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LIFE ON THE OUTSIDE

INTO THE LIGHT

DARE 2 BE A REBEL

DESIGNER ESCAPES

MAKING A STATEMENT

INTERVIEW TOM DIXON

INTO THE LIGHT

Strike a match and you've made light in much the same way as your ancestors did many thousands of years ago. Blow it out immediately and in the time it has taken you to do so, its waves of light, if they could follow the curvature of the earth, would have hit you in the back. Light is life. Light is extraordinary.

So too is the craft of producing light. **Enzo Catellani** does this, and he does it like nobody else in the world today.

Sorry Giotto
Pure and unadorned, reflecting its light on the wall behind, this iconic lamp is a masterpiece of minimalism.

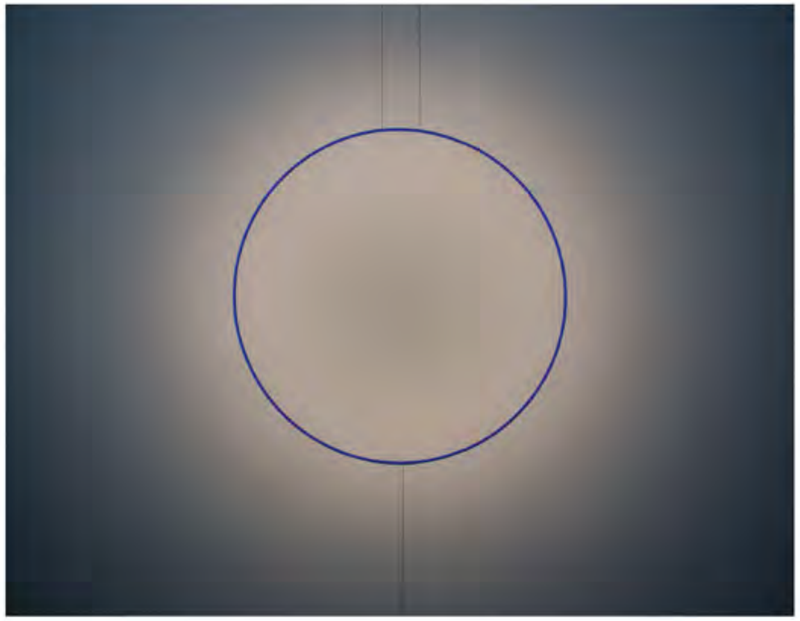

Photo: Nava-Rapacchietta

INTERVIEW WITH ENZO CATELLANI

UD Magazine talks to the lightsmith of Lombardy, arguably the most creative lighting designer in the world.

Enzo Catellani began making lamps in his workshop in Bergamo in the 1980s, selling them through his own shop. They attracted the attention of a top German distributor who presented them at the Ambiente Expo in Frankfurt in 1989, and they were a huge success. He then set up his own company, calling it Catellani & Smith (he explains the name in the interview). Since then his reputation has been growing worldwide. Everything he produces is still made by hand.

Simple, beautiful shapes that happen to be lamps. This is what he does, and one of his most basic designs, the *Fil de Fer* range (see opposite page), is not only one of the public's favourites but has been installed in some of the most prestigious buildings in the world, such as the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.

In recent years he has been devoting much of his time to outdoor lighting, some photographs of which can be seen on the following

Fil de Fer
Suitable for indoors or outdoors. Each globe hanging in the Victoria & Albert Museum measures two metres in diameter.

"Light has always been my *raison d'être*, a dream that has become reality"

pages. Organic forms rising from the earth like glowing flowers, trees of glittering bulbs, otherworldly stalks of light like magic bulrushes, clouds of light floating overhead: welcome to the world of Enzo Catellani.

In our interview he speaks of the past, the present and the future of lighting, the importance of craftsmanship and light technology, art, public spaces and much more.

Do you think you'd have been as happy being a blacksmith, as you once famously claimed to be?
Light has always been my *raison d'être*, a dream that has become reality. When I started to create my lamps, I didn't know if I would ever sell them. I only knew that this was my life. Then I decided to follow and develop my dream to reach the light, giving it a shape through the objects that I was able to create. I'm surprised at what I've succeeded in doing, without teachers or guidelines.

The start of my working experience as a blacksmith is part of the plainly fictitious story about occasional meetings with Logan Smith, who we encouraged people to believe was a London architect, but was actually the name of my horse. I didn't want to draw attention to myself; I thought that my work could tell my story. If I had not become a designer, I would probably have chosen to be a fisherman.

Do you see what you do as art?
I don't consider my work and the objects I create as works of art. Nevertheless, *Fil de Fer*, one of Catellani

Right: *I Maestri del Paesaggio*
Installation by Catellani & Smith, showing the **Syphasera lamp**, an opaline glass cylinder with natural brass detail and black stem

Photo: Nava-Rapacchietta

This page & opposite: Installation by Catellani & Smith in *Casa Tresoldi* Garden - Bergamo, made for the International Meeting "*I Maestri del Paesaggio*",

Photo: Nava-Rapacchietta

& Smith icons, has been acknowledged as a work of art, worthy of protection under copyright. I like to play down my creations, even if I put all of myself into them and they are the fruits of research and the expression of my feelings. I don't consider myself an artist. I'm a person who loves what he does. I like to give a touch of irony to my work.

Catellani & Smith is known for it's craftsmanship, but how important is technology to you?
At the Catellani & Smith factory each lamp is made by hand. We're still producing our lamps in the same way as we started in 1989, but technology has allowed me to develop new concepts of lights, especially by using LEDs. The development of alternative energy sources has brought about a revolution in the field of lighting. With the Eco-Logic Light collection, for instance, I interpreted LED technology by moving away from the industrial uses of LED. I wanted to create new applications that could express a new concept of light – a sort of Zen light – combining technology with unexpected materials, embracing at the same time the increasing demand for energy-saving and respect for the environment.

So you don't sacrifice design and style for technology?
On the contrary, technology helps me to translate new ideas into objects that reflect my personality and lets me experiment with new combinations of materials and alternative lighting sources.

How important is it for you to work in public spaces?
Public spaces allow the creation of objects in huge dimensions, which can be installed in a museum, in the hall of an airport or a renowned hotel, in historical places or outdoors, in parks and public spaces. Large outdoor installations are more

"I like to give a touch of irony to my work"

Photo: Nava-Rapacchietta