Queen Taitù’s 50th Birthday

ITALIAN BRAND TAITÙ CELEBRATES ITS HALF CENTURY. LOVE FOR NATURE, CREATIVITY, A POETIC APPROACH TO THE WORLD ARE THE KEY WORDS TO THE HUGE SUCCESS OF AN ENTERPRISE THAT HAS CHANGED THE FACE OF TRADITIONAL PORCELAIN FOREVER. THE STORY OF A TRUE ARTIST WHO BELIEVES IN HIS OWN DREAM AND IN THE HEALING POWER OF BEAUTY

BY OMBRETTA BERTINI PHOTO TAITÙ’S ARCHIVE
Self-made man, artist and dreamer: Emilio Bergamin was born in post war Veneto, at a time when each day was a struggle for survival
The Incom Week Newsreel of 1960 announced: “The Taitù retail store has opened in Downtown Milan, Via Bigli 16...”. It was the year of Fellini’s “La dolce vita”, the beginning of a golden age. Taitù’s opening was a capital event, by many still remembered today: crowded streets, journalists, outstanding characters of the cultural and social world of the period, such as Valentina Cortese and Mayor Letizia Moratti’s mother. Today in 2010 the old Taitù shop is still there, a few steps away from Via Montenapoleone, still faithful to its original spirit in spite of the many changes undergone by a city like Milan, that has completed the mutation from a symbol of the economic boom to fashion and design capital. Emilio Bergamin, artist and designer, founder of Taitù brand and store, is still at his place, witnessing the changes of an entire world. Taitù’s half-century mark takes him almost by surprise, with a smile on his lips. The same smile that drew the poet Eugenio Montale, fifty years ago, to write some verses about him, the young man of the opposite window intent on drawing during the long summer nights. “It was a great time, a hard time too, but it was still possible to have dreams in those days” says Bergamin, light blue eyes and pastel green sweater. “The much praised ‘Fashion Quad’ did not exist back then, and in the Via della Spiga there were only craftsmen shops, bakers, little greengrocers. The bigs of today’s made in Italy were still unknown: I remember Armani and me lending each other the usual 100 lire to buy pizza...”. Self-made man, artist and dreamer: Emilio Bergamin was born in post war Veneto, at a time when each day was a struggle for survival. From his beloved mother of Brazilian origin Emilio took his deep love for life and the faith to believe in himself and in his own dream. A song of those times had a great impact on his imaginary inner world as a child: the well known tune about “Queen Taitù”, an actual historical character.

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who later became a legend, turning into an archetype of beauty and magic destined to give its name to Beramini’s brand. Nobody then could foretell that the dream of creating beautiful and possible everyday objects would come true. Nevertheless, believing in one’s own dreams often summons fairy mothers who make real what seems utterly impossible. “I got many signs that showed me the right direction” Bergamin says, “even through the encounter with very special people to whom I owe a lot still today, such as architect Filippo Perego, who gave me the basis to carry out my dream, and Stanley Marcus, founder and president of the luxury chain store Neiman Marcus, Dallas”. But let’s proceed with order through the story. Emilio Bergamin is a young man with many ideas in 1960s Italy. His retail store is an absolute novelty, in that it puts together different, transversal objects for the table and the home, it charms the élite with the freshness of new things, it sets a trend. But this is not enough, yet. Stanley Marcus, among his earliest customers and fans, is the one who makes known Taitù style in the United States: “I like the store and its unique atmosphere”, he says, after visiting the shop in Via Bigli, and he decides to organize an Italian exhibition in Dallas, where the Taitù store is reconstructed, identical to the original one. Sophia Loren, Susanna Agnelli, Ferragamo and Valentino are among the guests: an extraordinary event, but it is only the beginning. “If you want to succeed in the USA, you cannot just design everything; you’ve got to specialize”; Marcus had said. Emilio, then, visited the Neiman Marcus stores from top to bottom, examining the variety of objects, studying the different sections, from shoes to lipsticks. During his visit to the art of the table department, he finally has a kind of revelation: unlike the other sections, where everything is changing rapidly, Bergamin faces what he later called the “sleeping beauty” of the time, that is to say, porcelain. Granny’s Old England table sets under a layer of centuries old powder. “Mr Marcus, I’d like to deal with porcelain” was his final statement. With the blessing of his mentor, Bergamin went to Limoges and other centres of production, taking with him new projects and ideas which tried to renew the traditional image of the table. It was necessary to create modern things in the plate section, as well as in all the other areas of design. Bergamin had a very hard time at the beginning, there were many doors slammed in his face, nobody daring enough to produce him. Marcus then suggested he should go to Japan, where there was new start. The Japanese agreed to produce Taitù designs. Great breaking works were created, such as the “Positivo & Negativo” set, later renamed “Night & Day”, an all time classic now on permanent show at the Museum of Modern Art of New York. It was something never seen before: a plate graphically divided into two halves, one black, the other white. Such an unexpected object raised something never seen before: a plate graphically divided into two.

Emilio Bergamin was among the first to use tested colours at a time when there were no international guidelines and he invented the “mix & match” concept, a widely known formula today, an actual revolution in those times, that introduced the free play of combinations among the different pieces of the table set, matching forms and colours according to one own’s personal taste, mood and needs. He indicated new trends, like the combination of rose patterned placeholders and plates of different design; he played with shades through the use of “camayeu”, a colour that is gradually diluted from a starting nuance; he created the “Intermezzo” set, drawing its name from the Scala Theatre of Milan, of which Emilio has always been a great fan. He designed the famous and unleaded “Red Plate”, which obtained the approval of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). A very special set, inspired by little Dorothy’s shoes in “The Wizard of Oz”, which has a remarkable story. The “Red Plate” was among Nancy Reagan’s favourite sets of dishes. Bergamin gentlemanly decided to send her...
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later renamed “Night & Day”, the Bloomingdale’s stores of New York dedicated 18 shop windows to Bergamin, inviting 18 top personalities – opera singers, football players, the “Good Morning America” announcer and many others from every field – to decorate each a shop window using Taitù objects. The exhibition was followed by a 2000 guests party and the store was especially closed for the occasion. “Nobody in the world has ever had 18 shop windows at Bloomingdale’s” commented Keith, Bergamin’s longtime friend and associate, prematurely deceased. Times have changed a lot, but the will to create new things has not. Emilio Bergamin’s imaginary world, guided by Queen Taitù’s mythical muse, finds new ways of expressing its charms through fresh and colourful collections, inspired by the sense of a living nature filtered through an art which does not exist only for its own sake, but permeates everyday life with beauty and functionality. Just as in the latest collection “Mare (Sea)”, inspired by the primeval waters that are the cradle of life, or in the still top secret creations that are expected in the near future. “Today’s market is dominated by fear of expressing oneself clearly, nobody dares to challenge conventions, there is a general lack of ‘object culture’ and above all, little knowledge of porcelain” Bergamin says. “There is only one rule: follow the price. Once I was holding a lecture in an institute in Nagoya. A young student asked me how much I gained from my work. This is what they really want to know nowadays”.

**But then, how can we react to this mental and economic swamp?**

“We must come back to our dreams, trying to get rid of the panic that has frozen the brains of shopkeepers and customers. We have to open our minds to innovation and make beautiful things available to anyone. There is an incredible inequality between salaries and buying power today, but I think that design should be affordable for all. Design needs new ideas, a more human dimension, joie de vivre. It is not meant to change the world, but to create meaningful objects to be used and enjoyed”. In Bergamin’s opinion, today’s brand “dictatorship” is a sure sign of decadence: “Everything today is judged by the reputation of its trademark. In order to understand the beauty of an object we are forced to infer it from its brand, yet quality is not always on a level with its fame”. In spite of the bitter economic crisis, Emilio Bergamin keeps flying high, definitely “somewhere over the rainbow”.

As a man and an artist who has fulfilled many a dream, do you have any recurrent dream?

Bergamin smiles: “I often dream my mother ringing me from Heaven to tell me that the Holy Mary has seen my collections and wants me to visit her because she needs new table sets”.

**One last thing. If you choose to retire, what would you like to do?**

“I would like to paint the walls of my city with tromp-l’oeils, so that Milan would look like a garden, with lawns, flowers and trees. They would not be real trees, but they would certainly be a great relief for the spirit!” he says without hesitation. **www.taitu.it**