



OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

A LOFTY INDUSTRIAL SPACE IS THE PERFECT FOIL FOR FLOS AND MOROSO IN LONDON

WORDS LUCY BULLIVANT
PHOTOGRAPHY
GERMANO BORRELLI

ARCHITECT MACKAY + PARTNERS
INTERIOR DESIGNER PATRICIA
URQUIOLA
LOCATION LONDON | UK
PROJECT FLOS-MOROSO
SHOWROOM

OPPOSITE Patricia Urquiola's angled pipe installation visually connects the two levels
RIGHT One of the vibrant window displays showcasing Flos and Moroso products

To say that the new Flos-Moroso showroom in London lacks a corporate feel is an understatement. Moroso, established in 1952 by Agostino Moroso, is a radical design brand leading the high end of the market through consistently confounding expectations. The individualist flair of its new London home had to support its plural design language influenced by culture, fashion and world crafts. So, when choosing a showroom designer, sibling Managing Directors, Roberto and Patrizia Moroso, selected Patricia Urquiola, their Spanish star, who already designs all Moroso's stands at the Salone. They also found a two-floor space in Clerkenwell, in central London, that, says Steen Olsen, Country Director for Moroso, "felt like a gallery environment but with quirkiness".

Moroso began strengthening its presence in leading overseas markets a few years ago. First came a successful shop in Manhattan and then, in 2008, the firm opened a vividly coloured showroom in Amsterdam together with Flos. Agostino and Patrizia covet the UK market, where architects are constantly in search of innovative, functional and high quality manufacturing solutions for demanding customers. The tie-in with Flos – another strong, family-run brand that Urquiola designs for – represents their synergy in approach to design. While in the Dutch space there is a lot more division between the two companies, here in London the layout is designed to unite their designs over two floors.



Moroso's designs... needed a strong 'container' akin to a large domestic space

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Ken Mackay, Senior Partner at Mackay + Partners, is a London architect who specifies Moroso regularly. For these reasons, he was brought in to work on the project with Urquiola. Mackay knew of an attractive, 600m² space, "a little off the beaten track", on Rosebery Avenue in Clerkenwell – traditionally something of an Italian district. With two floors – a ground floor and a huge basement vault – the loft-like industrial space won over Mackay, Urquiola and the Morosos. After a four-month fit-out period, for which Mackay was Executive Architect, the space survived an onslaught of over 700 guests attending the showroom's launch party in November 2009.

The architects have opened up the whole street façade, projecting the first level showroom and upper level workspaces across the road. Apart from giving visibility to the inner spaces, Urquiola's chief aesthetic element – a mangrove of curved tree-shaped pipes made of white painted aluminium adapted from her design for Moroso's last Salone stand design – can clearly be seen. This bit of organic scenography binds the two floors with a sense of verticality, softening the functional nature of the spaces. Clustered around the new staircase, the pipes also appear throughout the lower ground, defining three spacious showroom areas in alcoves, two of them large (around 49m² each).

The contrasting angles and stylised tangling of the pipes set up an interestingly liquid aesthetic that permits views and yet frames spaces at every step. As fixtures, they can be removed in the future if desired, making the showroom space highly adaptable. On the lower ground, light floods in through street level windows that frame views of the sky, trees and red brick Victorian housing across the street.

The existing lower ground makes the showroom even more spacious (a total area of 600m²). As part of the refit, a kitchen space was introduced to the rear, joining a shower room. This lowerground space retains its original features, including arched doorways and barrel-vaulted ceilings to the showroom areas. This, says Mackay, "enhances the space so that the clients can reinterpret it". The aim was not to make a modernist white box but to recognise what Olsen describes as "the beauty of imperfections". Moroso's designs are a magical treasure trove of forms, colours, patterns and styles, so they needed a strong 'container' akin to a large domestic space to hold their own. Cultural influences are found throughout the firm's furniture, which lends itself to a more 'raw space'. For example, Tord Boontje's 'Shadowy', part of the M'Afrique collection, is a woven Senegalese armchair that demonstrates Moroso's use of local production.

Old carpets with a new twist, created by Golran, add to the grittiness. Dating from the earlier 20th Century, these have been re-worked in a risky process involving bleaching and re-dyeing with natural monochrome pigments. They lie on floors raised by around 20cm to contain all the services, with new oak floorboards laid over an aluminium plate. The Oak is laminated and whitewashed to give a distressed feel but is extremely hard wearing.

The identity of London design showrooms is in flux: B&B Italia is the ultimate warehouse hangar party space, while the new Walter Knoll showroom on Charterhouse Square EC1 is a raised up box with a fussy aesthetic. Moroso, which 10 years ago promoted art furniture and now has a mix of designs that break through remaining barriers between commercial and domestic spaces, has brought hard-edged character to its space: and the people naturally have followed.

Lucy Bullivant is Indesign's London correspondent.



FLOS-MOROSO SHOWROOM

ARCHITECT Mackay + Partners
INTERIOR DESIGNER Patricia Urquiola
CONTRACTOR Interior Dimensions Contracts

TIME TO COMPLETE 3 months
TOTAL FLOOR AREA 600m²

MACKAY + PARTNERS
 (44 20) 7608 1177 mackayandpartners.co.uk

STUDIO URQUIOLA
 (39 2) 8738 1848 patriciaurquiola.com

FURNITURE All furniture by Moroso.

LIGHTING All lighting by Flos.

OPPOSITE The entire façade of the new showroom opens up to the street, projecting the space across the road

ABOVE The lower level retains original features, such as barrel-vaulted ceilings to the showrooms