



SNIFFING OUT A SOLUTION

Antonio Larosa wants his designs to make you feel good ...
And maybe even help you make some new friends, too.

BY PETER J. WOLF

PORTRAIT BY JEFF NEWTON



Previous page: Antonio Larosa's newest hit, the Puppy table, is a smile-inducing piece of design manufactured by Michieli in Milan.

This page above: The Colorado chair may look like a mountainous terrain at profile, but it functions as a lounge on one side and workstation on the other. Below: The Newton can accommodate one, two, three, even six people or more! Both are manufactured in Italy.



TO EVERYONE THAT MEETS ANTONIO LAROSA, IT'S immediately apparent this architect-designer loves what he does for a living. His broad and infectious smile is your first giveaway. When he talks about the furniture he's created (and the effect it has on people) he beams like a proud parent. For more than 20 years, Larosa's designs have encouraged people to interact with each other and recognize that good design can make people more playful. "As designers, we have that kind of responsibility ... to make the world a little better," says the 42-year-old Larosa, who thinks things should "make people smile. That's very important."

Larosa was born and raised in Italy where he studied architecture and design at Milan Polytechnic University. His résumé reads like an anthology of Italian design history, studying and working alongside luminaries like Achille Castiglioni, Marco Zanuso, Ettore Sottsass, Andrea Branzi, Aldo Rossi, Enzo Mari, and Alessandro Mendini. He has served as design consultant for numerous prestigious interior design projects: the U.S. headquarters of Pepe Jeans

London in Manhattan; a palace for a royal family in Saudi Arabia; the DDC showroom in Manhattan, redesigned after 10 years by Philip Johnson; a synagogue in Chicago; an animal hospital in Rome, Italy; and residences in Venice, Rome, New York, and Phoenix, including one at Optima Tower. His furniture designs have been featured at the world's most prominent exhibitions and his Cubix design for Metro Chairs was featured on *The Apprentice*.

Even before he finished school, Larosa was exposed to some major design projects while working for a large firm in Milan. "We used to do furniture and interiors all over the world," he says. That experience helped encourage the young Larosa to experiment with his own designs. "Since my first piece," he says, "I was always thinking of the relationship between furniture and people ... how furniture can make people not only comfortable, but also happy." As an example, he cites his Cubix system, which was designed in reaction to the typically "frontal" seating in public spaces, such as airports. "You have all those chairs, and people don't even look at



Above: The Roswell spins people around while holding their magazines.

Below: The Cubix positions people in alternate directions to foster conversation between strangers. Both are made by Metro Chairs, manufactured in Italy, and can be covered in leather, vinyl, or other specific materials in various colors.



each other!" For Cubix, Larosa says, "I didn't care about the shape [as much as] encouraging people to get friendly and have a better relationship [with each other]." It certainly built some relationships among the crowd at NeoCon (The National Exposition of Contract Furnishings), where Cubix won Best of Show in 2004.

Larosa's other experiments include the Roswell Chair, an oversized rotating chair/magazine rack combo that would look right at home in a Dr. Seuss book. Like Cubix, the Roswell Chair is designed for public spaces, where its playful design cultivates good old-fashioned human interaction. "So you're spinning, and you end up facing somebody, and you start chatting," says Larosa. "Maybe some people can meet and get married one day. Or they get a friend forever ... Who knows? Something may happen!"

His most recent creation, a table called Puppy, debuted at the Milan Furniture Fair in April, where, Larosa says, "people were just crazy about it!" Recalling the whimsical aspects of the 1980s Italian design movement, Memphis, Puppy has even charmed the factory

workers in Milan, where it's produced. When Larosa called to see how the prototypes were coming along, he was told, "Everyone in the factory is smiling at this!" "When you walk with it under your arm," says Larosa, "you can't help but smile. And that's the point."

Larosa says his brand of creativity – the kind that gets strangers chatting – comes from the freedom to experiment. He chooses his projects carefully, preferring "to stay away from so-called 'serious' pieces." Larosa also stays away from focus groups, which he says are, "killing design, and the creativity in design." He says, "If they eliminate focus groups, we're going to kick butt because then all the designers in this country will have the creativity and freedom to design whatever they want." In Italy, "they don't care about focus groups. You hear people say, 'Man, this is cool. Let's do it.' What do you have to lose, a couple hundred dollars for the prototypes? I may lose two hundred dollars, or I may make two hundred million!" And that kind of success makes everyone smile. ■

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