

# A BRIGHT

By LINDYL ZANBAKA

The sisters behind *Paola Lenti* are cultivating a LEGACY for younger generations by training the *artisans* of tomorrow and designing *furniture* to stand the test of time.

# FUTURE



**T**he energy in the Paola Lenti studio is charged. Salone del Mobile is approaching and the pressure to put on a presentation that impresses has shifted the mood from one of enthusiasm to anxiety. “It’s crazy. We’ve got to be nervous because every year people expect something more... new product, materials, colours, and that all comes together at the last moment,” says Anna Lenti, the Italian design company’s CEO and sister of its founder, Paola.

Anna is in Australia for the arrival of new indoor and outdoor furniture collections at Dedecé, while back in Brianza, Italy’s production and design district, the 122-strong team are preparing for Paola Lenti’s next exhibition.

When Paola launched the Lenti name in 1994, among her first designs were rugs that revealed a designer whose curiosity can’t be confined to the CMYK colour model and for whom the world is a living swatch book. Anna, on the other hand, studied nuclear engineering and was working for an aerospace company when her sister came calling. “Paola was insisting ‘you have to come and work with me!’” Anna says. “The company was small but growing... She needed somebody to take care of all the other aspects.”

The number-crunching pragmatist to Paola’s creative spirit, Anna says their differences make a “great combination” and that family “is the most important thing. Before anything else we are sisters.” Anna joined Paola in 2000 and laughs at the suggestion that moving from a largely male workforce to a matriarchy must have been a breath of fresh air. “To be honest, in the beginning that was the most difficult part!”

When developing a new shade, Paola Lenti starts from a library of about 70 colours, “and then we start mixing”, says Anna. The latest collection proposes furniture settings in the

colours of a viridescent beetle’s back and the magenta of a make-up artist’s dreams. “[Paola’s] always looking to something new, something different, or old traditions... and then absolutely transforming them,” says Anna, though she maintains “there is nothing more beautiful than nature”.

At Paola Lenti, the beauty of a product cannot be considered before designing its lifespan. The use of recyclable materials took off with the brand’s first outdoor designs, and circularity is woven into the most minute details, from the way a chair can be dismantled into individual materials at the end of its life to the protective coatings applied to yarns. Working with Brazilian designers Fernando and Humberto Campana, Paola Lenti made use of its production ‘leftovers’ to create a special edition seating and tapestry collection.

Preserving craftsmanship is also key to the creative process. Paola Lenti invests in its artisans and trains the experts of tomorrow, though Anna says it’s increasingly difficult “because you have to find younger people that want to do this kind of work”. As brands seek lower costs overseas, she warns “teaching is a tradition in Italy that is going to be discontinued”. What cannot be achieved in-house is done locally — in Sicily, Paola Lenti works with embroiderer Marella Ferrera, and with Nicolò Morales to produce hand-painted ceramics.

In a former industrial estate of Milan, Paola Lenti is sowing the seeds of its legacy in a more literal way. Guided by scientist Stefano Mancuso, the company is planting a low-environmental impact rooftop garden that will attract not only visitors to experience its new range of fabrics and colours during Milan Design Week but bees, too. “It’s a small drop in the ocean,” Anna says of the new venue. “But every small drop can create change.” ■ [paolalenti.it](http://paolalenti.it)

*This page* outdoor furniture including the Altopiano table, Telar chairs, and Kiti chair (at rear), all by Paola Lenti, from Dedecé.