



CATELLANI & SMITH

by Rebecca Skinner

# BEACON OF CREATIVITY

AVANT-GARDE DESIGNS TO LIGHT UP HOMES, A STOCK  
EXCHANGE AND LONDON'S VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM





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NAMED AFTER A MAN AND HIS RACEHORSE, CATELLANI & SMITH IS AN EXAMPLE OF PASSION, innovation and irony melded with the desire to create artisan lighting spanning both past and future.

The story begins with Italian Enzo Catellani. Born in the Zibello commune in Parma, Italy in 1950, Catellani began making lamps in the '80s. His unique designs quickly caught the eyes of connoisseurs worldwide and he set up his lighting company, Catellani & Smith, in 1989. Catellani claimed his first name was Carlo, that he had a background in blacksmithing, and that his partner was English architect Logan Smith, who specialised in racetrack renovations. The real story was that Carlo was his father's name, and Logan Smith was his own horse.

Many feel the fictitious biography reflects the ironic attitude Catellani has towards the sometimes self-referential world of design.

His workshop is housed in an old restored mill in the province of Bergamo, Italy, a unique environment in keeping with the philosophy of the company. He explains, "My laboratory is a workshop where I continually accumulate materials, components and objects of all different kinds, and this is where everything is born. I assemble, weld, bend, shape...I need to feel the materials, to see how they play with light. In this initial stage there is no real design; the idea must take shape immediately, becoming an object."

Light of course plays a vital role in our lives, instantly able to transform a space, creating an ambience ranging >>

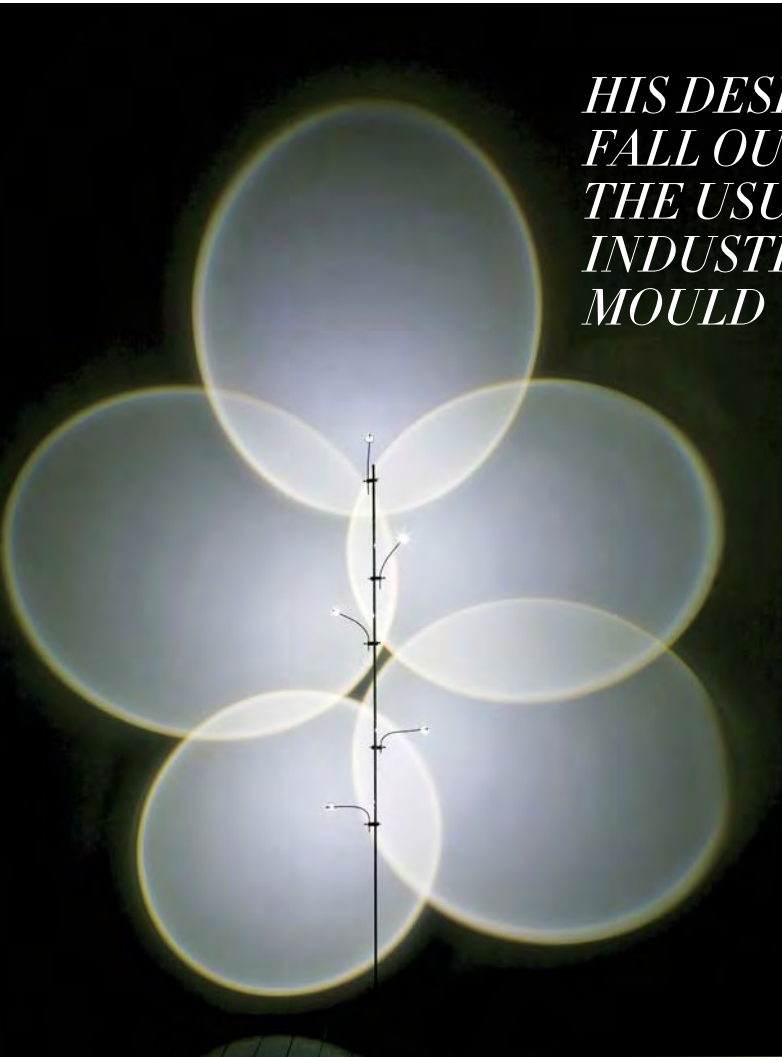
OPPOSITE PAGE

The Luna nel Pozzo, from the Out Collection

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP

Fil de Fer, from the Out Collection  
Luci d'Oro

*HIS DESIGNS  
FALL OUTSIDE  
THE USUAL  
INDUSTRIAL  
MOULD*



In Catellani's hands, lamps become sources of light and beauty, not mere tools

>> from cosy and intimate to airy and spectacular. Catellani has mastered light manipulation, although his designs can be deceptively simple.

Today, his work can be seen around the world, from Copenhagen Stock Exchange to London's Victoria and Albert Museum; from the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin to the Hotel Schloss Elmau spa in the Bavarian Alps and the historical Neveri Convent in Bergamo. His creativity also graces private homes and offices, as well as

theatres and chic European streets.

Nature and his surroundings inspire Catellani. His philosophical yet playful personality can be seen in all his pieces, including table-top and standing lamps, wall and ceiling lights, and pieces for internal and external installations. His designs fall outside the usual industrial mould as they are created with both hands and mind: they are not just an aesthetic expression, but a quest for the perfect light.

Many of his pieces call for "a great



Light gives life to irregular forms, unpredictable patterns, indefinable shapes — and vice versa

amount of craftsmanship,” Catellani says. For example, no two pieces are exactly alike in the Out Collection and in the Stchu-Moon and Luce d’Oro lines. “It’s the hand of the craftsman that builds them, his manual work that creates the imperfection, making a truly unique object.” The Stchu-Moon range projects light from a separate source onto an object with an irregularly shaped surface. The surface reflects and refracts the light, becoming the source of illumination. Luci d’Oro or Golden Light uses gilded surfaces that reflect and multiply the luminance of a small light source. The Out Collection reveals the most imaginative handmade items, including the Fil de Fer — a sphere made of tangled iron wires with a light source at the core.

In 2008, Catellani began branching into LED technology. This led to the creation of Eco-Logic Light, using clean, minimal shapes and materials like nickel-plated metal rods and micro-cables to create low consumption, relaxing light. The new shapes and concepts reduce CO<sup>2</sup> emissions by one

fifth and save energy by 80 to 90 per cent. The first model of this series was the Atman lamp, a minuscule LED bulb within a crystal case. A touch of a thin, barely visible power cable turns on the bulb, with the LED light penetrating the crystal and casting a glow shaped like the lamp.

But the true irony of this creator comes with his Lucenera (Black Light) collection, which uses a halogen lamp in a black carbon-fibre tube that prevents the light from refracting at the source. The beam and intensity of light can be adjusted by sliding the tube up or down. Light becomes the design focus, and the lamp is no more than an unseen tool — thereby putting his physical creativity very much in the background. As pointed out in the official write-up for the Lucenera (musings presumably written by Catellani himself), “Is that how it is? It’s the very opposite of what he has been doing for 10 years.”

Surprise, surprise. 



## REFLECTION TIME

**1989**

Catellani & Smith creates the Turciù and Albero della Luce collection characterised by flex tubing, highlighting the lamp as both object and subject

**1995**

Released Luci d’Oro collection, where gold surfaces reflect light

**1997**

Created Stchu-Moon, where irregular surfaces refract light

**2000**

Lucenera, a series where the lamp sacrifices its sculptural value for the concept of pure light

**2002**

Out Collection (made up of Fil de Fer, Luna nel Pozzo and Luce che Dipinge models) is made in limited quantities

**2004**

PostKrisi fibreglass lamps are released, where light interacts with colour and shape

**2007**

Atman, his first LED lamp, is born

**2008**

Eco-Logical Light, a LED series, opens up a world of infinite possibilities