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THE FASHION ISSUE

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OFF THE runway

Exclusive! HELENA CHRISTENSEN AT HOME

*The supermodel on timeless style and her Middle Eastern adventure*

ISSN 2409 - 9643 22 Inclusive of VAT

9 772409 964009

BHD 3 KWD 2.5 OMR 3 AED 30 LBP 20,000



*Perfect*  
**Imperfection**  
*Vincenzo de Cotiis' beautiful, functional sculptures find inspiration in nature*

WORDS TALIB CHOUDHRY

“I like to create things that are imperfect, but that still offer a sense of luxury,” says the Italian designer Vincenzo de Cotiis, who is something of a creative polymath. After training as an architect in Milan, he started a studio in the city 21 years ago, and has become as well known for his striking sculptures as the high-end interiors he dreams up.

Most recently, he launched a limited-edition furniture collection, which bridges the divide between art and design with aplomb.

The latest additions to his furniture portfolio - each creation is unique, but similar styles can be commissioned - were a highlight of Milan Design Week in April. The installation in his Brera studio, was dubbed *En Plein Air*, French for ‘outdoors’ - a nod to the late 19th century art movement of the same name, which saw artists leaving their studios to paint outdoors. “I always think about how culture from the past can be reinterpreted in a modern, contemporary way,” de Cotiis explains. “I grew up with that



Vincenzo de Cotiis will be showcasing his earth-inspired collection at the Carpenters Workshop Gallery from 15th September

culture. I feel more like a man from the 1900s than the 2000s. I think contemporary expression always needs to be related to history.” The 20-strong collection - seating, lighting, tables and cabinets - combines semi-precious stones, Murano glass, recycled resin and cast brass. It is being transported to the Carpenters Workshop Gallery in Mayfair for a show opening on 15th September to coincide with the London Design Festival.

The sculptural, organic forms come in earthy hues, and the warm brass panels create ‘reflections that are similar to the light of the sun.’ “I wanted the pieces to be as close to nature as possible,” he explains. “The challenge was trying to reinterpret something that is already perfect and show it in a new light. People have a very strong emotional response to the designs and want to touch them. That’s the biggest compliment. It’s the same in the countryside - you want to touch and feel things, to make a connection with nature.”

It’s hard to explain how exquisite de Cotiis’ work is when viewed up close. A wall cabinet in silvered brass, transparent glass, and rare Indian stone set in resin, looks like it is hewn from a mountainside. Its simple, elemental beauty chimes with our atavistic need to be close to nature in a way that a precisely manufactured storage unit never can. Little wonder then, that de Cotiis refers to his oeuvre as ‘functional sculpture.’

The staging and soundscape for his exhibits are reimagined each time, adding to his creative vision.

All of the one-a-kind pieces are handmade by de Cotiis and his team of artisans in a workshop 400km away from Milan. Surprisingly, he travels there almost every day, the long drive serving as thinking time to distill ideas and take in the beauty of the north Italian landscape. Once he arrives at the workshop, he is very hands on: the craftsmen do not work on pieces when he’s not there. Every decision, every shape is very intuitive as he gradually moulds and layers the materials. The works start life as sketches, but there are no precise measurements or sharp angles involved in their making. As in nature, an overarching order combines with happenstance to create dazzling effects.

A coffee table made from cast brass and stone appears to be entirely organic in form with distressed and patinated surfaces. These perfect imperfections elevate the piece from design to sculpture.

Artists who were part of the En Plein Air movement painted quickly to try and capture the effects of shifting light and winds on the landscape. The dabs of paint they used came to be known as pointillism. To echo the effect, de Cotiis uses small Murano glass beads set in resin, which add depth and lustre. The two

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VINCENZO DE COTIIS  
 DESIGNER



materials have different melting points, fusing together to create stunning results, which look entirely natural. It is an innovative technique that’s never been employed before.

Some of the works are purely decorative, such as a vase-like sculpture which is monolithic in form, drawing viewers closer to admire its raw-yet-refined surface. This tactile appeal and contrast between polished and matte materials is a thread which runs through the whole collection.

As well as imagining the wind moving through the landscape and the effect of shifting light, de Cotiis thought about the force and beauty of moving bodies of water. The latter inspired the mesmerising surface of a four metre-long table, its sinuous silhouette adding to the feeling of fluidity.

“I believe that my work needs to be full of passion and different inspirations. It’s not like industrial design which is all about repetitive processes. I constantly need to find a new idea, something that is very emotional. I’m happiest when I’ve just finished a piece. I feel somehow relieved and ready to move on to something new.” □ [decotiis.it](http://decotiis.it)