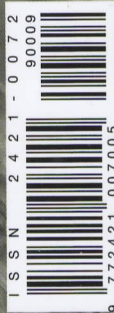


LOOK AT ME

# CAP 74024

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Photography Edoardo de Ruggiero  
Feature Daniela Giuliano and Michele Seppia



Text Alice Ida Salerni

**Ceramic collections, homages to Giò Ponti, art books and photos by Nan Goldin: Michele Seppia and Daniela Giuliano's home in Arezzo is the expression of their enthusiasm for objects, art and design. This passion is felt here in these private rooms and then shared with the world at the Nero Design Gallery, founded in 2005.**

As well as providing a point of reference for anybody interested in historic design, it is one of the most interesting independent contemporary design projects in Italy. A couple that shares a love for objects in both their life and work. Daniela and Michele tell us about their house, their work, and their passions.

The house, designed by Michele himself, who is an interior designer as well as a gallerist, has a sophisticated aesthetic. Michele dedicated great attention to the restoration and conservation of the historic building's classical elements, creating an effective dialogue between past and present, a transversal element in the couple's design research.

**How long have you lived in this house and what was it that fascinated you about the building when you first discovered it?**

The house had been on the market for years when we bought it. We were looking for something that had not been restructured and still had a historic character and original features.

When we first viewed it, Daniela and I immediately fell in love with the light and the garden.

The house was in terrible condition, but we knew that we could conserve the doors and floors and we suspected we would find frescoes behind the white walls. And we did! It took three years of renovations before we could move in in 2016.

**Which part of the house do you enjoy the most?**

The studio on the ground floor, the living room and the garden: a happy place in which to get some fresh air and with a view over the buildings of Piazza di Santa Maria in Gradi and the gardens of Casa Vasari. A magical place in Arezzo which almost feels like being in the countryside.





**Did you design the space around the objects you wanted to have in it or vice versa?**

I did in some cases.

I already knew which bed I wanted in the bedroom and on this basis

I designed a wardrobe made of metal and varied burnished brass, with decorations inspired by a Giò Ponti design from the '40s.

In other cases, the furniture was fitted to the space, using the materials I always use in my projects: marble, concrete and brass.

**What is your relationship with objects, do you believe that in some way they have consolatory powers?**

Our home is full of different collections, lots of books, ceramics and works of art. We are always going to different art and design fairs and we often buy objects, so my role as collector sometimes collides with my role as a dealer but objects that enter my house generally do not leave again.

Because I tend to fall in love with them.

**A gallerist often starts out as a collector and sometimes, as in your case, as a designer. How did the Nero Design Gallery come about?**

My passion for art and design began as a teenager when my father used to take me on his work trips to museums and galleries all around the world.

Over the years, I started my own personal research into objects, starting from ArezzoSì, which hosts Antiquaria, the biggest antique fair in Italy.

So, you might say that my career as a gallerist started with a collection but it was my job as an interior designer that allowed me to continue my research and find pieces to use in my projects.

**Research is one of the key elements of a gallerist's job, what do you find interesting in the world of contemporary design at the moment and who should we be keeping an eye on?**

This is a very exciting moment for contemporary design and there is a great desire to experiment.

I can not choose any one gallery that I prefer. I think each gallerist has to have his or her own personal approach and choose objects that stimulate his or her own sensibility. This can also stem from meeting people who make similar choices.

**Who or what developed your aesthetic taste?**

It might be obvious but, for me, the masters of the '50s and '60s Italian Design are indisputable points of reference: Ponti, Albini, Scarpa, Mangiarotti and so on.

My first "love" was the bed that Giò Ponti designed for the Hotel Royal in Naples, which I bought when I was very young and has followed me from home to home ever since.

**Arezzo has many international visitors, how does the public approach your gallery? Who is your ideal client?**

My ideal clients are those who let me take them by the hand and guide them. Despite its influx of international visitors, Arezzo is still a provincial city in many ways and the clientele is different to cities like Milan, London or Paris. Some clients are quite overwhelmed when they enter the gallery and wonder if

they have stepped into a museum, while others are immediately captivated by the objects.

For example, two international visitors knocked on the gallery window one Easter a few years back because they had seen something they liked. They are still clients of mine to this day, nowadays I handle interior design projects for them in Moscow.

**How important is storytelling in the presentation of a collectable design object?**

Storytelling is very important because not every object can be understood on first impact. When I present a collection like Guerra

Fredda by Duccio Maria Gambi, I have to explain that the tiles used for the pieces were collected by Duccio himself from places such as the Paris metro, that they are assembled with concrete and that each piece is created by the cohabitation of two very different materials. Design needs stories just like art and objects have to be explained.

**If you had to suggest a piece to a neophyte collector, which would it be?**

If a client asked me this question, I would say that a collection starts with two objects: a piece of historic Italian design and a piece of contemporary design. The choice of the latter needs to be made on the basis of what they like in that moment, beyond value and quotation, as collectible contemporary design is risky. Therefore, it is best to choose based on what the object communicates.

**The gallery collaborates with various designers, each with their own personal and individual approach. What do they have in common?**

Sensibility, dexterity and knowledge of the product. Every designer we work with has a background in art and design studies or has worked alongside great masters, such as Duccio with Van Lieshout in Rotterdam.





**How and when did the collaboration with Duccio Maria Gambi come about?**

Duccio was the first name that we approached in the world of contemporary design, seven years ago. We met in Paris at the home of a collector who commissioned a project from Duccio. It was perhaps his first ever commission.



That meeting had a big impact. I immediately liked his work and have found our collaboration since then very satisfying. We share a very direct understanding; I only need one sketch to grasp what Duccio wants to transmit. I think what unites us as people is that we are both from Tuscany. We share a certain sense of closeness but at the same time a great openness.

#### **How do you and Daniela manage work?**

My wife and I have known each other for twenty-seven years and have been together for seventeen of those. We have shared this interest throughout our relationship. We would cultivate our passion at art exhibitions and antique markets. Today I take care of the creative direction and my own interior design projects while my wife handles the gallery, public relations and bureaucratic tasks. She has the last word

on all projects, however, and we hardly ever disagree about which direction to take the gallery.

#### **In comparison to big companies, with galleries one presumes that designers have more freedom to experiment. What are the dynamics when you collaborate with designers? Can you give us an example?**

One example would be the work we did for the new exhibition "Lightness" which will open at the end of November.

We selected nine designers who we asked to create objects around the concept of "lightness", respecting its double meaning: brightness and lightness. We gave each designer indications on the type of object to produce, whether vases, lights and mirrors. The guidelines were collaborative then, and the designers were given freedom in the language and implementation. That is why we are still waiting to see some of the objects!



**What is the relationship between collectible design objects and art? Is a unique piece of design a work of art or not?**

Until some time ago, the art world held a certain distrust for design. Over the years, the relationship between art and design has changed. More and more art fairs like Miart and ArtBasel have important design sections and more and more galleries are now having design pieces made exclusively for them.

In both sectors, however, those who want to invest tend to invest safely because the avant-garde is still risky.

If we had to establish a line between the two worlds, we might say that the difference lies in how a piece comes to fruition. The relationship between aesthetic and function is still an essential prerogative in design. When somebody buys a designer armchair, they will want to sit on it, whereas that is not necessarily true if they buy a chair by an artist.

**Tuscany has an enviable level of artisanal knowhow. How is avant-garde design perceived there? Do you collaborate with local artisans?**

Tuscany is very fortunate to have an important input from the fashion world. Artisanal companies, in particular in the Arezzo area, where Prada and Ferragamo produce, have an innovative and forward-looking approach.

All our products are made exclusively by artisans, for the most part local. We have established a relationship of trust and synergy with these companies. Their openness and curiosity about what we do is very stimulating.

Other collaborations have developed thanks to special projects like Piemonte Handmade, promoted by Operae, where we worked with two local artisans for two years, making works by Marcello Pirovano and Duccio Maria Gambi. We still work with both of them, a cabinet-maker and a company that works stone.

**With the Salone del Mobile in Milan, Italy's role in the international design panorama is increasingly authoritative, how much space is dedicated to independent realities at this event, and what is your experience of the Salone?**

We have participated in the Salone del Mobile twice. In 2018 we presented a project with Duccio Maria Gambia in dialogue with his master Giovanni Pettena's work, and in 2019 we returned with Duccio to show the Guerra Fredda collection.

We exhibited at Alcova in Via Sassetti and I can tell you Alcova is one of the most relevant spaces in terms of the independent and the avant-garde.

**Any future projects?**

"Lightness", the exhibition that will open on November 28th in our gallery in Arezzo.

This will see us involved in a conversation with new designers for the first time and we are curious to see how this discourse will develop in the future.

In the meantime, we are working on bringing another dream to life but I can not reveal anything about that yet.