

# The pursuit of happiness

Paola Lenti talks to **identity** about her creations and her overriding ambition to create elegant and joyful personal landscapes. **TEXT: LAURA VOLPI**



Italian designer Paola Lenti's latest collection, *In the Key of Colour*, was recently presented at the opening of Dubai's new designer showroom Purity, which will offer all her latest creations at their space in Downtown Dubai.

**identity** took the chance to ask her what she thinks of the design scene in the city and how she sees her designs in a Middle Eastern setting.

"Dubai's incredible architectural development now under way is a great pull also for design," she says. "There we can see probably the most advanced constructions in the world, and this definitely means that there is a desire for beauty and functionality. I am sure that this tendency has a very international outreach and this will lead to the selection of the best interior and exterior designs on the market."

"I leave to the people who appreciate the Paola Lenti products absolute freedom of choice, in both shapes and colours. I am sure that in the Middle East, too, substance comes before appearance, and for this reason I am

confident to be able to offer a product of outstanding quality. Dubai is today a place of exchange between cultures and people from all over the world: real design is recognized at international level and it won't fail to have an active role in the life of the country."

Lenti's brand is synonymous with experimentation and research, as well as incredible quality and attention to detail. In the collections, striking opposites blend together to create a new and original domestic landscape, defined by the selection and creation of new, high-performing materials. The streamlined shapes are enhanced by the extraordinary quality of the craftsmanship, where high-tech yarns coexist with wood and metal structures. Each piece is created to be timeless, in terms of quality, functionality and aesthetics.

"I always start from the predicament that every object needs to be well designed and must have the best balance possible between aesthetics and function," she says. "Only if there is this balance the design can leave a mark,



Clockwise from extreme left: Paola Lenti's Pavilion structure with AMI chairs; Paola Lenti; Bouton rug; and Agadir lanterns





Poolside setting with *Shoji* lamps, *Ombra* umbrella and *Swell* sun lounges

and can be one day considered 'timeless'. We have to always remember that design is serving a purpose and it is not just a mere aesthetic exercise."

This synthesis of appearance and functionality leads to the brand's naturally evolving design, which creates a world of architectural structures, seating and rugs where nothing is left to chance and every detail is carefully planned, yet everything appears effortlessly natural. Colours and shapes are designed to create an impact but without excess, conveying harmony and a serene connection between the products and the surrounding landscape.

This is a key element also in *In The Key of Colour*, which was shown at Milan's International Design Week and will be showcased in April at the upcoming Salone Internazionale del Mobile. The pieces are characterised by vibrant colours and a melange of textures in new fabrics and lacquering, featuring high-quality felts, wools and cottons for the interiors, and the trademark high-tech yarns for the exteriors.

The unprecedented chromatic proposal, with a choice of more than 500 matching or contrasting shades, multiplies the possibilities for customisation. A playful, joyful feeling sweeps through the new items, all made with sleek and yet welcoming lines and shapes.

"The need for freedom is the vision behind this new line," Lenti says. "An outdoor furniture item will inevitably be placed in very different settings: one

thing is to furnish the terrace of a villa in Dubai, another is to furnish a yacht, or a garden in northern Europe. Nature offers so many different types of scenery, so I thought about offering a wide range of colours that can meet and embrace different backgrounds, naturally blending in or creating a striking contrast, as per personal taste."

Lenti's latest collection was also recently seen at the Monaco Yacht Show. "Nautical design has always been a great challenge for me and for the products I create. It encourages me to find new solutions and pushes me to improve also products designed to less challenging settings," she says.

Lenti places extraordinary importance on innovation, experimentation and study of materials, both natural and synthetic. The woods, stones and metals used in the structural designs are attentively selected and treated to further improve their endurance. Her signature yarns, *Aquatech* and *Rope*, create a unique look and are resistant to atmospheric agents such as sea, swimming pool water and sun rays, allowing rugs, traditionally indoor elements, to be used in outdoor settings.

"I started to study plastic with my first outdoor collections, because I needed to cover the seats with resistant fabrics of high-tech performance qualities," Lenti says. "The first product has been *Rope*, a yarn that utilises a pre-existing material, resistant and recyclable, but to which we have given a completely new



*In the key of colour* allows for unprecedented colour customisation

and particular set of characteristics: *Rope* is really a high-tech yarn, also in its look. *Aquatech* came a few years after and offers an even better performance, but surprisingly has a more 'natural' look."

Great importance is also given to the environment. Paola Lenti routinely adopts processes allowing for the recycling of materials; their woods originate from sustainably managed forests whilst their non-toxic finishing treatments are based on natural products.

"I want to offer long-lasting products that are environmentally friendly and recyclable. I always take into consideration the possible impact of the materials on the environment. I want the product to give the best performance, but not to the detriment of the surrounding world and quality of life," the designer says. "Every material is to me also a source of inspiration: often it leads the design process and its development, and for this reason it is really a critical element."

In this mixing of materials, nature itself becomes a protagonist, as in the *Greenery* wall, where it becomes a structural element. This "live" wall is supported by a steel frame, creating a vertical structure of removable containers suitable for plants or herbs. A drip irrigation system, specifically conceived and tested by Verde Profilo, allows for the ideal maintenance of the plants.

"It is very important for an outdoor product to become as integrated as possible in the environment where it is destined to live," Lenti says. "At the same time, natural elements can also become part of the project. *Greenery* is an experiment in this direction, giving the opportunity to create a natural setting

even where nature can't be present in other forms."

This shows how in Paola Lenti's world, outdoors and indoors are not necessarily separate from each other. "I often observed the 'classic' outdoor furniture, all quite stem and made of materials that limited the choice in colours and shapes. I therefore asked myself: 'Why can't I be outdoors and still enjoy beautiful fabrics, comfortable seating and pleasant materials?' I have been trying to give an answer to this question to the best of my capabilities."

After founding her company in Milan in 1994, Lenti established herself with her creative and original approach, vibrant colour range and attention to detail. From the first collections of rugs and seating furniture for both indoors and outdoors, Lenti's brand has become a reference point for textile innovation. However, issues of happiness and relaxation are very important when Lenti is choosing her next design.

"I always imagine how would it be to put it in my own home, and then I immediately know if the textiles are helping me to create a serene and relaxing ambience or not: a material that makes you think: 'I am home' helps you to live better. Our harmonious combination between Italian tradition and craftsmanship and the most advanced industrial and technical solutions, both with their distinctive features, results in something that can't be achieved when choosing only one of these two aspects.

"This collaboration makes the technical aspect less aggressive, creating a human space of wellbeing and relaxation, something ever more precious nowadays." **ID**



From left clockwise: *Strap* table; *Otto* pouf and *Juni* seat

