



ART DESIGN

The Italian artisans who take industrial oil drums and cut, beat and fuse them into vivid new creations

Words: Paolo Sormani Photos: Callo Albanese

'HA! INSIDE THE INTERIOR design world we're the motorcycle guys, while bikers consider us kind of furniture designers. It's our contradiction, we can't escape it.' Alberto Dassasso, 38, and Riccardo Zanobini, 37, both smile when describing what Vibrazioni Art Design are and how they're making their mark on motorcycle aesthetics, in bright colours, steel sheets and rust, with the blue of the welding flame and the red and the yellow of sparks. Plus there's the green that surrounds their shop, set in the silence of the Romagna countryside, Italy's 'land of the engine'.

At their workshop in Massa Lombarda, just a few litres of gasoline from the Imola race circuit, the two-wheeler harks back to its experimental and very human origins. Rough and charming at the same time, a Vibrazioni Art Design creation stands as a typical one-of-a-kind, made in Italy.

It was 2007 when the two friends embraced the idea of recycling metal drums from oil, gasoline and fruit jam - the area is renowned for its jam and fruit juice production, as well - to create furniture. They started looking for drums in scrapyards to give them a second life as chairs and tables, lamps or shelves.

'Old 44-gallon drums have their own beauty in vivid colours, with brilliant logos. They continue to tell individual and collective stories.' Esso, BP, Volvo, Texaco, Shell, John Deere, Caterpillar, Vanguard, Agip, Tamol, Petronas, Mobil, Bardahl... Practising pop art principles, these humble metal cylinders are

reborn into new shapes destined for living rooms and showrooms.

Then Alberto and Riccardo realised they could do the same with motorcycle bodywork. 'We felt kind of bound to. Both of us ride Moto Morinis - a Granpasso and a Corsaro 1200 Veloce, purely emotional choices, maybe influenced by the proximity of Bologna. Anyway, what results is a niche product. We're all-round artisans: give us a bike and in a couple of weeks we'll have made something that wasn't there before.' First came the Zolla (Clod), a Cagiva SX250 born to escape off road, now displaying its odd beauty on the Virgin Radio HQ carpet in downtown Milan.

The colourfulness of the boxed steel used on the bikes shares the industrial mood of the interior design pieces. The genesis is the same: the drum is opened into a sheet and plasma-cut into the desired shape. Then the piece is brutally hammered on the bare concrete floor - if you've ever done this, you'll understand why vibrations are so closely associated with their art and design. The steel is then folded, welded, polished and coated with a thick transparent enamel. The result is powerfully tactile and invites fingertips to slide over the irregular surface and enjoy its bruises and imperfections.

From a single drum, in three days the Vibes boys can get either a chair, a couple of lamps or some 3D box lettering. The thing is, the two love to mix sheets and colours following whatever's inspiring them at the time. 'Every piece is unique. Even if they're



Just beat it, beat it,
beat it, beat it,
No one wants to be
defeated,
Shows how funky
and strong is
your fight,
It doesn't matter
who's wrong or right

If you spotted
Raticosa started
life as a '49 you
deserve a biscuit

the same model, you never get two identical chairs.' Same for their hand-built bikes, like the new Ducati 749 Raticosa. The name comes from a twisting Appennine pass well known by local speed seekers. The Raticosa's rough and rugged metalwork style and the flat track, hooligan stance would probably horrify Pierre Terblanche, designer of the original 749.

There's no rational thinking here, just guts. Little has survived of the original, parts traded with those from other Ducati models. The tubular trellis frame and sub-frame have been modified, while the swingarm was traded for a Ducati 1098 job and the forks are from a Streetfighter. The in-house exhaust system has been fitted with a short, GP-like end can that enhances the unmistakable rumble of the V-twin. And if you feel you've already seen that blue and yellow gas tank before, yes, it's from the Ducati Scrambler, but out and welded to match the Sunoco tail and the vented front plate with vertical headlight.

Vibrazioni Art Design are not news for Borgo Panigale: after providing the Ducati Museum with original metalwork lettering, the mutual collaboration brought the Scrambler build for Pirelli, possibly the best business card for their new MT60 RS tyres, and also raced at SnowQuake. A quick google will turn up another Vibrazioni Scrambler, the Flamingo. Besides these, ever hiding behind their welding masks à la Daft Punk, Alberto and Riccardo have worked on a couple of BMW K100s, the '70s/'80s endurance-styled Finale 1000 and the Trofeo 1000.

'But ask us where to find the core of our art and we'll tell you to look out for our Honda CB750 Pennzoil, built for the same customer who commissioned the Finale 1000. All our love for racing motorcycles is there. It's particularly touching for us, like it was built by itself.'

All Vibrazioni's bikes share the same rough visual approach, in contrast with a love for fine detail. Like the petrol that many of the drums contained, they're refined from raw, primordial material, from humble ingredients transformed into luxury objects. To define the Vibrazioni Art Design style is more futile than difficult.


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"To us, a motorcycle is speed and low bars. The important thing about our bikes isn't the search for Zen, but to transmit their spirit, their previous life, in a different form. By oozing abrasiveness, they make you feel like a wheeled superhero, you know, with the brightly coloured costume and all."

It's metal, a bit heavy and that rocks hard. Besides the steel drums, Alberto and Biocardo have started playing with other materials, mixing steel with Kevlar and carbon fibre... 'It's a good way to experiment with motorcycle parts and we're loving it.' But their ambition is starting to outstrip drums and

bikes ('Sometimes four wheels can move your soul too...'), as well as the space in their family garage. 'Yeah, we're supposed to make the great jump and set up Vibrazioni Art Design as a small firm, with workers and tooling that can make us independent in terms of production.'

'Work hard, dream big, never give up.' That's what's written under the Rattocosa's tail. Even if they're looking to the future, watching them hand-making motorcycles like a century ago is heart-warming, a real comfort for those who fear the cold dawning of the era of CAD and 3D printing. 

It's a street tracker, but thanks to 749 guts it's one that breakfasts on 40 miles of barbed wire and uses a cobra snake as a neck tie (opposite top) Vibrazioni's twist on the iconic XR tail design. Taller, chunkier, with added number boards and all hand-beaten, on a bare concrete floor with a big hammer

