

# Beautiful MINDS

Shine on: Venini's colourful glassware combines exquisite design with skilled craftsmanship



**CREATIVITY IS IN ITALIANS' GENES: THEIR PASSION FOR BEAUTIFUL THINGS SPANS CENTURIES AND INDUSTRIES, FROM GUNS TO GLASS, JEWELS TO LEATHER. THESE TIME-HONOURED TRADES CONTINUE TO UNDERPIN THE COUNTRY'S ARTISTIC CAPABILITIES**

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ACCORDING TO visionary designer Gaetano Pesce, creativity 'is Italy's true resource'. Quite right. It's a resource that is a talent, nurtured and developed through knowledge, technique and work. By avoiding distinctions between applied and decorative arts, design and plain art, Pesce maintains that every creation is in part pragmatic – so everybody can understand it – and in part cultural, relating to a particular sensitivity that no longer exists as it once did, and so is timeless.

Italy's 'creativity' has proved unique in combining the imagination and the mastery of realising the idea – both in supremely crafted products and industrially made pieces. There is a flash of genius and a vitality of taste that is very seductive to those not influenced by beauty in its capacity to bring together what appear to be contrasting ideas. Beauty is loved because it has a charismatic value that distinguishes it. As the great critic of taste Gillo Dorfles wrote, a will to differentiate 'is among those which most spurs man on, no matter what social level he belongs to'.

It's a quality from centuries past, that found its apotheosis in the Renaissance atelier, thanks to three elements: a desire to be ever more skilful and inventive; an infinite and ingenious attention to craftsmanship; and a curious and demanding customer-base with wealth of astonishing proportions – notably the courts of the aristocracy. 'No institution,' observes scholar and author Guido Guerzoni, 'was better able than these to promote feverish processes of invention, differentiation, specialisation and perfecting forms, materials and functions: anything and everything became the subject of special attention of proposals and designs, of variants and innovations.' This contributed to the diffusion of a taste for detail and pleasure in those who created and bought perfection. Take Isabella d'Este, who refused a portrait by the great Andrea Mantegna because it did not seem emblematic enough of her position, since the painter 'has done it so badly and does not look like us at all'.

The result? The excellence of the Italian product, confirmed by the success it had, and continues to have, abroad. In the 16th and 17th centuries, for example, the Lombard gunsmiths – from Pompeo della Cesa to the workshop of Missaglia, Aloisio da Boltego and the Brescian school – led the way in Europe, while aristocrats the continent over vied to obtain the leatherwork coming from the factories of the Venetian Republic and Tuscany. It was not just about accessories