

Summer 2016

THE PENINSULA

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TEXT: COCO MARETT
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Enrico Marone Cinzano's range of sustainable, ethical furniture could be considered as art. In fact, he recently showcased a series of pieces inspired by his journeys through China - aptly titled 'China Clean' - at Pearl Lam Galleries in Hong Kong.



Qing Chair

It's hard to tell Count Enrico Marone Cinzano's story when it's one that's worthy of its own biography. Born in Turin, Italy in 1963, he's a descendant of the Founder of Fiat Automobiles on his maternal side, and a scion of Italy's prominent Cinzano Vermouth empire on his paternal side. His step-grandmother, Infanta Maria Cristina de Borbon y Battenberg, was Spanish royalty.

Despite his roots, I'll admit I was surprised when I met Marone Cinzano. Dressed in a distressed leather jacket, tattoos peeking out of his t-shirt, and donning a perfectly groomed mustache, he is a far cry from the conventional idea of what a Count should be. Which is fitting, as I soon learned that challenging perception is something Marone Cinzano is good – no, great – at.

So much so, that he has built a career out of it.

Following a more conservative career in finance and real estate after receiving his Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from

Babson College, it wasn't long before Marone Cinzano's inherent entrepreneurial spirit took hold, and his interest in – and utmost respect for – ecology inspired him to shift his focus to sustainable design.

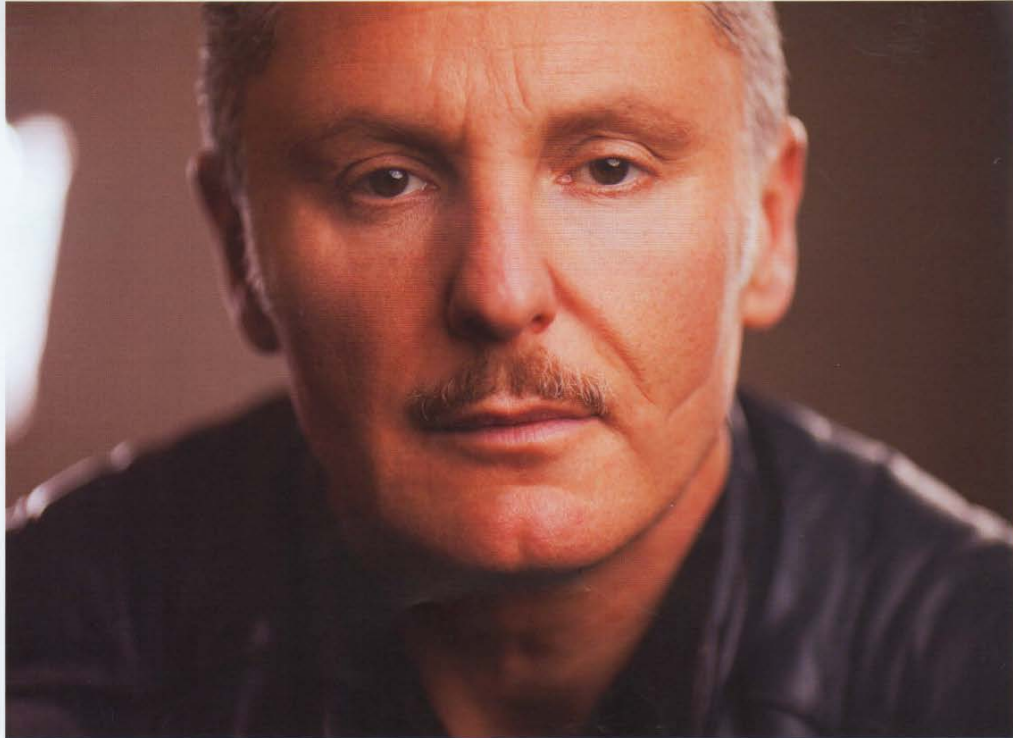
In 2001, Marone Cinzano – alongside former filmmaker Natalie Chanin and photographer Paul Graves – co-founded 'Project Alabama', an environmentally friendly fashion label for which he served as Co-Creative Director until 2007.

The designer then turned to the world of furniture design, establishing his eponymous brand in 2012, under which he continues to produce an ethical collection of otherworldly, fantastical furniture using local, sustainable materials.

"I think my understanding of the sustainable real estate market was ahead of the curve," Marone Cinzano explains. "I began my new journey by backing the development of a healthier, conscious and design driven line of furniture."



Qing Chair (detail)



The Peninsula(TP): What inspired your desire to reconnect with nature?

EMC: We all want answers in life, whether to existential, practical, or just everyday questions; there are so many sources in terms of potential answers. The greatest system that continues to seamlessly operate is and always has been nature. Everything is somehow an end result of nature.

TP: How big a role does sustainability play in your designs?

EMC: It is absolutely central and crucial – sustainability is a little like a rabbit hole in that it goes on forever, with new facets arising on a daily basis. It's a fascinating and interesting way to better yourself. At the end of the day, it's about respect for all sentient beings and for life in general.

TP: Have you always been an eco-conscious person?

EMC: I led a more toxic, wasteful and unsustainable life in my earlier years. But am absolutely glad I did, because you can't really see the light unless you have seen the darkness.

TP: What are your hopes for the future of sustainable design?

EMC: There are enough natural resources in our world to share with everyone, and if we use our collective ingenuity correctly, we can all lead fuller lives. Following the advent of the Industrial Revolution, and the subsequent abundance in production technology, design became very much an external process. It is time for us to go back to ensuring that design is focused on performance and functionality, but at the same time remain well-dressed.

TP: How or where do you source your materials?

EMC: I source materials in all sorts of ways. Some are just recycled materials, and sometimes I research which materials are better than traditional ones, for instance the ones made industrially but which are eco-certified by legitimate third parties. I also try to look for materials local to where I produce that are all natural and without artificial processes. The truth of the matter is that by now, my eyes are forever looking for them, and there are times when I will be driving somewhere and all of a sudden stop the car because something beautifully discarded caught my attention.

TP: What have been some of the most exotic or unique materials you have used in your designs?

EMC: I have used some amazing crystals and woods. In China, I sourced the most beautiful tiger wood from trees that had fallen during an earthquake. I also use metals from junkyards, like a large sheet of titanium I once found in an industrial park which I used to make a coffee table.

TP: What is the difference between good design and exceptional design?

EMC: Exceptional design is an internal process, one where above all, the user experience is improved; where you have a win-win situation, where the designer is being truly materialistic, meaning that she or he shows respect for the materials used. The aesthetic of it is an added bonus, but the content is the master.



Flatpack