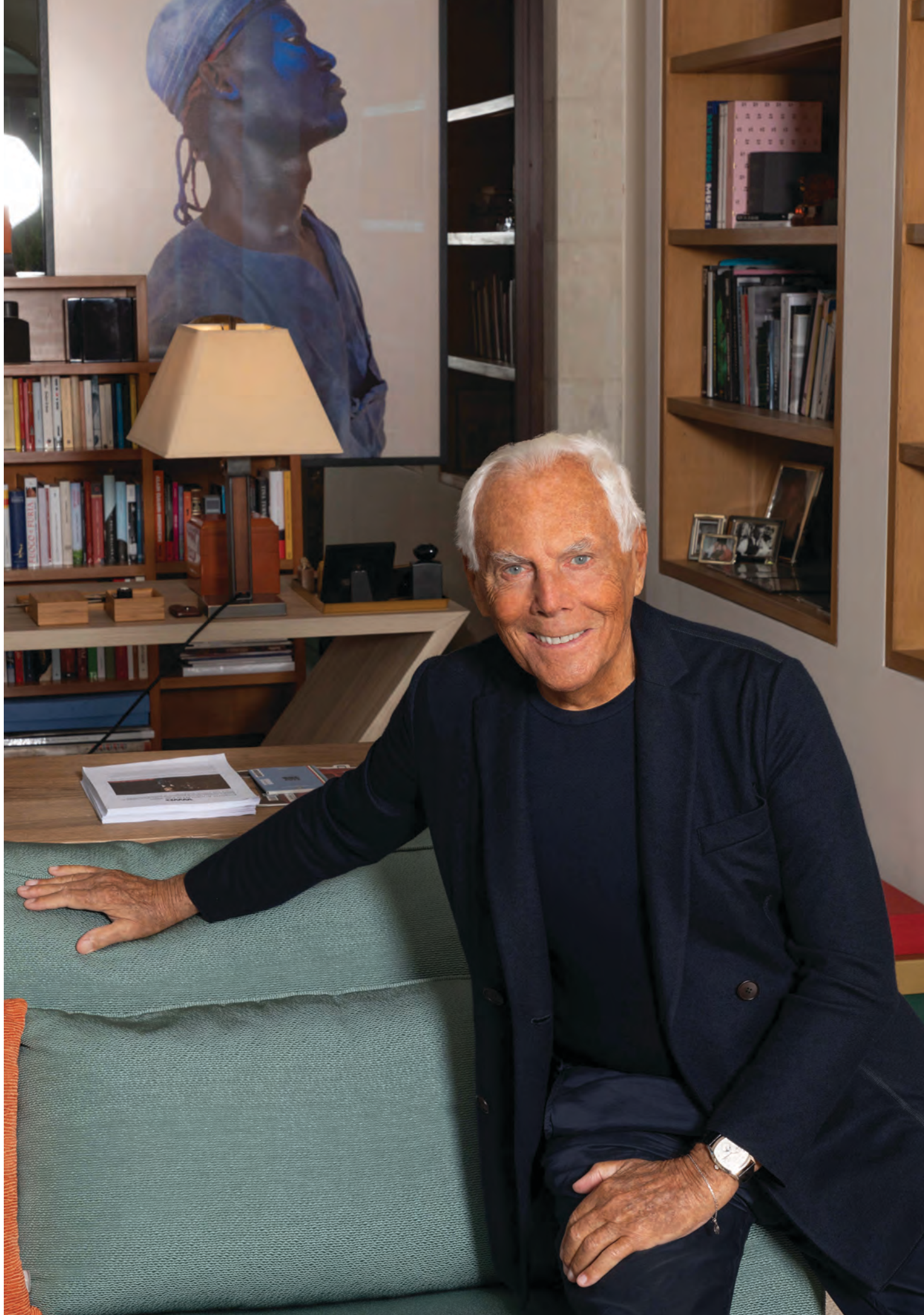


# THE ART OF ARMANI

GIORGIO ARMANI'S PASSION FOR ART,  
ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN INSPIRES  
HIS WORK AND HIS LIFE.

BY JACKIE COOPERMAN

Giorgio Armani at home in Milan; photos courtesy of Giorgio Armani.





Design legend and cultural omnivore Giorgio Armani eschews the label “collector,” but those who know him may well question that choice. Armani, now 88, fills his homes and boutiques with Art Deco furniture, as well as works by artists including Marcantonio Raimondi Malerba and Peter Lindbergh.

As passionate about architecture as he is about theater design, furniture, photography and painting, the revered fashion impresario has commissioned buildings by Tadao Ando, Peter Marino and Daniel Libeskind, and has himself been the subject of retrospectives at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. His Armani/Silos venue in Milan recently exhibited *Magnum Photos: Colors, Places, Faces*, which Armani curated with the 75-year-old photography agency. Even his runway offerings take inspiration from the art and design world. The Giorgio Armani Privé haute couture Autumn/Winter 2022-2023 collection took Art Deco painter Tamara de Lempicka’s works as a point of departure, lauding a time, he says, “when the world seemed to be sparkling and beautiful and light.”

This fall, Armani spoke with *Design District* magazine about where he goes for inspiration, the life-size black resin gorilla who shares his Milan living room, and why the concepts of “soulfulness” and “honesty” guide his work and inform his many artistic collaborations.

**WHEN DID YOU FIRST BEGIN COLLECTING ART, AND HOW HAS YOUR SENSE OF YOURSELF AS A CURATOR AND COLLECTOR EVOLVED?**

I really do not consider myself to be a collector. I have portraits, drawings and photographs that are often given to me by the photographers and artists I work with as well as Art Deco furniture and objects, which are an essential part of my home.







Clockwise from left: A scene from the *Giorgio Armani* exhibition at the Guggenheim Bilbao; photos courtesy of Giorgio Armani; the entrance to Armani/Silos in Milan; photo by Davide Lovatti; a display from the *Stars* exhibition inside the Armani/Silos; photo courtesy of Giorgio Armani.



**AS YOU LOOK BACK ON YOUR COLLECTION, AND CONSIDER ITS EVOLUTION, DO ANY ARTISTS/WORKS SURPRISE YOU?**

As my “collection” comprises a mixture of things that are very personal to me, and that usually represent relationships with individuals who gave them to me or created them, each comes with its own memories. So, none is surprising. The one exception to this might be Uri, the life-sized gorilla that shares my Milanese living room with me. It was a Christmas gift from my sister Rosanna, found in her favorite antique shop. I think it was originally on the set of a movie. It is designed by the Italian artist Marcantonio Raimondi Malerba and made from black resin. Its species is currently under threat of extinction, so he also serves as a reminder that we must make more of an effort to look after our planet and our fellow creatures.

**ARE THERE ANY WORKS OF ART THAT YOU REGRET NOT BUYING?**

Not really. I suspect I would enjoy something by Tamara de Lempicka, a strong-willed, rebellious, independent woman who was much ahead of her time. My Autumn/Winter 2022-23 couture collection was inspired by her work and the 1920s, when the world seemed to be sparkling and beautiful and light. But I have to say that I am no art critic – my appreciation is simply based on the pleasure I derive from looking at art. Goya said that if we have art, it is so that we will not die of too much reality. It represents a breath of life. And maybe Tamara de Lempicka would enhance mine a little.

**I'D LIKE TO GET A SENSE OF HOW YOUR PASSION FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE INFLUENCES YOUR OWN WORK AS A DESIGNER.**

I have referenced many artists in my collections throughout the years – among them Matisse in Autumn/Winter 1993-94, Picasso in Autumn/Winter 2001-02 and Kandinsky in Spring/Summer 2000. And there have been others. I don't know if so-called “consumers” can see the influence of art on my collections. I certainly don't insist on reminding them of it; it's one of many notes in the margin. And each artist I reference is chosen at a specific time in the development of my work for specific reasons. Kandinsky, for example, is known for having swept away traditional aesthetics through what he called the value of abstract form. His work consisted of a progressive lightening of forms and deepening of thought. Even though you may not have seen literal expressions of his work in my collection of 2000, as prints, for example – which is what another designer might have done – it was the attitude and spirit of Kandinsky I was tapping into. Other influences have been [Paul] Gauguin, [Anish] Kapoor, and Léon Bakst's Ballets Russes, but also art and design movements like Surrealism, the Bauhaus, and Art Deco. This last – Art Deco – is a constant source of ideas for me, as I instinctively respond to the geometry and purity of its lines.







From left: Giorgio Armani Fall/Winter 2022 fashion show; photo courtesy of Giorgio Armani. Armani's living room in Milan; photo by Gionata Xerra.

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The Giorgio Armani Fall/Winter 1993 collection was influenced by the artist Henri Matisse; photo by Peter Lindbergh.

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**THE DESCRIPTION OF YOUR COLLABORATIVE EXHIBIT WITH PHOTOGRAPHER PETER LINDBERGH USES THE WORDS “HONESTY,” “SOULFULNESS,” AND “TIMELESSNESS” REPEATEDLY. WHY ARE THOSE CHARACTERISTICS SO COMPELLING TO YOU, AND HOW DO YOU USE THEM IN YOUR OWN WORK?**

These qualities are relevant to Peter’s work and my own. Because my aim is to always champion elegance in an authentic, personal – in other words, honest – way; to bring elegant, sophisticated, and timeless design to the customer who values this approach. Over the years, I have seen how passing trends have come and gone, and how a longer-term approach to style is something that many desire and seek out. And I do believe that this approach is emblematic of “soulfulness.” It has soul because it is a genuine passion. Interestingly, when I put on *Heimat. A Sense of Belonging*, an exhibition of Peter Lindbergh’s photography, at the Armani/Silos in 2020, the space perfectly complemented the pictures. Just as the architecture of the Silos harmoniously chimed with Peter’s frank images, it also reflects my aesthetic vision, which applies to everything I do. In conceiving the Silos, I wanted a rational form that offered order, rigor, and functionality, and that was fully in line with the nature of the site.

**WHAT IS YOUR EARLIEST MEMORY OF APPRECIATING ARCHITECTURE?**

A series of personal discoveries, emotional discoveries you might say. It started when I was attending high school in Milan, where my family moved just after the war. As I explored the city, I came across its great works of art and magnificent churches. So, Milan was my teacher where architecture was concerned and I have always felt a debt of gratitude to the city, where I felt welcomed and understood. To this day, some of my favorite architecture is in the place I call home.

**HOW DID YOUR COLLABORATION WITH TADAO ANDAO BEGIN, AND HOW HAS IT EVOLVED?**

When I traveled to Tokyo back in 1997, a friend gave me a gift of several books on Japanese architecture and on the design of traditional Japanese houses. Among these I found examples of Tadao Ando’s work, and I was immediately captivated by it. I remember seeing images of The Row House of Sumiyoshi in Osaka, Benesse House in Naoshima and Fabrice in Treviso, Italy, among them, and so I made inquiries about how I could meet the man who had created these astonishing constructions. I was really struck by his work, even in photographic form. I could see the geometry and the use of what I would describe as noble materials – in the sense that they are not opulent or over-worked, but have a natural simplicity, even in the case of the concrete that he uses, which is unadorned, undisguised. It is as if he revels in the essential character



The *Androgynous* exhibition at Armani/Silos in Milan; photo courtesy of Giorgio Armani.





of his materials, much as I love to use authentic, essential materials in my own work. When we first met, we had to speak through translators, but we both realized quickly that communication between us wasn't flowing naturally. So, we found our own way by using sketches – we both sketch a lot and engaging through a visual language meant that we connected easily. I realized that here was a man and an artist I could relate to and work with. It was very exciting. So, I commissioned him to create my Armani/Teatro in Milan, a new show space for my collections. What he delivered in 2001 is a space where volume and light create a majestic, calm impression. Then several years later, in 2018, I saw the exhibition of his work at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris – entitled *The Challenge* – and was really impressed. So, I decided to bring it to Milan and show it at the Armani/Silos in 2019. I thought the Silos would be the perfect place to showcase a review of Tadao Ando's work, especially as when you walk out into the street, you actually see an example of it in the form of the Armani/Teatro across the road.

**ARE THERE ANY OTHER ARCHITECTS WITH WHOM YOU'D LIKE TO COLLABORATE?**

Aside from Tadao Ando, I have collaborated with several over the years – including Peter Marino in his early days, who designed my store in New York in 1996 and who also worked on my home in Milan in the late 1980s. I have also had the pleasure of working with an architect of the caliber of Daniel Libeskind on the Century Spire in Manila, Philippines. The combining of our two visions resulted in a very special project, with unique charm and elegance. Other great architects whose work I admire are Frank Lloyd Wright, for his genius in creating simple buildings that also fit perfectly into the landscape and the natural environment, and Le Corbusier, who always impresses me with his purist architecture and the symbolic power of his buildings.

**IF YOUR ART COLLECTION WERE LIMITED TO ONLY FIVE ARTISTS, OR ONLY FIVE WORKS OF ART IN ANY MEDIUM, WHOM/WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?**

I have a collection of animal figurines. Initially my home was rather bare and austere, but over time the relationship with my space has become more personal, perhaps less detached, and more intimate, acquiring a lived-in personality. I began adding objects acquired in my travels, from rugs to rare antiques. Details make a place different, and a new element of interior décor can add surprising depth to an area. Those small objects representing animals are part of this evolution. I acquired them in my travels to many destinations, in different times in my life. I presume they reflect my love for nature: they remind me of the strength of the wild, and they suggest an oasis in the middle of this city, so organized yet chaotic.



# A SOPHISTICATED JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

Armani/Casa brings their story  
to life at Armani/Silos.



This page: Armani/Casa's Morfeo bed at the center of the *Seta Liquida*. Photos courtesy of Armani.  
Opposite page: The brand's Renoir sofa takes center stage in *Le Tigre*.





Pulling back the curtain on the Armani/Casa legacy, the brand recently unveiled a unique exhibition on the ground floor of Armani/Silos, filling the space with furniture and accessories that showcase established classics next to recently released pieces. The exhibition embraces the juxtaposition of the brutalist space with the inspirations that fuel Armani/Casa's history, taking visitors on a journey through themes and recurring references including the 1930s and 1940s, the atmospheres and aesthetics of the Orient (China and Japan in particular), travel, and the world of nature. "For the first time I am using the spaces of the Silos to create an exhibition that offers an immersive and emotional experience in the Armani/Casa world," says Giorgio Armani.

The journey begins with a projection of logo lamps, first introduced by the designer in 1982, and continues through eight themes in eight individual environments, each featuring immersive, large-scale projections. The

setting dedicated to textiles, for example, features a suspended Morfeo bed surrounded by a sea of cushions, while the Chinese zodiac is celebrated via the exotic São Paulo fabric draping the brand's Renior sofa. Past and present connect in a setup featuring the Pascal armchair, a piece inspired by the seats of early 20th-century ocean liners, alongside contemporary materials such as resin and methacrylate, and the Space table, in Canaletto walnut with plexiglass legs.

"Pieces of furniture are made to stay; compared to fashion, they have an extended lifespan, which shines through in these images with exciting intensity," says Armani. "Whether it is a painting by a living artist or a classical sculpture, I find in these artefacts the same drive towards the essence, the same linear taste, the same careful attention. It is the proof that true modernity is classic, and that the classic expresses absolute modernity, which is the essence of Armani/Casa."