



Every month, perhaps every week, Milan gives birth to a new design-related initiative. Every season another fair, festival or celebration of design is baptised, after which a disheartening percentage does not survive for more than a year. But we don't even get the chance to acknowledge that fact, because the sound of the forest growing is louder than that of the trees falling, to paraphrase an Italian saying. And the noise soon turns into static. To review and historicise all that goes on is a colossal enterprise, and only in a few cases does it lead to the discovery of a consistent and inviting cream that might actually have staying power. Often this leads us to ignore events under the presumption — or prejudice, in the worst cases — that nothing new ever happens here in Italy. However, I think [MammaFotogramma](#) (Gianluca Lo Presti, Giulio Masotti, Marco Falatti, Federico Della Putta, Ettore Tripodi) is worth knowing about and even worth going to check out in person if you have the chance.

For three reasons.

Considering the group's average age, you would pardon a certain amount of approximation and chaos. Instead, the impression is of being inside a running, functional machine. The former stable, former workshop is now divided into a large entrance that is used for the sets, a manufacturing atelier, and a hallway with kitchen that ends in the animation room. Another wing introduces you to a series of jointed Innocenti pipes that frame the studio's bookcases and shelving units. It feels like the messy backstage of an experimental theatre, only that here, the accumulation of material, the organisation of the archive and the instrumentation at hand seem to be result of decades of work.

The space's skeleton is given by the identity of its components: an architect, an artisan, a set designer, an illustrator and a puppeteer (meaning an advanced constructor of doll-like figures and sets). The space's soul is a contest between its debut in the production of cinematographic animation and the new expressive directions in which it is evolving, for example exhibition design and interiors. Listening to them, it would seem to be an almost instinctive passage. The objective is to animate the handcrafted products they manufacture. In the meanwhile, the attempt is to transmit the value of this teamwork and multiple skills to potential clients, who would join a pool of existing, widely interesting names that range from the [Triennale di Milano](#) to Ventura Lambrate and Mondadori, the latter of which was only connected to an inquiry about an interactive design project.

The second reason is that it's good for the design world to think that in the exhausting and sterile controversy between being analogue or going digital, having handicraft skills or technological power, between self-production as an end, compromise or provocation, it is possible to carve out a semantically autonomous corner. Here, self-production functionally enters the process of building the presses, moulds and instruments needed for the physical realisation of prototypes. But this is not the arrival point. The limited series is a possibility of further life for some pieces that were used for other purposes, and 3-D is only one of the many means to verify the potential of a project that has already been tested physically. And so, as they proceed realistically (in the sense that reality is the guide to their proceeding) it happens that they stumble upon discoveries.

One example is the furniture they made for Allez Up, a sport-climbing gym in Montreal. The product is a "hand-made interior" and the process to make it was invented and customised especially for this project. Giulio Masotti and Gianluca Lo Presti moved to the Island of Montreal for two months, receiving from the gym's owners the use of a workshop next to the sugar silos that are the location for the final result. There, they had the possibility to construct the furniture, which for now will inhabit the entrance area, on a 1:1 scale. There, they built the presses that they will need to manufacture the furniture. There, they were able to get to know the gym's rock-climbing customers as well as the family that runs this small enterprise and had the brash idea to commission two of its young clients with such an important project. Indeed, much of the inspiration for this project comes from climbers: their approach, the way they share space and interact with nature. There, above all, MammaFotogramma discovered that they could compress different layers of plywood and fabric netting into a new material that is extremely elastic and resilient, warm and mechanical. A new composite that can bend, jut out and (for now only in their dreams) even be animated, like a skin for inanimate matter.

They call it *WoodSkin*, and manage the labour involved in this brainwave entirely by themselves, constructing the first series of 15,000 tiles that will be used to build the lively entrance counter. The idea that walls and finishes can be endowed with the qualities of dynamic and live material is a topic that has been around for quite some time, especially in auto and exhibit design; but the novelty here consists in the fact that movement is applied to a handcrafted product that combines mechanics and electronics, yet guarantees the same precision as a digitally produced one. The tailor-madness of the furniture results in an interior that is physically and progressively "sewn" to the sizes of its users.

The last reason is that it's always nice to meet good people who do their job well. It is a pleasant surprise that for once, it's not about freewheeling foreigners toiling in a dark and out-of-the-way basement, but Italians who are working in their rehearsal rooms as a new quintet. *Chiara Alessi* ([@chiaralesi](https://www.instagram.com/chiaralesi))