

DELUXE

DELAIDE

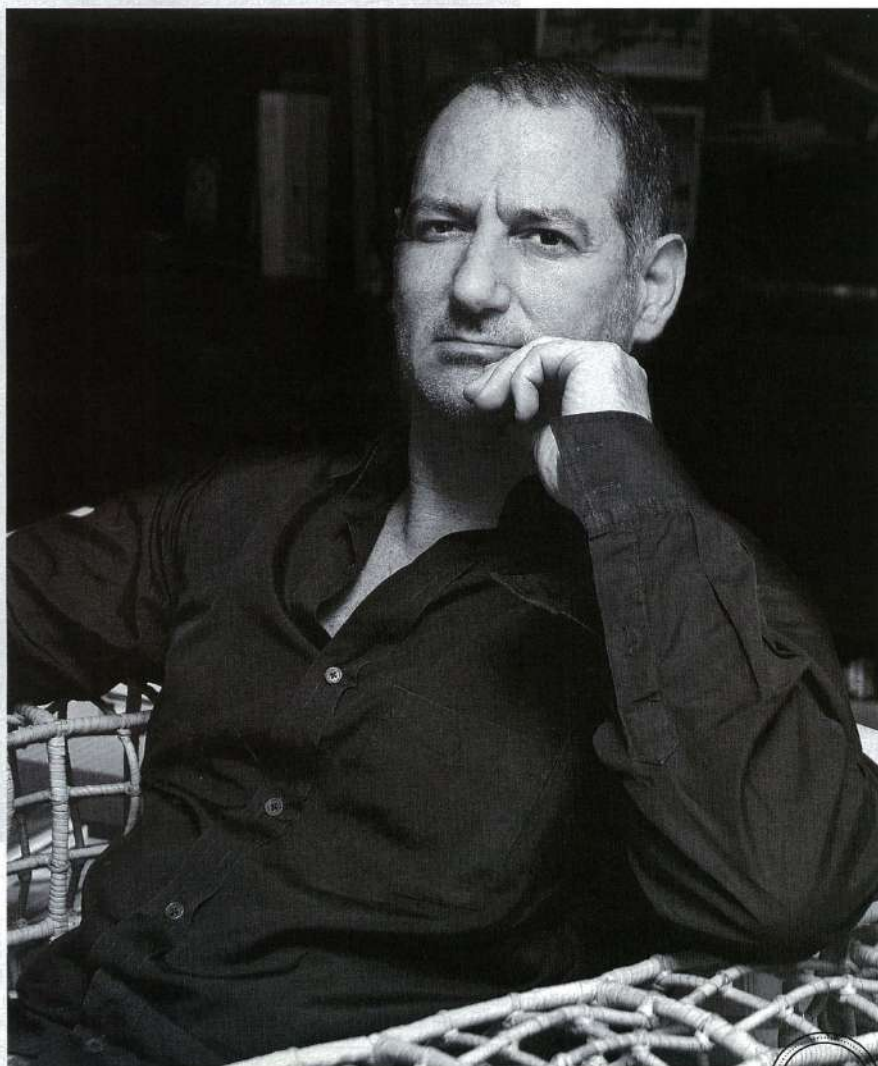
THE DESIGN ISSUE

Bright new forms, flawless function

GETTING GRAPHIC

ARMANI'S ARCHITECT

BOLD TYPES

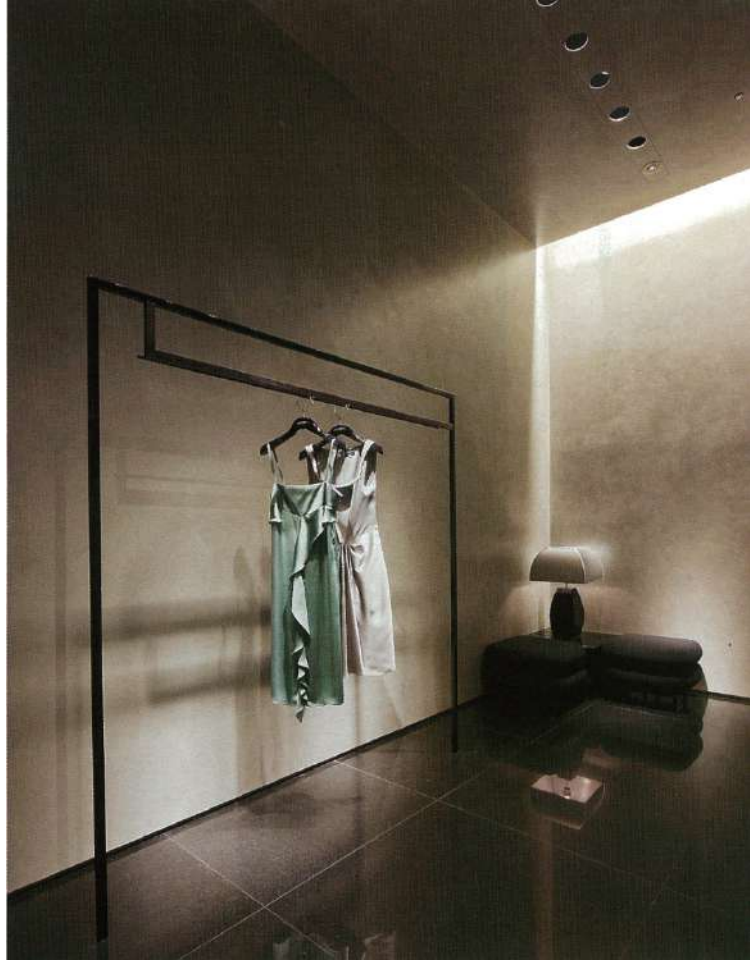


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THE TOSSANI TOUCH

Architect and urban designer Riccardo Tossani lives and works both in Tokyo and Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. The Adelaide born designer has created residential, resort and retail spaces across Japan and the wider Asian region for the likes of Giorgio Armani and the Australian Consulate. We caught up with him at home in Tokyo...



THE RENAISSANCE ideal of an architect is of “a guy who on Tuesday paints a painting of the Madonna and on Thursday designs the battlements of a city.

A designer who has the ability to apply his intellectual reasoning and creative thinking to a range of different physical problems.”

This is how architect Riccardo Tossani describes his role – and it’s an ideal that he achieves. Not only has he created residential and commercial buildings, he designs furniture and plans urban landscapes. He even dressed a building in denim – at least symbolically.

Tossani says his firm was commissioned to design the Tokyo flagship store of Italian fashion company Gas, explaining that its CEO, Claudio Grotto, thinks of denim as “an organic material that takes on a patina of time as it’s washed and rewashed, and it becomes more and more interesting.

“The idea of materials that have an organic life, a life that continues after they’re put in place was something that [also] fascinated me,” says Tossani. “So we designed this store that is wrapped in a titanium cladding and changes as it gets older. It actually develops

a patina and becomes more interesting and more variegated with time and with weather.”

Grotto spoke of fashion as theatre, which inspired Tossani’s wife, business partner and fellow architect Atsuko Itoda to incorporate stagelike elements into their design for Gas. Most notably, the folds of titanium on the facade suggest a theatre curtain.

The interior features a hovering stairway: “Stairs are one of our signatures,” says Tossani. “Our stairs are all about lightness and space, movement and the combination of elements to create beauty.”

Tossani, 54, born and raised in Magill, earned an architecture degree from the University of Adelaide in 1980 and formed a partnership in his hometown with, now prominent Australian architect, Peter Villis.

It was a good start, but Tossani wanted

RICCARDO TOSSANI

Riccardo Tossani Architecture started in 1997. Tossani, Atsuko Itoda and Felice Londono work from a Tokyo studio and a branch in Hokkaido. Tossani lives in Italy. He even set a local altitude record for hang-gliding on a section of coast in Victoria.

tossani.com

more. “Just designing buildings didn’t really fulfill me spiritually, intellectually or creatively.” To find himself, he took six months off work in 1984 to travel around the world.

But months stretched into years as he picked up advanced degrees from the University of Florence and then Harvard, and worked at practices including Johnson Fain and Pereira Associates in Los Angeles, where he met Atsuko in 1995. Two years later, the couple moved to Japan for what was meant to be another six-month sojourn – but the move turned out to be permanent.

The Gas store, one of his first projects in Japan, built in 2006, brought Tossani to the attention of Italian fashion maestro Giorgio Armani, who “was trying to create a new store... that felt like it belonged in Tokyo”.

The Armani store, created in 2009, catches the eye with its abstract bamboo motif. But some of its finer detailing might be missed at first. “You’ll notice that there is metalwork all around the windows,” says Tossani. “[The building] contains, in a hidden way, the lighting and a podium, and various other infrastructural elements that are positioned to highlight the mannequins or the products... It contains a lot of things that you just don’t see.”

This is important for Tossani, who says he is “horrified” at how buildings in urban Japan

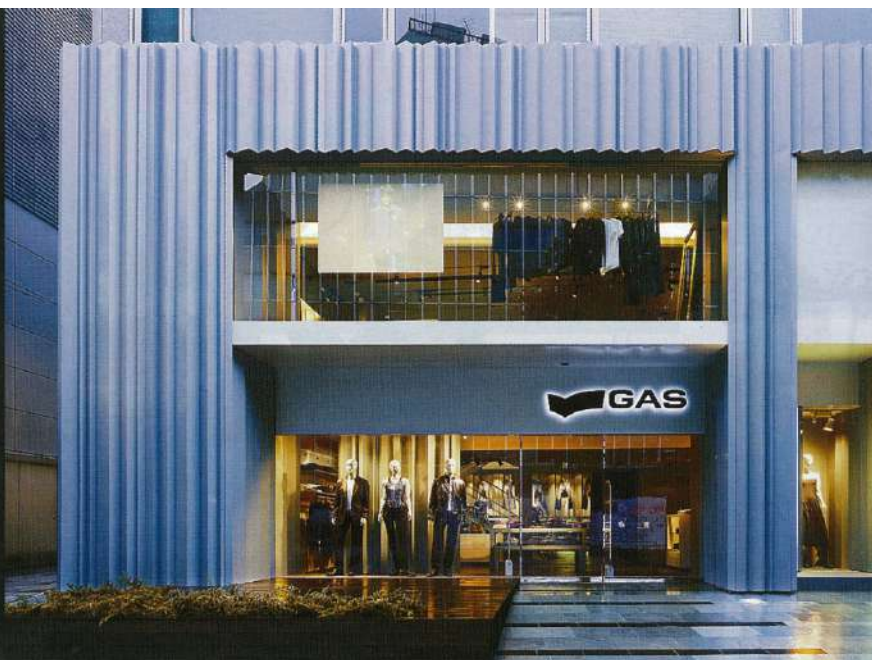
“Armani was trying to create a new store that felt like it belonged in Tokyo”

METAL GURU

RIGHT Riccardo Tossani wrapped pleated titanium around the Gas store he designed in Tokyo. The metal's patina changes as it ages, taking on the appearance of faded denim.

ORIENTAL ARMANI

OPPOSITE For Giorgio Armani's Tokyo store, Tossani included an Asian bamboo motif. The metal 'bamboo stems' cleverly disguise the store's lighting and other infrastructural elements such as retractable blinds, which are used for special events where they turn the entire length of the store into a fashion runway.



“Materials that have a life that continues after they’re put in place fascinate me”

BEECH RESORT

Tossani is redesigning the village of Hirafu, Hokkaido, turning its unsightly roads (far left, top) into modern streets complete with underground cabling and street furniture that evoke the feeling of a silver beech forest.

are “ruined by the vandalism of external infrastructure”, such as window air conditioners and tangled nests of overhead wires.

Tucking away the unsightly bits is part of his plan for Hirafu village in the Niseko ski resort area of Hokkaido. “We proposed undergrounding all of the power lines, creating wide, paved sidewalks, custom designing the light poles, introducing a landscape theme and customised street furniture with a motif of paving that recalls the shadows that one finds in the silver beech forests; of dark shadow against snow – it’s a beautiful geometry.”

Residents liked the plan enough to get government funding to carry it out. “It’s a three-year phased project, and this year is the first year of its construction,” Tossani says.

Fellow Australian architect Julian Worrall, author of *21st Century Tokyo*, says Tossani’s Niseko plan “will hopefully provide a model of how to create new places for leisure that are actually imagined as coherent environments, rather than as ad hoc assemblages of elements... I’m very hopeful that this will be seen as Tossani’s most significant achievement of his diverse career, and a great contribution by a very successful Adelaidean.”