

PERFECTLY CAPTURES THE OPENING OF GESSI SINGAPORE

Bathed in luxury

Gessi has opened a Singapore branch, its first flagship store in Asia. By Arthur Sim

GESSI is investing big in Singapore with its first flagship store in Asia located here, costing between three million euros (\$4.3 million) and 3.5 million euros just to renovate and fit out. Currently, the luxury Italian bathroom and kitchen fittings and furnishings manufacturer's Asia business contributes about 15 per cent to its annual turnover, which in 2014 hit 130 million euros, but this looks set to grow if Gessi president Gian Luca Gessi has his way.

In Singapore in March to attend the opening of its latest flagship store, located in a 614 sq m Victorian conservation building on Penang Road, Mr Gessi says Singapore is the perfect location for its business in Asia because of its proximity to countries such as Indonesia, although he jokes that "retris here are very high". Still, Gessi expects to recoup its investment in three years.

While the company could easily have found a cheaper location, Mr Gessi explains that he wanted to be close to Orchard Road. It is not a coincidence that the big Italian fashion labels found on Orchard Road like Gucci and Prada are nearby. "We have always positioned our Gessi brand alongside Italian fashion because it's the best in the world and it represents Italy," says Mr Gessi, who also happens to be dapperly dressed in a cerulean blue suit of impeccable cut. Fashionistas too will probably recognise Gessi's Milan flagship store address - Via Manzoni - conveniently located in the heart of the fashion capital for its collaborations with brands such as Versace and Armani.

This market positioning is unusual for a bathroom and kitchen fittings manufacturer that was founded in a small workshop (previously a garage) by Umberto Gessi, Mr Gessi's father, in 1992. Before this, Mr Gessi senior was working for a furniture manufacturer, involved in the engineering aspects of manufacturing.

At the time, bathroom and kitchen fittings were a mostly utilitarian affair dominated by a few big players. However, the younger Mr Gessi explains there was a market for fittings that were more about "decoration" than just utility. Early designs like its Diverso range capitalised on the Post Modern trend for whimsy with kitchen mixers that looked a little bit like teapots.

As fashions changed, so did Gessi's designs with the minimalist Rettangolo range proving to be a big hit for the company. To this day, the spare lines and aesthetic of Rettangolo make it one of Gessi's best selling



PHOTO: ARTHUR LEE

'We want to make people stay in the bathroom for as long as possible.'

Gian Luca Gessi, president of Gessi

and most copied designs, Mr Gessi reveals. Indeed, there have been several copyright infringement lawsuits already.

Rettangolo was designed by long-time Gessi collaborator, Prospero Rasulo. Trained as an artist, Mr Rasulo still designs for Gessi today, with the Cono range - inspired by a cone of light - one of his latest efforts. Interestingly, Gessi has not partnered other famous designers, preferring to depend on its in-house design team or Mr Rasulo. Mr Gessi says that this is because Gessi is a relatively young company and that "it is more important to develop the brand first".

Part of Gessi's branding is rooted in wellness. This not only means it has created products that are designed with more features like atomisers, body jets, and massage modes to make you feel good, but also that users form a special connection with water (using Gessi products) to elevate the whole experience of using the bathroom. "We want to bring an additional meaning to the bathroom," says Mr Gessi, adding that "talking about the product is not enough anymore". To substantiate its claims that Gessi products provide "wellness", the company has even engaged psychologists to undertake behavioural studies on the users' connection with bathing and time spent in the bathroom. One finding showed that women who wore high heels were more prone to spend time on their feet in the shower so Gessi created a shower console with a low level nozzle just to massage ankles and heels. "We have developed a whole culture of water," adds Mr Gessi.

This "culture of water" is best experienced at Casa Gessi, the Asia flagship on Penang Road where the bathroom is presented as a private sanctuary in various settings. This kind of personal quality time is not cheap. Gessi's new Eleganza bathtub will set you back \$520,000 to \$825,000. Fittings are extra at about \$83,000 in a chrome finish or \$96,500 in a gold plated finish. "We want to make people stay in the bathroom for as long as possible," adds Mr Gessi.



CULTURE OF WATER

Right: Casa Gessi, on Penang Road, where the bathroom is presented as a private sanctuary in various settings. Above: The super slim Tremilimetri showerhead. Top: The designer Segni shower

