



# *vision*

*global designers discuss how they transform groundbreaking thought into reality.*

**Creativity lies within each of us.** Bringing it to the surface is the hard part. Even the most gifted designers sometimes have trouble stimulating their imagination for truly novel solutions. *Perspective* asked a group of award-winning designers how inspiration and innovation color their creative approach. With their insights, these trendsetters open a window into their thought process.

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**Riccardo Bianchini** In a single word, the greatest quality of an innovator is curiosity. More articulately, an innovator must ask questions before giving answers and try to use these questions to examine the problem from an unconventional point of view. A client often has a blurry perception of what he really needs, so the designer is responsible for suggesting solutions the client can't imagine by himself.

Today's designers must avoid the temptation to be in the next top 10 chart of most trendy designers of the month. We actually live in a time that nurtures people's fears and anxiety. As designers, we can look beyond trends and suggest how our clients will experience the world in the future – the kinds of spaces, collective as well as private, they will live in.

This already is possible if you carefully read the signs in our everyday life.

Designers operate to build environments that other people will live in – people with various cultural backgrounds, activities and interests – so every experience in a designer's life may influence his or her work.

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**Riccardo Bianchini** taught at the Milan University from 1995 to 2003, initially with Achille Castiglioni and Eugenio Bettinelli and then as professor-in-charge.



**Federica Lusiardi** graduated from Milan University with a degree in Architecture. Initially, she worked on the planning of public spaces and digital media design.

**Bianchini & Lusiardi Associates**, Cremona, Italy, deals with almost all branches of architecture, though mainly with interior design for museums and temporary exhibitions. The firm recently won the second Design Between East and West international interior design competition in Seoul, South Korea.

If a project is innovative, it doesn't matter how big it is. The only difference is that a grand-scale innovation often is appreciated by a lot of people in a short time, while a small-scale one takes longer to propagate its influence. It's much more difficult to say if

this kind of influence will foster a new design school or not.

Actually, there isn't an authoritative design school that deeply shapes the way people live. Our world is too fast, too frantic, with a lot of contradictory trends and cross-contaminations. This situation led to the coexistence of many small design schools with a short-lived popularity. You can see the same situation in music, fashion and figurative arts. For example, in Italy, all the greatest design masters now are very old, and there aren't young designers with a comparable influence.



**Johnson Chou**, Principal, Johnson Chou Inc., is a graduate of University of Waterloo's School of Architecture and co-founder of Archive Inc., Gallery and Art Library. In 2001 he received the Arts Toronto Protégé Award. His firm has received the *Canadian Interior Magazine* Best of Canada Award 2002 for TNT Woman, the Ontario Association of Architecture Awards 2002, and Toronto's Interior Design Show's Gold Award for Outstanding Booth Design in 2001.

Only a design school that will take upon its shoulders the exigency to give answers to people's most profound needs – environmental, economic, health – may give our world a long-lasting shape.

**Federica Lusiardi** Many times, a satisfying project originates from a single, strong idea revealed by a long series of complex choices; a great master like Achille Castiglioni

called this single idea "il componente principale del progetto," daringly translated as "the crucial ingredient of a project," the soul of a project, the element that identifies it and guides your work until it becomes a coherent proposal.

This is sometimes an ambitious path that makes you constantly verify the correctness of your opinions, investigate unconventional uses of materials and technology, and become a sterner self-evaluator.

Contemporary designers in Europe – but also now in the United States – must deal inevitably with a significant cultural heritage. You can use this legacy in many different ways. You can steal a lot of stereotypical shapes someone created in the past, or even in the modern era, and merely reproduce them as a weak update, but this means that you have no possibility to be creative and certainly you will never be an innovative designer.

Otherwise, you can assume traditional solutions but, at the same time, use them as a launching point to brand new, personal research paths. In this case, there will be no differences among traditional, modern and innovative. You have to see yourself as an intelligent sponge that absorbs your surroundings and transforms them.

We are influenced by many designers, including Achille Castiglioni, Steven Hall or a young studio like Studio Azzurro, but also

by movie directors such as Kubrick and Hitchcock, by literature, by our travels, by modern art or even by our experiences with food.

We aim to use the designer's tools like the letters of an alphabet and to translate emotions coming from different experiences into a familiar language. For example, we currently are working on a personal experiment: We are designing a theoretical exhibition derived from three novels by Italian writer Italo Calvino. It's not an exhibition about Calvino. Our purpose is to translate the significance but also the impressions every novel gave us into different environments that can give the public similar perceptions – above all, the psychological ones. It's a trial to check our ability using materials, lighting, sounds and every other physical element that makes an exhibition setup in terms of an idiom.

**Johnson Chou** We live in an exciting, heterogeneous design milieu where one can explore numerous fascinating ideas. My design methodology is merely a framework that I apply and test these ideas against. Currently though, I find it much more interesting to have my client's aesthetic inclinations permeate my visions, and I am always curious to see the hybrid that results. Each project has its own life, its own distinct expression that is a unique coupling of both the clients' and my own conceptual pursuits.

My foremost source of inspiration is a criticism of architecture that is mute, its central theme focused on the urgent need for buildings and spaces to engage the viewer or participant on intellectual, emotional and physiological levels of experience. But the most moving experience I've had that continues to resonate and be deeply formative was my trip to Le Corbusier's Chapel at Ronchamp, France.

More recently, the opening of Archive Inc. in 1996, a fine arts gallery that I co-own with Patricia Christie, revived and refocused my interest in conceptual/installation art. The artists themselves, many of whom we befriended, were inspirational in their entrepreneurial, promotional resourcefulness and passion for their work. That experience served to rejuvenate the confidence that was necessary for me to establish a design practice in 1999.

Although my design philosophy evolves with every project, there are currently four conceptual streams that I apply to a project either singularly or cumulatively. This methodology adopts a

phenomenological approach to design, a process that attempts to develop an intensified form of ritual and metaphor with an emphasis on the sensory.

First, the notion of narrative, activated by one's movement through space, is the creation of a story conveyed by the architectural promenade wherein the form and details of the interior elements are imbued with metaphoric content. The second is the notion of architectural reduction, or the search for the elemental. Third is the articulation of the complex within the simple, and of these elements' paradoxical relationship, and fourth being the transformational poetics and programmatic invention as applied to both objects and space.

I have always been fascinated with objects and space that transform, and mutable sculptural forms that are inflected by function – buildings and spaces that transform, spaces animated by the fascination and beauty of movement.

Of course, I would like to consider my work as timeless, universal and



Over the past 17 years, **Collin Burry**, IIDA, Vice President, Gensler, San Francisco, has worked on many award-winning design projects across North America and China, ranging from law firms, corporate headquarters, showrooms, retail, hospitality and product designs. An advocate for sustainability in design, Burry received the Doc Award in 2002 and won the 28th Annual Interior Design Competition.

not susceptible to the vagaries of fashion or trends, but perhaps that is naïve. My preoccupation with utilizing translucency as a means of layering views and encouraging movement has probably made my work more of the moment, paralleling developments in product design.

**Collin Burry** I want to lead my clients and challenge myself to find solutions that solve strategic, business, functional and aesthetic issues in the simplest possible fashion. I strive to do the best possible

work, to do something unique for every client. Clients are the secret, untapped wealth of inspiration. They help me find that gem of opportunity – no matter how small the project or task at hand.

Initially, I think I saw design as about aesthetically solving functional problems. As I've grown, aesthetics and function are still important, but finding ways to enhance a client's business and advancing the industry have been added to the mix. I find that when we speak solely about design, we lose our true advantage as creative entities. Our clients view us as a commodity, or someone who spends their money, not someone who can help them make it.

I hope designers will take the challenge to lead in the communities in which we live and/or work. We affect people's lives, and I hope we are able to begin to quantify what we do, thereby increasing our value in the free market economy in which we live.

Globalism is becoming a major contributor to and influence on our work. As the shepherds and trusted advisors for these new economies, what do we want to learn from where we've been – where we can help them go? Will the world end up continents of box retail, office parks and strip malls?

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I aspire to tread lightly on this Earth, experience life and feed my endless curiosity to learn about someone or something – the brilliant creativity of nature and other designers. Ultimately, I want to do work that transforms. I want to strive to do the right thing, stay inspired and have fun on this journey.

**Anouska Hempel** Design doesn't just mean a pretty curtain; it comes with a total concept of how to eat, how to stand, how to live – all the things that make a difference in life. In both classical and contemporary design, the rules are the same, but they're written slightly differently. Classical means detail, because inspiration comes from so many different periods. You've got to follow a rhythm that is detail-oriented for that period. Contemporary also means detail, but in a very different volume.

If you're an innovator, you can get away with messing the rules up. I take more chances. I'm more spontaneous. I'll give a design a twist in the middle, with the clarity coming from the architectural side, to prevent the sterile feel. But you don't set

out to do that – it just happens along the way. For instance, if you think of a hotel, when you walk in the front door with your Louis Vuitton bag and your American Express Card, why should all 47 potted orchids face the same way? The lovely thing about confusion is that, in its own way, it creates excitement.

When approaching a new project, we rely on the solutions of the past. Our results dictate our practice. There are certain things we stick to, but I lead the team to create an underground look as we're doing it. Thought goes from the nib of a pen, throughout the room, out the chimney; it's a complete connection of past experience that leads you into the next thing.

Architecture and interior design have to become a total experience.

The future of design will involve ergonomics of living among the masses. The young have their individual space, and relation to their individuality is going to involve quite a myopic experience as time goes on. The ability to create privacy within the individual spaces of our lives is going to mean smaller and smaller solutions, but ones that are



**Anouska Hempel**, a.k.a. Lady Weinberg, has owned, designed and managed three award-winning boutique hotels which showcase her signature style. She leads a team of 20 architects and designers who are able to provide all aspects of architectural, interior, product and garden design services. Projects range from high-end residential, commercial, hospitality to retail.

technically more and more brilliant. The use of virtual reality will make your living much freer; you'll be able to have any type of experience within your own box.

If you think about hotel living, it can mean a tired little room with a bed, but the ceiling above you can represent the whole dream sequence from a movie. You can turn on your television and get into your fridge from that same little box – it's a whole different way of living. It's about how you divide the space and the way you interpret it. It's the imagination of the architect or designer. ■

*We must always be sensitive to client needs, and we must never stop learning. Today's knowledge might not be tomorrow's solution.*