

Home_Interviews_From the archive, Enzo Mari

23.09.14 | [Interviews](#)

From the archive, Enzo Mari

In 1980 Aurelio Zanotta paid Enzo Mari a visit with a 6th degree rock climber's nail, the type that makes the most of crevices in the rock wall to sustain the climber's body. This was the beginning of project Toniotta, Zanotta's seat, which won the Compasso d'Oro award in 1987. Its designer, architect Enzo Mari, speaks about it.

Q. What lies at the basis of your projects?

A. Let me give you an example. During the same years, Cesare Cassina too was reasoning on the idea of the rock climber's nail (he was a mountain enthusiast). He thought of having them produced in forged aluminium, which is highly compressed and very strong. Instead, starting from Aurelio's idea I thought of making the chair's legs in die-cast aluminium with differentiated thicknesses and thinner, slightly curved front legs. It took me five years to reach the right thickness and the final design. The assistance of Penati (Head of Zanotta's Technical Department at the time) with whom I defined every detail to make Toniotta work perfectly was essential. I cannot stand projects that are conceived the same morning as I cannot tolerate those who come along asking for an idea for the next day... You need thought, research and work to reach a design and create a product. The only possible reasons to design an item issue from the intention to clearly communicate a shape and the chair is the simplest shape one can start from: it has four legs, a seat and a back. Toniotta's pure arch and strong thin legs. The assembly system recalls that of the historical Thonet. The effort focuses on gaining the utmost resistance with the minimum use of material.

Q. After Toniotta, you designed many other furniture items and accessories for Zanotta – all characterised by remarkable formal purity, functionality and an advanced technological layout. Which do you recall with most satisfaction?

A. I recall them all. The coffee table Ambo with crystal tops – in practise it comprises two coffee tables, one low and one high, designed to be fitted as the user pleases. The table Dongiovanni, whose legs joined at the top with a special star-shaped joint designed by me. And then the seat Marina, the clothes hanger Museo, the table Fonte and the upholstered items Daniele. I do not like creating products for the market. I like to think of formal beauty and how to concretise it by rationalising the production process.

Q. Which customer target do you have in mind when you create a piece of furniture?

A. On the forty million potential purchasers of furnishing items in Italy, I think very few can draw close to design today. And it is not merely a matter of IQ... The first approach should be financial and, economy leads to basics. I find classical Greek culture's manner of proceeding ideal. Rather than needs, I want to focus on defending the right to think.