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VETRERIA BAZZANESE – THE EXCELLENCE OF GLASS DESIGN

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Gucci, Prada and Fendi, Valentino, Bulgari and Dior – many of the world's leading designer brands rely on the class, style and skills of a thriving local firm, Vetreria Bazzanese, for the innovative and glamorous glasswork of their stores.

Originally founded in the 1960s, Vetreria Bazzanese was taken over by Ugo Biondi and partner Alberto Benuzzi in 1993 when the previous owners were retiring and over the past 25 years they have managed to transform what was a modest local firm into a world leader thanks to their expertise, far-sightedness, energy and talent.

"We offer a global service from the initial consultation and measuring stage, right through to post-installation assistance; our success is partly down to the fact that we really understand glass and how it works," explains Biondi, pointing out that both he and Benuzzi had previously worked for another local glassworks. "Before we started here I was a glassfitter, while Alberto was a cutter; nowadays he is in charge of production and I deal with the sales side of things, communicating with our clients both directly and through architectural studios."

Many of the architects and interior designers they work with are among the best architects, people like American Peter Marino, Frenchman Philippe Starck and Patricia Urquiola from Spain. "Designers and architects often come to visit us to see if their ideas are workable – we discuss what they want during the morning, then while we go and enjoy a delicious lunch at the Antica Trattoria del Cacciatore nearby in Castelbolognese, or one of the other good restaurants in the area, a sample is being



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"We can make just about any shape," says Bellantoni, "one particularly unusual order for a Milan boutique involved a series of profiles of a couple, each time with their arms in a slightly different position – the final effect was rather like a flick book."

To create curved surfaces the straight glass is heated to approximately 600°C when it starts to soften and take on the contours of a specially-made mould. After applying the various techniques of curving, layering with different substances, painting or sandblasting comes the

They also work with top architects and designers on exclusive private residences, office interiors and even unique installations for cultural locations such as Bologna's Palazzo Pepoli and exteriors include the striking glass and metal facade of the Bulgari store on New York's Fifth Avenue.

Very often time is of the essence - sometimes Prada or Fendi will give them just a week or ten days to complete their part of an entire shop refurbishment. Rapidity is in fact one of the company's trademark characteristics,

made back at the factory so they can take it back home at the end of the day to help them finalise the project they're working on," explains Biondi.

"Many people don't realise the potential of glass - I myself was astonished when I joined the company and started to find out just how versatile it can be," admits Marco Bellantoni, one of the ten-strong technical team. Biondi agrees: "having been around for thousands of years, glass is rather a classic substance; our aim is to innovate." And the range of effects they manage to obtain is startling: metallic mesh, coloured film, luxury fabric or digital images sandwiched between sheets of glass for example, sandblasting at different pressures to obtain various levels of opacity or painted designs.

When an order comes through, the first step is to select the sheets of glass required for a project - they come in two sizes, 6m x 3m and 3.21m x 2.40m - and cut them down to the right dimensions; after that CNC machinery is used to make any necessary holes, shape the contours and smooth the edges.

welding stage - a special glue is used to fix glass on glass for a completely transparent display cabinet for example, or perhaps onto a metal frame. "Gucci have just started transforming the interiors of their boutiques - we began with the Milan flagship," says Biondi, "their distinctive warm and rich bronze-coloured interiors are making way for more transparency, with steel and glass cabinets to place more emphasis on the items on display".

If you've ever shopped - or window shopped - among the designer stores of Milan, Rome, New York or London (including Harrods), or in Bologna's exclusive Galleria Cavour, the chances are you'll have seen their work. They're not limited to the world of retail however: VB regularly creates stunning glass fittings and furnishings for top hotels too, such as the new and luxurious Hotel Ocelle at Sirmione on Lake Garda, Hotel Eden in Rome and the historic Hotel Lutetia in Paris.

together with utmost quality, complex solutions and innovation. "We manage to deliver to such strict deadlines partly as we are so well-equipped: by having all the machinery we could possibly need, everything can be done on site and timings are kept to a minimum," explains Biondi. He also believes he has his origins to thank for a particularly work-oriented mindset: "both Alberto and I are from Modena, it's a beautiful city and a wonderful place to live; it's also the home of such world famous excellences as Ferrari and Maserati [not to mention balsamic vinegar] and there's a deeply engrained work ethic."

What Biondi loves most about his company is the aspect of innovation, "we're continually working on something new, fresh and exciting - it really is stimulating." R&D is vital and new materials and techniques are experimented with all the time: "at the moment we're testing wood and marble in combination with glass to see the potential in terms of visual effects as well as practicality.

Sarah Lane

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