something Italian you buy a dream, a dream made of tradition, technology and strong research. Dubai has customers of a certain level and they can be very picky about the brand, so they want something that is synonymous with quality, and this can only be found with 'Made In Italy' products."

Now in its fourth year, Italian Luxury Interiors is the ideal platform for home companies keen to focus on lucrative export revenues. Many brands surviving the economic recession in Italy do so from exporting a whopping 80% of their overall production and the UAE has proved to be a strong, receptive market, reveals Fiore. The Italian furniture sector has a turnover of €27.4 billion, of which around 46% is earned through foreign exports. Last year, the export of furniture and home accessories to the UAE was reported to be more than €150,000 – a figure which is guaranteed to rise again in 2014, in line with the increasing expatriate population and the renewed





Clockwise from left: Maison Claire, Armani Casa, Cassina, Mirage Spa



vigour in the construction sector after the UAE's Expo 2020 win.

Our love affair with Italy is nothing new, however. Mirage Spa has experienced increasing demand for 'Made in Italy' flooring in the UAE throughout the past decade. This is in part thanks to an extensive promotional programme covering the Middle East, as well as continued improvements in manufacturing and technology.

"The UAE market progressively recognises the quality of Italian products due to the hard work in research that is constantly undertaken within aesthetic and material innovations," says Tanya Pearson, key account manager at Mirage Spa. "Such characteristics make 'Made in Italy' flooring an inimitable product."

The Italian tile experts champions the marque further as a member of Ceramics of Italy, avid promoters of the 'Made in Italy' institution and representative of the country's industrial ceramic factories throughout the world. Such membership enhances Mirage Spa's presence in the international market, as Ceramics of Italy aims to support the export of quality, innovation, texture and creativity of ceramic products worldwide.

"The care taken regarding the best material

choice, the research and the application of innovative manufacturing processes, the focus and the responsibility towards the country and the environment – all these things are distinctive of Italian tiling," concludes Pearson.

Back at Italian Luxury Interiors, exhibitor Maison Claire is another company enjoying a flourishing export trade with customers in the UAE, despite having no point of sale here. What is the secret to its international success? "Our collections have always been very popular in the UAE for the refinement and exclusivity of the models that we propose," explains Clara Bertoli, co-founder of Maison Claire. "The linens are made with 24-carat-gold thread, which expresses ultimate refinement and sophistication and has been met with great enthusiasm because it's the perfect blend of quality, tradition and innovation. The 'Made in Italy' marque has always been synonymous with quality, refinement and attention and it is recognised worldwide."

Furthermore, Maison Claire has been awarded the Certificate of Excellence in Craftsmanship by the Piedmont Region, further proof of the high quality, sophistication and the luxuriousness of her company's fine home textiles.

Bertoli founded Maison Claire together with her mother Mrs Scalvini Giulia. Family ties are another common thread among Italian companies and one that instils generations of artisanal skills and manufacturing know-how within the company's employees as well as inherent trust among customers.

"Italian companies tend to be small- or medium-sized family-run enterprises," says the Italian trade commissioner. "Even the famous names in today's furniture and fashion industries all started out as a small tailor or carpentry shop. Both Armani and Versace were just tailors and have become gurus in the world of fashion. This is the strength of the Italian family-run company, from the knowledge transmitted through generations and generations, from father to son, which is then enriched by the new technology the younger generation learns."

In a country populated with expats living far-flung from their families back home, it looks like we have a lot to learn from this lineage-rich country. Who knows, in generations to come the UAE may have its own dynasties in the furniture industry to rival this paese di qualità it so admires. And perhaps then the love affair will be wholly mutual.