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By JoAnn Greco
Photos courtesy of Paola Lenti



IN LIVING COLOR

The Italian designer makes a bold statement



“I can’t remember ever looking at the world in black and white,” says designer Paola Lenti. Certainly the raspberry, lime, and pumpkin hues that populate her bold furniture and accessory lines confirm that sentiment. Consider, too, the ambiguity and sense of possibility that runs through her work—a subtler, more figurative reluctance to choose between extremes.

It’s this balance that the Meda, Italy-based Lenti credits with bringing her business to the next level. “Our big break was a new way of thinking, a new approach to viewing the outdoors,” she says. “By treating exteriors not as a separate entity but as places that continue from and interact with the interior world, we started to shape an innovative philosophy of outdoor furniture.”

Since starting her eponymous company some 25 years ago, Lenti has shifted her focus from developing fabrics, materials, finishes, and colors for the outdoors to create lines for the indoors. “That

effort was bolstered by our experience in outdoor,” she adds, “which has always been the more difficult and demanding sector.”

Before any of this, Lenti was a graphic designer and a freelance art director for fashion brands. She eventually mustered the courage to start designing her own products, beginning with small glass and porcelain objects before moving into felt rugs. She says she’s more akin to a material researcher or color designer than an industrial designer.

At the core of her design process “lies respect for humankind—their feelings, needs, and desires—and for the environment,” she says. That means using recyclable materials and environmentally friendly finishes, as well as avoiding harmful production processes and striving to create products whose beauty, durability, timelessness, and functionality ensure they won’t be viewed as disposable.

While nature remains an important source of inspiration, it’s not the only one for Lenti. “Often, it can be conceptual. Sometimes I’ll visualize a color and then try to create it. After trial and error, eventually we’ll succeed in formulating the exact hue I’d seen so clearly in my mind.” **hd**

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1. Wood and fabric make up the shade structure of the Toku outdoor bedding system.

2. A wide range of rug patterns showcase Lenti’s diverse yet vibrant palette.

3. The Calatini series of side tables come in a variety of forms and dimensions, and are decorated by hand.



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