

BRAZILIAN CAPITAL,  
*but with an utterly ITALIAN  
creative and productive*  
HEART. *The result is TOG,  
a new design brand  
conceived as an OPEN SOURCE  
PLATFORM that links  
company, consumer  
and craftsman. The goal:  
to make INDUSTRIAL  
PRODUCTS UNIQUE*

# SHARED DESIGN

by Maddalena Padovani



Below: some 'backstage' moments of **Tog**. Clockwise from top: Sebastian Bergne with the table and chair of the Square collection, which he designed; Sam Hecht and pieces from his Tubo collection, for the home-office; Nicola Rapetti, director of design and R+D of Tog, together with Philippe Starck; a prototype of the Oka Chic sofa by the French designer.



Below and on the facing page: the Jono Pek chair designed by Philippe Starck, in the 'original' version, and in a custom version by the illustrator Tommaso Cian.



**T**wenty-one collections of products for a total of 46 pieces, ranging from seating for the living room to home-office furnishings, children's furniture to outdoor creations. Seven international designers, with a leading role played by none other than Philippe Starck. All this should suffice to make some waves in the already turbulent Design Week in Milan. And that is just what happened. Even the name made people curious: Tog, which stands for "all creators together." Almost a proclamation, for a brand that begins with an approach of internationalism, creative participation, a social orientation seen as a way of reaching out to ideas and talents belonging to undervalued realities. To stand out, the company proposes a new model of production that combines the technological standards of the most advanced industrial processes with the uniqueness of crafts, in an open system that encourages end-users to play an active role in the creative development of their purchases.

Many factors make Tog an interesting business project. Behind the contemporary character of its expression and content lies a story of Italian ingenuity that begins in the Veneto, shifts to Brazil, where it finds fertile ground for explosive growth, and then returns to Italy, because only here can one find the conditions to make a new challenge possible in the name of design. We're at the start of the 1970s: having set off from the hills of Vicenza, the Grendene family settles in the hills of Farroupilha, about one hundred kilometers west of Porto Alegre, and opens a factory, first to make packaging, then to produce plastic accessories. They gradually refine specific expertise in the design of molds and the production of innovative machines for the fabrication of products made with synthetic materials. The great innovative leap comes in the 1980s, when Grendene decides to use plastic for the first time for the production of monomateric footwear, in which plastic becomes the skin and the core of the product. Today the Brazilian firm is the most advanced in the world in the field of injection molded footwear; they make 250 million pairs of shoes each year, and their leading brand is Melissa, which thanks to collaboration with famous designers (from the Campana brothers to Zaha Hadid) has revolutionized the image of plastic footwear, changing it from a basic low-cost product to an appealing fashion accessory.

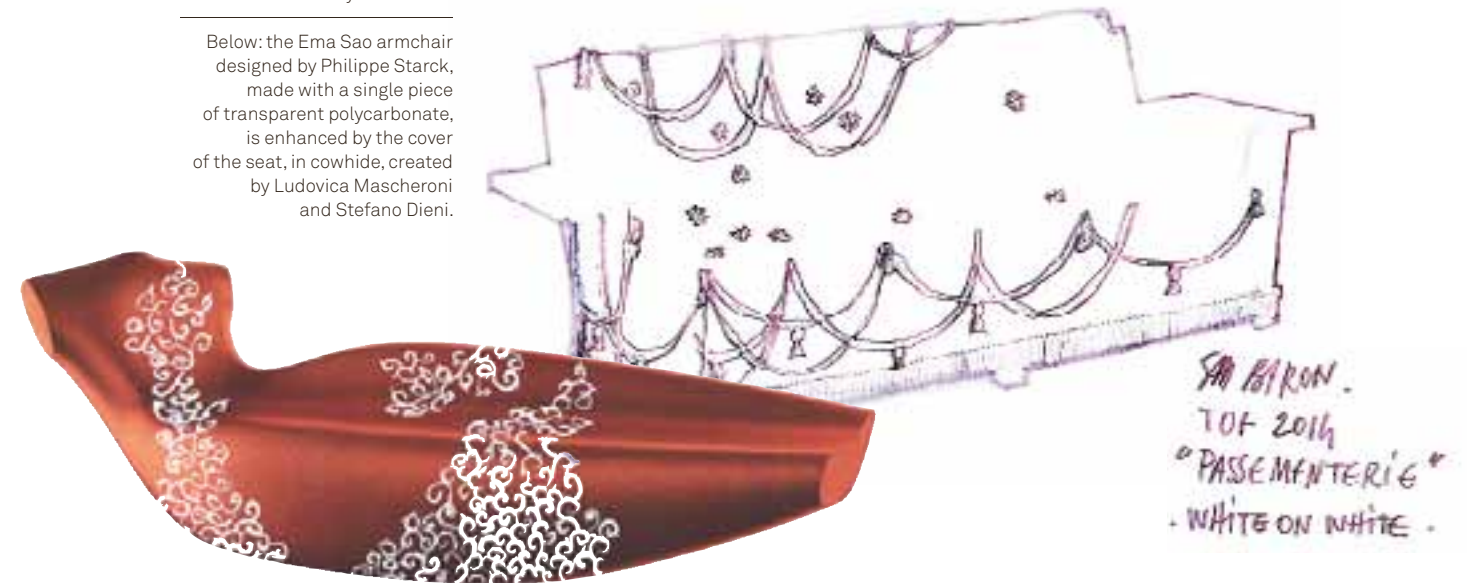


The Vodo Masko table is part of a collection of children's furniture designed by Ambroise Maggiar. When it is turned over and hung on the wall it looks like a tribal mask, made even more expressive by the decorative intervention of the artist Carlotta Modica Amore.



Below, two other customization options for Tog products. The Amber Fame bench by Nicola Rapetti, inspired by the sculptures of Henry Moore, interpreted by Ryu Yamamoto; the Oka Chic sofa by Philippe Starck decorated by Sam Baron.

Below: the Ema Sao armchair designed by Philippe Starck, made with a single piece of transparent polycarbonate, is enhanced by the cover of the seat, in cowhide, created by Ludovica Mascheroni and Stefano Dieni.



During an encounter between Alexandre Grendene Bartelle, majority shareholder of the company, and Philippe Starck, the project of a new adventure took form: to enter the world of furnishings. The initial idea was to do the production in Brazil, where the company listed on the stock exchange has its industrial plants. To direct the research and development side, they called in the Italian Nicola Rapetti, with extensive experience working with sector leaders like Triade, Cassina and Dedon. When Rapetti invited Grendene Bartelle to Italy to visit the production companies that work for the top brands of design made in Italy, the plans changed: why start from scratch in Brazil when production excellence already exists in Italy? This is why Tog was born with an Italian passport, though it speaks the languages of the world. "In our country," Rapetti points out, "there is a supply chain capable of ensuring quality, reliability, flexibility, while pushing towards maximum industrialization of products, which is necessary to limit their prices when they hit the market. The objective, nevertheless, is to reach the point of acquisition of production lines, in order to export them into other areas of the world, in Asia for example." Philippe Starck was called in to design the furnishings (mostly seating) in thermoplastic; he acts as the captain of a team of designers that soon took form, with six other members, with different

backgrounds and languages: Sebastian Bergne, Sam Hech+Kim Colin, Ambroise Maggiar, Jonathan Bui Quang Da, Dai Sugawawa and Nicola Rapetti himself. In little more than a year the designers have developed 21 families of products, covering a range of typologies and using different materials, from plastic to aluminium, wood to marble. The characteristic of their creations is that they are objects with a clear industrial conception, but the story with which they have made their market debut points to a much wider vision that has the aim of combining technology and crafts, mass production and personalization. Nicola Rapetti explains: "With the slogan 'all creators together' Tog proposes that end-users take part in the creative process that generates their objects. The mechanism is simple: the client purchase a product that could be described as 'naked' (it actually has all the content of a finished object of industrial design), and then they have the possibility of using a special app to access a network of artist/artisans ready to personalize the object through manual interventions of different kinds: from the tribes of the Amazon jungle that use their traditional crafts techniques to make covers in string or beads, to the Italian lady who knits 'sweaters' for the chairs; from the young artist who uses markers to draw fantasy landscapes on the backs of the seats, to the airbrush virtuoso who reinvents the planks of the

benches as if they were surfboards." The company takes no cut from the craftsmen for their contributions to personalize the products: all proceeds go directly to the artists and artisans involved. Consumers are asked to do something that goes beyond a mere purchase: they are invited to enter the big Tog community, displaying the results of the creative process of which they have been a part, proposing new ideas, sharing the vision of a kind of creativity that is increasingly widespread, based on participation.

