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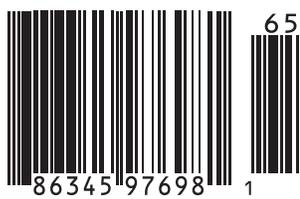
INTERIORS



PIONEERING DESIGN

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SELLING POINTS

Italian architect **Giorgio Borruso** creates unforgettable retail environments that define brands and lure shoppers
BY MICHAEL WEBB

GIORGIO BORRUSO HATES TO SHOP, BUT HE HAS created a succession of dazzling stores and showrooms that share a common idea: architecture must communicate with the public. In designing interiors he tries to tell a story that will draw people in from the street, and, since he was born in Sicily, that story often verges on the fantastical. A dozen civilizations flourished and died on that harshly beautiful island, and its rich cultural legacy ameliorates the poverty that drives its best talents to make new lives abroad. Borruso opened a studio in Marina del Rey, California, in 2000 and executes commissions from enlightened corporations in the States and Northern Italy. Frequently

honored, he recently won the prestigious Red Dot Design Award for his Carlo Pazolini flagship store in Milan.

That project has an improbable backstory. Two Russian lawyers established a chain of stores in Eastern Europe selling Italian-made footwear under the made-up name of Carlo Pazolini. To impress the fashion capital of Italy, they hired Borruso to transform a huge retail space they bought from McDonald's (winning plaudits from the mayor for "liberating" the site). The challenge was to dramatize the display of tiny objects behind an expansive window, and Borruso found inspiration in the feet of his infant son for the graceful trays that support each pair of shoes. The success of the

The eye-catching retail environments of architect Giorgio Borruso make use of vibrant colors, sinuous lines and dramatic focal points. For Carlo Pazolini, a Russian-owned company that sells Italian-made shoes, Borruso designed an expansive flagship store in Milan (left and below) and a tightly compressed boutique in Rome (opposite).

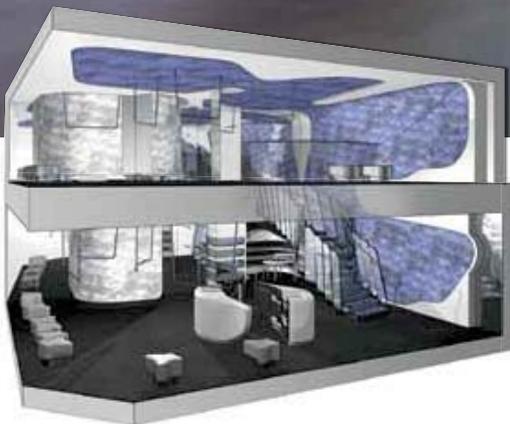




Benny Chan / Fotoworks

“Sometimes I feel like Robin Hood, taking their money and sharing it with the public.”

—GIORGIO BORRUSO



flagship has spurred a rapid expansion, and there are now eleven Carlo Pazolini stores in the U.S. and four in Western Europe. They share a common DNA but each has its own distinctive identity, notably the tightly compressed vortex of the boutique in Rome.

Unity in diversity is one of the many challenges Borruso has mastered. Most companies like to repeat a winning formula and standardize the elements; designers prefer to juggle the parts and refresh the brand with new iterations. “It’s a struggle to get clients to take chances and spend a bit more,” he admits. “Big corporations are risk-averse and want to maximize profits, and that often breeds mediocrity. Sometimes I feel like Robin Hood, taking their money and sharing it with the public.”

Fornarina commissioned a storefront for their stylish attire in South Coast Plaza and

an emporium on Carnaby Street, an icon of the 1960s, where Borruso may have been inspired by the wild excesses of Sicilian baroque. Its swooping glass staircase serves as a magnet for London’s Carrie Bradshaw wannabes. More recently, he transformed an abandoned porcelain factory in Milan to serve as a hip headquarters for Fornari, the parent company. “A central spine penetrates the entire volume, connecting the different levels in an organic way and guiding traffic through the building,” says Borruso. “Lines turn into a three-dimensional construction, tying the disparate spaces together.” His sensuously curved concourse extends from the street entrance to a sculptured staircase. Walls and ceiling are fabricated from a lightweight tensile copolymer, backlit by LEDs to achieve different color effects that spill over the white resin floor.



Alberto Ferrero



Borruso's London store for Fornarina (opposite), an Italian fashion powerhouse, is a chic addition to the legendary, but much faded Carnaby Street. A sleek glass staircase draws shoppers to the second level. For its parent company's Milan headquarters (this page), the designer used sensuous colors and lighting to transform an abandoned porcelain factory.



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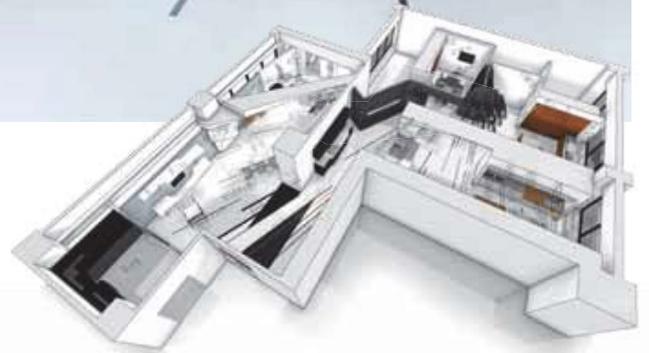
Magda Biermat



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“The goal is to develop a signature for the client rather than ourselves.”

—GIORGIO BURROSO



“With every job, we try to forget what we’ve done before and start from zero,” says Borruso. “The goal is to develop a signature for the client rather than ourselves.” His showrooms for Snaidero USA, a veteran Italian kitchen manufacturer, took an entirely fresh approach. In West Hollywood, sleek equipment designed by Gae Aulenti and Pininfarina (best known for its Ferrari coachwork) were being displayed in a mock-up of a domestic kitchen. Borruso removed the false walls and soffit, and set off the fittings with swooping ribbons that tamed the lofty volume without physically dividing it.

Business boomed, and the designer created a variation on this theme in Miami, turning the ribbons into snaking tendrils inspired by the trailing roots of the *Ficus magnolioides*—a tree that flourishes in Florida and Sicily. Borruso uses his pencil and computer with equal facility. “When I sketch, I take a line on a walk through space,” he says. “Here, my first sketch looked like a random scribble, but I pared it down to generate a model, reducing the number of lines from forty to eighteen.”

Working in Italy, Borruso taps into a network of craftsmen and specialized ateliers that sustain the country’s reputation for putting quality

ahead of mass production. “It’s harder to do that in the U.S., but I’ve found incredible people here and look for firms with lots of experience with the materials I’m using,” he says. He recently completed a ground-up store for Lord & Taylor, America’s oldest retailer, in Westchester, New York. In this innovative steel-and-glass structure he pushed this conservative client to rethink the traditional layout, and put all the departments within one soaring, light-filled void. That project may prove a breakout for Borruso’s studio, adding large-scale architectural commissions to the cottage industry of retail interiors. ■

To dramatize the kitchen showrooms of Snaidero USA, a prestigious Italian manufacturer, Borruso employed a vortex of swirling ribbons in Los Angeles (opposite) and a stark black-and-white composition of sharp lines and fanned planes in New York (above).