

## 50 years of Living Divani, 1969-2019

### The story begins

Perseverance, strong commitment, a touch of luck and a genuine fixation on the highest-quality of contemporary design.

These are the secrets behind the success of Living Divani, the Company from Anzano del Parco (Como) renowned for the immediately recognizable pure and clean lines of its soft furnishings, whose singular journey has turned it into a leading brand with a remarkable international reputation, and brought it to the important milestone of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

It's a story of perfectionism, of lightness of shapes and savoir-faire; a story that began at the dawn of the seventies. It was in 1969 when Luigi Bestetti and Renata Pozzoli embarked on both their married life and their professional venture.

Following the experience in his family's business, guided from classic furnishings to modern decor, Luigi decided to give it all up to follow his and Renata's dream: their own brand, which could fully reflect their avant-garde vision. And this is how Luigi, aged 26, and Renata, aged 22, created Living, starting with a small upholstery workshop in Via Palmanova, Milan.

"In the morning I used to drive my Fiat 500 Giardinetta to the suppliers near our home to pick up the components and fabrics, which I would take to Milan, assemble and then deliver to customers on the way home", says Luigi. "Meanwhile Renata was going around with her briefcase distributing our catalogues, helping to shape Living Divani's future sales network".

From the outset, the distinctive features of the brand have been clean silhouettes, sophistication, a carefully chosen palette of colors and a sense of energy and freedom. These were the years of emigration when families needed to accommodate more people in their homes, so the firm specialized the production in sofa beds and armchairs with a new twist. It was an experiment that gave them the courage and the determination to grow their business.

### The 1970s - the factory and overseas development

Thus, in 1971 they took the opportunity to return to Giussano in Brianza: a decision that was backed by favorable economic circumstances and an economic boom. Living started producing a wider range of furniture, but always with clean and neat lines, from the Kiss sofa, sold to Metro, to the Veruska Collection, comprising a table with chrome frame and glass surface, mostly exported to the USA, to the bed, whose design would still be current today. Extremely strong high-end products that took on the challenge of making a name for the firm to live up to the classic leading brands.

In 1974 the firm acquired the plot of land in Anzano del Parco and began the construction of the first 2,000 square meters of today's factory. At this moment, important was the collaboration with Gerard Benoit who, in accordance with Renata and Luigi, broaden up the production to the export, mainly towards the French market. Fundamental were also his aesthetical product advices, consequently made real by the expertise and craftsmanship of Mr. Enzo, the Company's prototypist at that age. Among the firm's flagship product, the "soft" Benson sofa (1978), displaying the firm's experimentation with new ideas of comfort and lifestyle, which has guided its output since the beginning. Produced in 2 and 3-seater sofas version and armchair, in only two types of leather or floral fabric, Benson was the iconic Living item of the 1970s. Also of pivotal importance, the timeless King (1979), whose classic image expresses at the same time the search for new proportions and attention to materials. The establishment in 1977 of a collaboration with a major French chain, who bought the exclusive resale rights of several models displayed in more than 200 stores - such as the

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impeccable Lucky sofa in aniline leather, presented in Paris in 1978 - led the Company to years of intense activity and a turnover which doubled year by year.

During this period Living is rewarded for the quality of its products, for a series of fortunate encounters and for the idea of focusing on foreign sales from then on. Taking part at three yearly trade fairs - Milan, Paris and Cologne - with limited exhibition space but a strong emphasis on a modern and innovative approach (think of the Veruska bed mounted on the wall due to lack of floor space in the stand) was essential for increasing the brand's worldwide reputation. Such exhibits expanded and improved as the years went by, from the early and spectacular installations "like a greenhouse" in Cologne in the 90s, the layout of 1995 in Milan characterized by a backlit flooring, right up to the more recent layouts curated by Piero Lissoni at Brera's Botanical Garden in 2014, the Torre Velasca in 2015 and the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca in 2016, to name only a few, which indicate an evolution in style while still remaining extremely consistent with the original concept.

### **The 80s - the Italian market and new collaborations**

With the arrival of the 1980s and the second expansion of the production department, Living focused on building its collections and create its sales network, an essential step in boosting the brand's identity and moving it forward.

The firm concentrated more determinedly on developing the Italian market - more complex due to the demand for diversification in models even in terms of a broader array of fabrics and leathers.

This period saw the beginning of the relation with Giuliano Cavana, who supported Living in marketing and sales management, and for the collaborations with external designers. From the Marianne sofa, designed by Mario Marengo in 1982 and presented in Milan by Franco Maria Ricci, to the Bronx sofa and the Arlette chaise longue by Giotto Stoppino, the collection featured numerous "designer" pieces alongside products made by the "Living project", like Kismy Tu and Time.

The second half of the decade saw the firm's collaboration with Centrokappa, a group of designers and communication professionals, based in Milan, whose multidisciplinary nature gave the Company a coordinated and global image. Still a niche manufacturer, Living was already investing heavily in its image and was featured in major publications of the period.

### **The 90s - the encounter with Lissoni**

The pivotal moment that marked the modern story of Living Divani was the encounter with Piero Lissoni, who visited the firm and candidate himself to become its art director in 1986. Renata and Luigi initially said no but then, fascinated by his early work, called him back again in 1989.

Their work together began with the transformation of the brand into Living Divani, with a new logo which unequivocally states its mission; and it was just the beginning. Under Lissoni's artistic direction, which continues today, the firm was thoroughly analyzed and fine-tuned, giving it the image it bears today. Thus, began an extraordinary output of materials and visuals, ranging from catalogues, fair stands and invitations, with input from a team of creatives which developed over time and included Graphx for graphic design, Tommaso Sartori for photography and Elisa Ossino Studio for styling.

Meanwhile, Piero got on with designing the products, among which stands out Calibano, the first product ever designed by the Architect, and Bench System, a seating system consisting of cushions placed on wooden bases; its style and architectural approach made this a piece of furniture with personality, which could strongly fit in a modern setting.

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In 1995 Piero designed the product which remains the Living Divani icon: the Frog armchair, considered the forerunner of low, wide seating and a new, more relaxed lifestyle. Available in woven or soft padded versions, and in double and triple-seat benches - no longer in production - the Frog changed not only the image of Living Divani but also the domestic and contract landscape of the period.

"A beautiful item but so different from anything else, that when I saw it I told Piero we wouldn't sell even one" - confides Luigi Bestetti. "But our initial skepticism was followed by courage, and the chair was presented in more than 20 pieces at the Salone del Mobile that year, replacing sofas, and the rest is history. Our faith in the concept and its true, pure design, rewarded us".

### **The 2000s - bestsellers and international recognition**

The first decade of the 21st century saw Living Divani's consolidation on the international scene, with bestsellers that are still in the catalogue today.

Designed in 2000, Wall was the first model placed directly on the floor, creating a new concept of sofa thanks to its unusual volumes and wide platforms. In 2002 Wall evolved into Extra Wall, a completely modular sofa, composed of various elements which can be freely assembled: an epochal change and a new approach to the range of modular solutions, not only for smaller spaces, but above all for larger contract spaces.

"I remember we were in New York with a client when Piero sketched it on a paper napkin. We immediately got out to find a shop where to xerox it and send a Fax to the Company as the Technical Office could start to work on it. An extremely simple object with perfect proportions, meticulously calibrated. That year we presented it at the Salone and our customers thought we were crazy; then we made some scale models 1:20, lego-style, to see how they could be arranged. People started playing with them, and then they understood how to use it, and those who understood started selling it, and they still do. It's not just a sofa, it's a game where many people can sit on it in an unconventional way; it is our iconic piece by antonomasia".

With the aim of designing a more reassuring product, replacing a rigorous idea with a new concept of softness more suited to domestic interiors, 2008 saw the launch of Extrasoft, a soft and sleek version of Extra Wall that is still today's bestseller, in both its indoor and outdoor version.

Not to be forgotten the official presentation of the Bed Collection, in 2004, born as a natural evolution of the already existing sofa such as Avalon bed, ExtraWall Bed and Ile Bed.

In parallel with the evolution of the product range, even the structure of the Company changed with the arrival, in the same period, of Living Divani's second generation, the daughter Carola. The innate abilities and her deep involvement and passion for the design world and her perceptions of nuance and success, led to the development of new collections. Her intuition gave rise to the original re-editions in 2008 of classic items by Shiro Kuramata, contemporary Japan's most sophisticated and influential designer, and the 2010 collection (Drop table and the Family Chair) by the young Japanese talent Junya Ishigami, which won the Leone d'Oro for best design in the 12th Venice International Architecture Exhibition.

During this period a comprehensive range of products was developed for a complete living environment, based around upholstered furnishings with discreet forms and volumes, created by various designers such as Arik Levy, Claesson Koivisto Rune, Francesco Rota, Gabriele and Oscar Buratti, Piergiorgio and Michele Cazzaniga, Shiro Kuramata, Junya Ishigami and Víctor Carrasco, who all share the Company's style and approach to design.

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To face the ever changing communication needs of a global market, Living Divani structured itself through a strong collaboration with R+W Design and Brand Management, led by Rudi von Wedel and Gregorio Cappa.

Furthermore, in 2007, the Living Divani headquarters in Anzano del Parco was redesigned by Piero Lissoni as a showcase space, to mark the first 40 years of the brand's activity. Sober yet elegant contemporary architecture designed to convey the firm's core values, its philosophy and its approach that have made Living Divani a point of reference in the international design scene with solid roots in its birthplace, the hard-working Brianza within the province of Como.

### **2010-2019 - new markets and talent scouting**

The past decade has been a time of talent scouting among the new generation of designers, led by Carola in person, in close collaboration with art director Piero Lissoni. To deal with the dynamics of a constantly-changing market, the collection has been enriched with the products of designers from a variety of origins and styles, including (a+b) Dominioni Quaquaro, David Lopez Quincoces, Elisa Ossino Studio, Giopato&Coombes, Harry Paul, Junpei & Iori Tamaki, Keiji Takeuchi, Lanzavecchia + Wai, Luis Arrivillaga, Marco Guazzini, Mario Ferrarini, Massimo Mariani, Matthias Hickl, Mist-o, Nathan Yong, Shibuleru, Studio Juju, UNpizzo and Victor Vasilev, who all increase the diversity of the range, opening it up to new tastes. Different visions that although in their unique individuality, have the same common denominator, the harmony and the delicacy of forms, praising to the linearity and to formal neatness.

From the "outdoor" collection, expanded year by year, the carpet collection firstly introduced in 2011 up to the styling project of 2017, the Company built, little by little the concept of a "Living Divani world", which freely moves from living room to bedroom, dining room and outdoors; every room encapsulates a more flexible, people-friendly style of relaxation and a concept of personalization as the ultimate goal of the ideal comfort that has become an indispensable value of the firm.

Significant acknowledgement of the path of excellence of Living Divani is the entry in 2012 in Altagamma, the foundation that gathers Italian companies of international repute, which operate at the top end of the market expressing the Italian culture and style both in the business model and the product, renowned for innovation, quality, service, design and prestige.

All this while remaining deeply rooted to its heritage, connected by its production to the region and culturally closely linked to the city of Milan, as evidenced by the relationship built over the years with the city's major cultural institutes. From the Company's partnership with Accademia Teatro alla Scala in the occasion of Frog armchair 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2015, to supply furniture for all the public areas in the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca in 2016, and the collaboration with the Leonardo da Vinci Museum of Science and Technology in Milan, where the firm is Main Sponsor and has furnished the relaxation zones and supplied bespoke items to the Mathematics I-Lab, inaugurated in 2017, without missing the new partnership with the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum in Milan, the house-museum in Via Gesù, which decided to entrust Piero Lissoni for the artistic direction of its temporary exhibitions.

After 50 years since its foundation, with 60 employees and a constantly-growing sales network, Living Divani remains a family-run, human-centered business, a team consisting of people whose efforts contribute day by day to the creation of the brand's products.

This is a Company with a strong core, always in tune with its philosophy of rigor, clean lines and relaxed elegance, which has succeeded in reaching across the world of design with its own genuine and individual interpretation.

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