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INTERIORS ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

WOHA
WEAVES
A PLAYFUL
DIALOGUE
BETWEEN THE
OLD AND THE NEW

PETER TAY | WY-TO AND FUUR ASSOCIATES | THE BLACK SWAN BY TAKENOUCI WEBB | MOUNT
SINAI AVENUE BY SUYING METROPOLITAN STUDIO | KHOO TECK PUAT HOSPITAL BY CPG CONSULTANTS

CHECKLIST | BRAND STORY

A LIGHT AFFAIR

VIABIZZUNO, LED BY MARIO NANNI, TAKES THE ART OF ILLUMINATION TO OTHER-WORLDFLY LEVELS.

Viabizzuno is in the business of lighting alchemy. Of the 150 employees, 80 or so design alchemists work at its manufacturing plant in Bologna, Italy. Its founder Mario Nanni is the most revered of them all. Nanni founded the company in 1994, naming it after the main street that ran through the little village of Bizzuno where he was born. It was, after all, where his love affair with light began.

Sitting in the warmth of the sun at Viabizzuno's showroom in Milan, Nanni begins to recall his initial experiences with light. "I was six...I used to create plastic nativity scenes of Jesus Christ and the animals and holy images. I built and restored wires and switches, trying to recreate the light of mid-day, of the evening, of night with all these pieces," he relates slowly in his low, gravelly voice. He designs, one might imagine, the same way he speaks: with much consideration and equal amounts of soul.

Viabizzuno, led by Nanni and supported by a team of designers, creates bespoke lighting solutions for some of the greatest architects and designers of our time – Kengo

Kuma, Shigeru Ban, David Chipperfield, Peter Zumthor, just to name a few – many of whom are long-time collaborators with the company. It is little wonder why. Merely lighting a building, a space, a park, or a work, is never the point. Nanni is after a feeling, an emotion – transcendental moments when architecture, space, light (and shadow) come together in perfect harmony.

For each project that Viabizzuno works on, light is seen as a vehicle for magic. Standing testament to this are projects such as the extraordinary Therme Vals by Zumthor, MVRDV's impressive Book Mountain, or, on a smaller scale, one of Vincent Van Duysen's sublime houses.

"When I develop light fittings, I always start from the final result – the most important, the light I want to obtain. And then I start working to achieve that result, to create light fittings that will help me create that light," Nanni says. Undoubtedly, Nanni's own intuitive ways with light contribute to Viabizzuno's success. But this intuition is also expertly mingled with a very sound understanding of light. This, he summarises



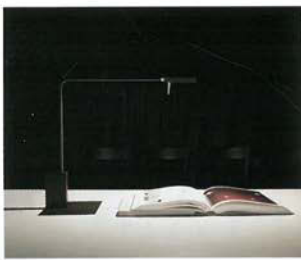
TEXT * RACHEL LEE-LEONG
 IMAGES * COURTESY OF VIABIZZUNO UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

Above: Mario Nanni founded Viabizzuno in 1994 and has worked with top architects the world over

Top: Peter Zumthor's Therme Vals is one of the most prolific projects Viabizzuno has been involved in

CHECKLIST | BRAND STORY

8 RULES OF LIGHT:



- 01 The presence of light, absence of the fitting
- 02 Light only where it is needed
- 03 Thickness of light
- 04 Light as a building material
- 05 Elegy of shadows
- 06 Light in movement
- 07 Light generates colour
- 08 Creating emotion with light

as his *8 Rules of Light*. Projects demonstrate at least one, if not more, of these 8 rules. But very rarely are they all encompassed in a single project. Kuma's Casalgrande Ceramic Cloud is an exception, embodying all 8 rules of light in one magical work.

One of the lighting fixtures created for the Casalgrande work was *Tsukimiso* – a floor-standing outdoor lamp that rises from the ground and lights up like a flower in the night. Designed by Kuma, the lamp, though specifically developed for the work, was later added onto Viabizzuno's repertoire of lighting fixtures for sale. The same goes for David Chipperfield's *Da Ma* chandelier, which was created together with Viabizzuno for his design of the Valentino store in Milan. It is an incredibly effective and

efficient way of developing lighting fixtures at the highest levels of quality.

But not all its lighting products are developed this way. For the most part, Nanni himself takes on the role of lead lighting designer, though it's not necessarily a term he would like to use on himself. Truth is, unlike other lighting companies, Viabizzuno technically doesn't sell lighting products; what it sells is a highly controlled and nuanced way with light – the product is secondary.

That is not to say that the products themselves are not impressive; some of the most advanced lighting technologies have emerged from the company: fixed glass panels that are lit from within their frames; shelving frames that safely conduct electricity without wires so that glass shelves magically



light up when simply put in place; embedded sensors that allow users to switch from one light colour to another just by gently rubbing a wall.

When asked about the worst way to handle light, Nanni readily answers, "Starting the production of a light fitting from a shape, and not from the light. Also, too many light bulbs. It's a waste. It's never about the quantity of light used that is the most important thing, but the position of the light source in the works, and the emotion they are able to give." It's something he learnt from his grandfather, among other things.

"He taught me to use the light of the sun, or the stars, or the moon in the same way, with no difference. He made me understand that all of them are extraordinary light sources that go along with a man's life," Nanni says of his grandfather. It explains his deep respect for light. Accordingly, in Viabizzuno, light is always treated ever-so gently. It creates illumination that is neither harsh on the eyes nor soul.

But what, according to Nanni, is the best kind of light? He replies, after a moment's pause, "The light that illuminates my mother's wrinkles."

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Bottom: Kengo Kuma's Casalgrande Ceramic Cloud is the only project thus far to apply all 8 rules of light. Photography by Pietro Savorelli

Top Left: The Tavolo table lamp exemplifies Viabizzuno's pursuit of elegance and simplicity

Top Right: David Chipperfield's *Da Ma* chandelier was designed for the Valentino store in Milan