

forbo

MARMOLEUM®

meets *A. Mendini*



Marmoleum is manufactured solely from natural materials. Linseed oil from Canada – extracted from the seeds of the flax plant – is one of the most important ingredients. Pine rosins come from Indonesia and China, cork from Portugal, wood flour and pigments from a number of European countries, and jute from India and Bangladesh.

**With its main brand Marmoleum, Forbo is the world leader in linoleum. Our floor coverings set the trend in design, quality, innovation and service in both the commercial and private sector. Close cooperation with the Italian architect Alessandro Mendini has produced six innovative floor designs, each available in multicoloured panels created with advanced aquajet technology.**

**Let the examples of the designs  
Mendini has made for Forbo be  
an inspiration to you.**

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**Plato**

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**Harlekino**

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**Proust**

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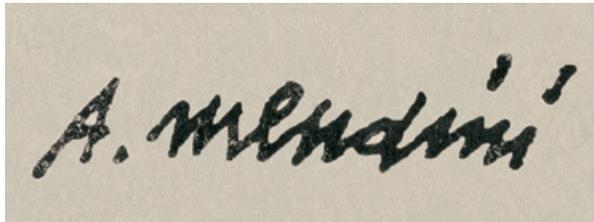
**Overview**



# Platonic relationship

Plato is available in a brightly coloured version (in eight Marmoleum colours) and one based on softer shades. The design reflects the principles of pointillism, in which the brush-strokes are abstracted into square shapes overlaid in a variety of ways.

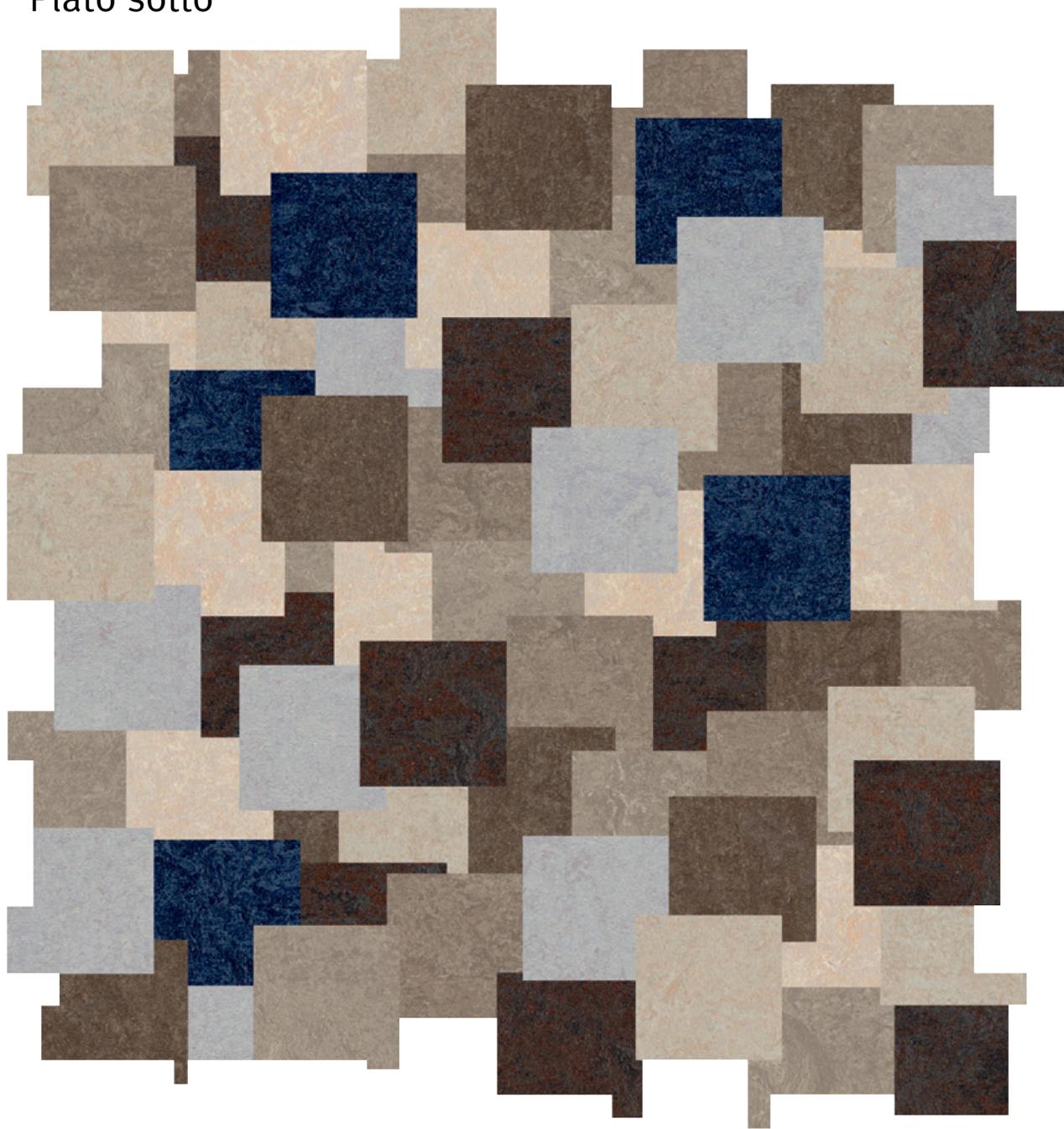
With each order Mendini's signature is delivered on a strip of Marmoleum, ready to be incorporated in the overall design (see an example of how this can be done on page 9).

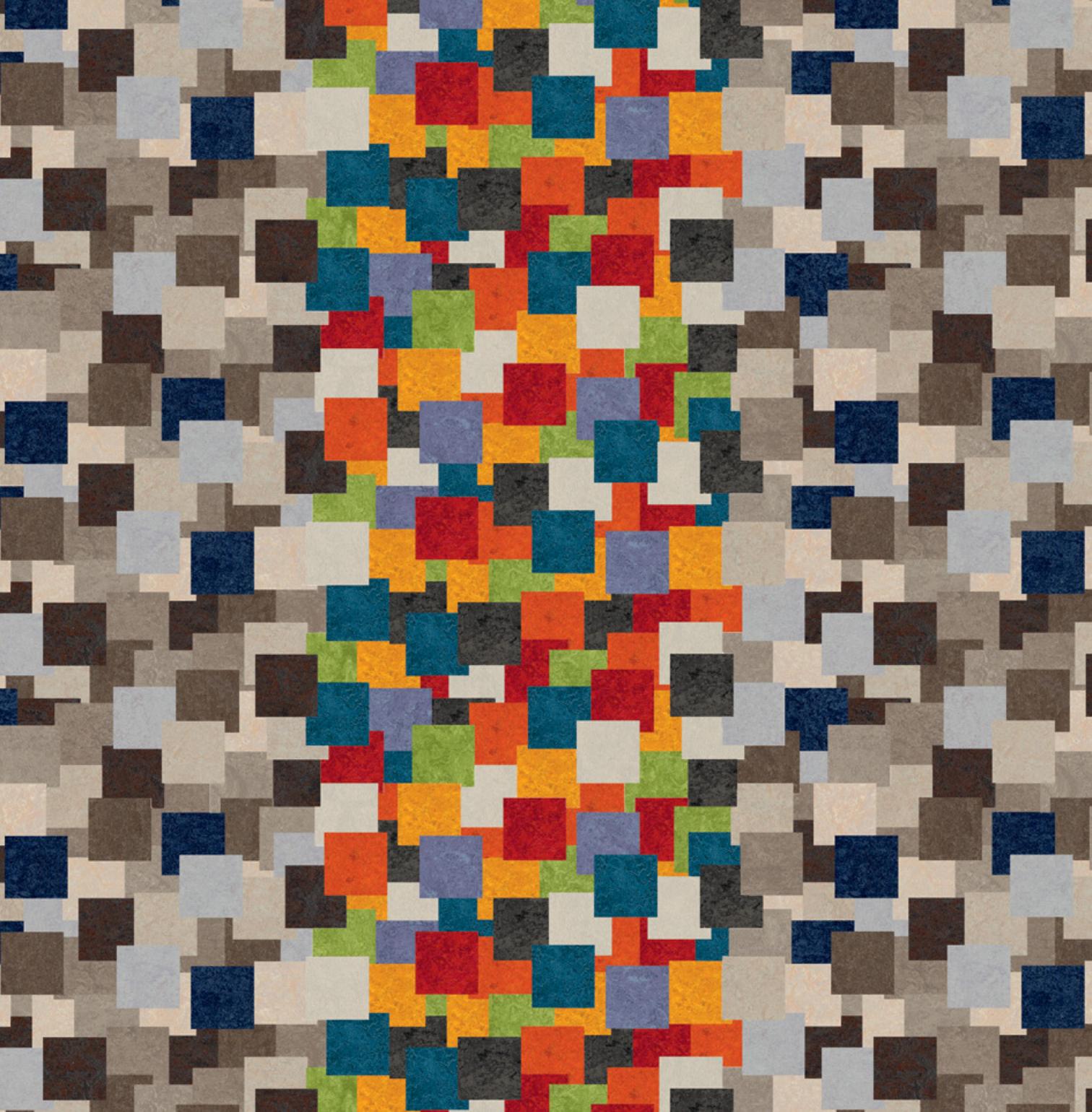


# Plato forte



Plato sotto







A. M. B. S. D. O. M.





# Inspired by Harlekino

**Harlekino – emblematic of Mendini himself – is at the heart of the ‘Marmoleum meets Mendini’ collection. The bright, colourful version refers to a harlequin’s suit, while the softer version has a more classical appearance, which combines wonderfully with marble. Harlekino is composed of seven colours. The colour of the lines that define the diamond shapes can be repeated in a simple border round the edge of the room.**

# Harlekino forte



# Harlekino sotto







# Memories of Proust

**This comes closest to designs made earlier by Mendini such as the Poltrona di Proust. The brush-strokes are clearly visible in this floor, powerfully magnified to a size of about 50 cm. Proust contains seven colours.**

**As with all Mendini floors, the panels can be connected to create a wall-to-wall design. It's also possible to lay a panel as if it were a rug, creating a strong accent within a larger uniform area of Marmoleum.**





AUDITORIO  
LIBRERIA  
GUARDAROBA

# Proust forte



Proust sotto





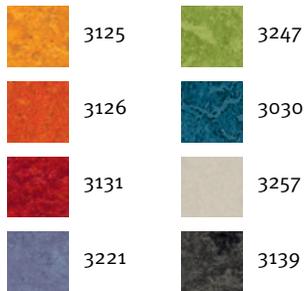




Plato forte  
**18002**

repeat 156 x 148 cm

Forte consists of eight colours from the Real collection:



Plato sotto  
**18001**

repeat 156 x 148 cm

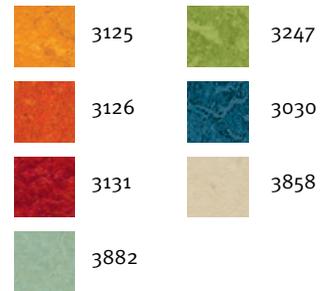
Sotto consists of eight colours from the Fresco collection:



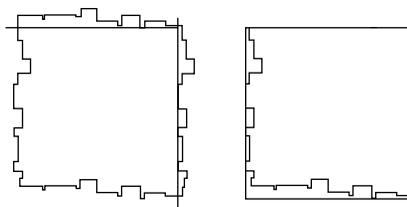
Harlekino forte  
**18012**

repeat 86 x 90 cm

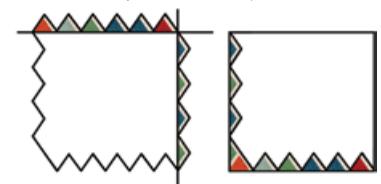
Forte consists of seven colours from the Real collection:



Example of how to convert the irregular Plato panels into squares



Example of how to cover the irregular Harlekino panels into squares

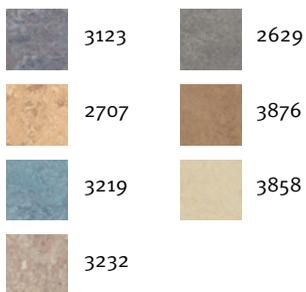




Harlekino sotto  
**18011**

repeat 86 x 90 cm

Sotto consists of seven colours from the Real collection



Proust forte  
**18022**

repeat 165 x 183 cm

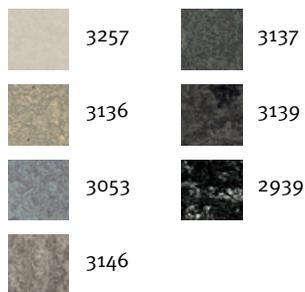
Forte consists of seven colours from the Real collection:



Proust sotto  
**18021**

repeat 165 x 183 cm

Sotto also consists of seven colours from the Real collection:



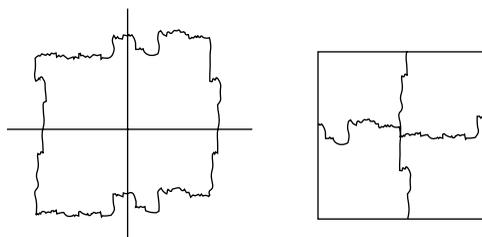
Extra signature  
**18031**

75 x 200 mm

The signature is made of two colours from the Real collection:



Example of how to convert the irregular Proust panels into squares



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FLOORING SYSTEMS



Forbo

MARMOLEUM® meets

*A. Meloni*

*Marmoleum meets Mendini* is like a marriage that has created six children. Two can be seen as paintings, two can be seen as self-portraits by the artist, and two are 'normal' floors. Such cooperation between industry and art has a long and interesting history. In this booklet Frans Haks tells the story behind the close collaboration between Mendini and Forbo.

page 4

## **On the way to the art factory**

features a number of remarkable examples from the history of the industrial revolution, prefiguring the output of *Marmoleum meets Mendini*.

page 5

## **Design pittorico**

tells about Mendini's ideology and methods.

page 13

## **Rammendini**

is an interview in which Mendini explains why he views the cooperation with Forbo as a marriage, and how the results can be interpreted and applied.

## On the way to the art factory

Ever since the emergence of industrial technologies, manufacturers have sought to enhance and expand the scope of production by involving artists in their work. One of the first and most remarkable personalities to take such an initiative was Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1793). In a catalogue published in 1779, he wrote that it was the duty of every manufacturer to promote good taste. The best and most effective way to achieve this, he claimed, is by using new techniques and materials to produce existing works of art in such large numbers that a much broader public can enjoy them.

Wedgwood did his utmost, as the summing up of new materials and



**Alessandro Mendini**

# Design pittorico

Mellini's architecture can be seen all over the world. A brief compendium of his work during the past decade includes several hundred shops for the Swatch and Alessi chains in Europe, Asia and the United States; the new underground stations in Naples; casinos in Switzerland; a cultural centre in Omega; and a museum at Groningen in the Netherlands. This enormous output is the work of Atelier Mendini, presided over by the Mendini brothers. Francesco deals with the technical aspects, the financial administration and the day-to-day management. The artistic direction is in the hands of Alessandro.

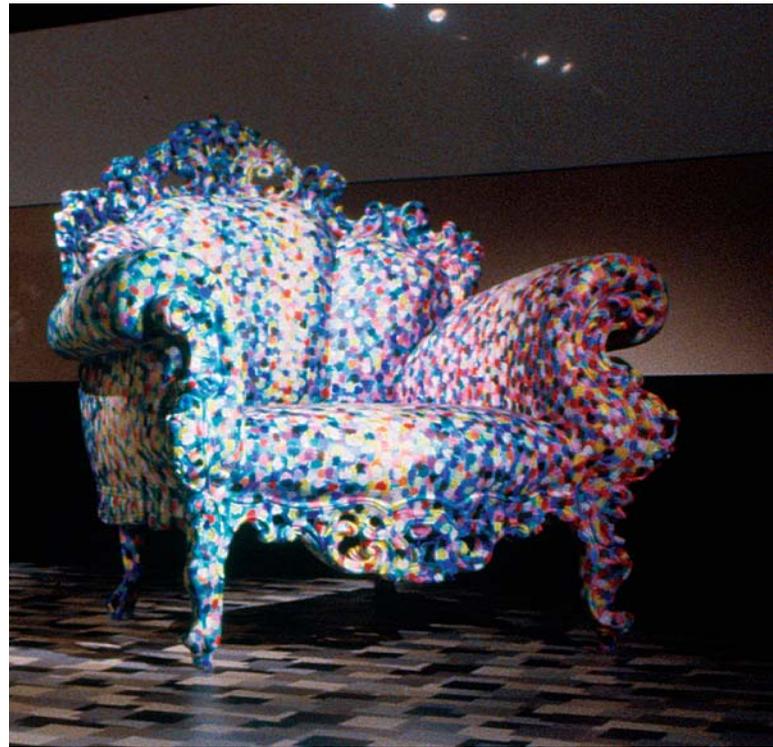
Trained as an architect in Milan, in 1970 Alessandro co-founded his first company, only to leave it again almost immediately, unable to reconcile himself to the demands and customs of the architectural world. He was successively editor-in-chief of *Casabella* magazine, *Modo* and finally *Domus*, where he published the ideas of like-minded spirits as well as his own thoughts on art, design and architecture. For example, he noted that houses in many far-away countries typically have lavishly decorated facades and are filled with furniture featuring brightly painted or sculpted surfaces. Objects, clothing and even the human body are all part of the decorative scheme. He regarded this practice as a kind of homage to outward form, and contrasted it to the modernist ban on decoration, which, he felt, had led to an overemphasis on the way things were made, and thus to their impoverishment. Such observations led Mendini to reject the modernist idiom – or, to put it another way: to seek to move functionalism beyond the merely technical and utilitarian.

### On the way to the art factory

their advantages in his catalogue shows. Black porcelain is acid-resistant and can be just as easily cleaned and polished as copper, silver and gold. It is even possible to put it in an oven without damaging it.

He drew his reader's special attention to 'Bisquit ware'. While this looks like marble, it is much cheaper and lighter, and therefore extremely suitable not only for copying portraits and busts from antiquity, but also for producing household goods such as vases and bowls. And while Wedgwood didn't make this explicit, he clearly intended his mass-produced work to achieve more than commercial success alone: he also aspired to artistic success.

The introduction of Marmoleum shows that Wedgwood's ideology was still very much alive in the twentieth century. The name Marmoleum is a contraction of marble and linoleum – a statement that the prestigious and expensive looks of marble can be echoed in a product that has the added advantages of being cheaper,



**Here, a model considered by many  
to resemble one of the**

To achieve this, he developed his own method, whereby the principles of one branch of art were transferred to another. One of the terms he used to describe this process was *Design pittorico* – literally: pictorial design. Design based on pictorial criteria became the hallmark of his work. He felt that decoration should be applied not so much intuitively, but rather systematically to a wide variety of forms in all shapes and sizes. The most highly developed of these systems – the one that has been used most frequently and therefore occupies an important place in Mendini's oeuvre – is known as *Proust*.

The tale begins in 1977 with Mendini's idea of designing a fabric inspired by the work of Marcel Proust. Just as he dreamed of an architecture as changeable as fashion, so he wanted to create a visual product based on literature. With this in mind, he visits the places where Proust had lived. Finding none of the interiors intact, he decides instead to turn to the art Proust had owned and admired. In sketches and collages he places details from paintings by Van Gogh, Monet, Bonnard, Vuillard, Seurat and Signac next to one another, and designs (on paper) fabrics combining these fragments. The final result, however, is not a fabric, but rather the so-called *Poltrona di Proust*: a brand-new chair that is evocative of the 18th century.

## **as the 'height of kitsch' was painted**

### **most radical painting styles of all time, Signac's pointillism**

The combination raises many questions: is the *Poltrona di Proust* a chair that should be used as such, or is it a chair-shaped painting? If it is not a painting, but merely a piece of painted upholstery, is not the person who sits on it some sort of barbarian, as the upholstery cannot be replaced?

## On the way to the art factory

softer and warmer to the touch, and at least as easy to clean.

Forbo is proud to continue Wedgwood's ideal of producing precious materials in a way that brings them within the reach of ordinary households – not to mention hospitals, restaurants and offices. Not that Mr Wedgwood's own contemporaries were always as ambitious or quality-conscious as he was: the market of his time was flooded with mediocre products. This confirmed the critics in their view that clear distinctions had to be made between unique, autonomous art on the one hand and practical or useful art made in series on the other. Naturally, the latter was always considered to be inferior...

Such prejudices were precisely what led Karl Ernst Osthaus, an early 20th-century banker and patron of the arts, to devote his energies to improving the relationship between artists, manufacturers and the consumer. Among many other activities, he founded the *Deutsches Museum für Kunst in Handel und Gewerbe*

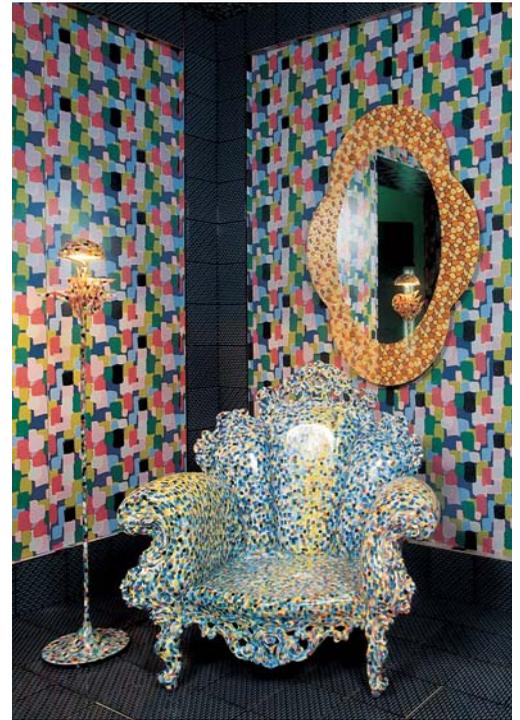
The *Poltrona di Proust* was also seen as an attack on the basic laws of functionalism formulated by the *Bauhaus*. One such dictum states that furniture must be 'honest' – that is: the structure of a chair and its upholstery must remain strictly separated. Here, however, the Signac motif patterns the wooden frame and the fabric equally, blurring the distinction between the two.

Still more fundamental is the objection that a painting is a painting and should therefore be hanging on a wall. A painting is more than just decoration – and certainly not something to be used to upholster a chair. In the eyes of all those who continue to defend the distinction between high and low art, between oil on canvas and everything else, Mendini has robbed painting of its sacrosanct aura, reducing the highest form of art to mere ornamentation. Mendini's passion for decoration is therefore a provocation on various fronts. It is no surprise, then, that the *Poltrona di Proust* becomes both famous and infamous around the world.

Still, this is not enough, and Mendini begins work on a series of variations, of which the design for Forbo is only the most recent case in point. Casting the model in bronze, for example, he creates a three-dimensional version that is even more obviously not something to be sat on, but rather an object to be looked at. It is bronze sculpture in the form of a chair.

Mendini then begins expanding the various possibilities in a systematic fashion. He designs new basic materials such as laminate, silk, cotton, velours, tiles and paper, all featuring the pointillist motif in various colour combinations, dot sizes and forms. For example, thirteen different colours are worked into the silk and velours – primarily shades of red, brown and beige. The fabrics themselves lead to yet another set of applications. Under Mendini's direction, the silk is turned into blouses, skirts and

***Interno di un Interno* is an installation in which the walls, floor, ceiling, furniture and accessories**



**are all executed according to the Proust concept**

men's ties, while the velours is used for upholstery, teddy bears and a jacket for Philippe Starck. In addition to these basic materials, which anyone can use at their discretion, Mendini also designs a number of ready-made, industrially produced pointillist objects for large-scale distribution. The best known of these is the *Lots-of-dots* watch for Swatch.

Unique objects are also painted with the dot motif, for example an antique chest of drawers belonging to Mendini's family. Two decorated lamps are probably the most striking, as the pointillist effect is achieved here by using glass-mosaic. This will have far-reaching consequences for the future, as we will see.

## On the way to the art factory

(‘The German Museum for Art in Commerce and Industry’) and began collecting such ephemera as letterheads, advertisements, invoices, packaging and posters.

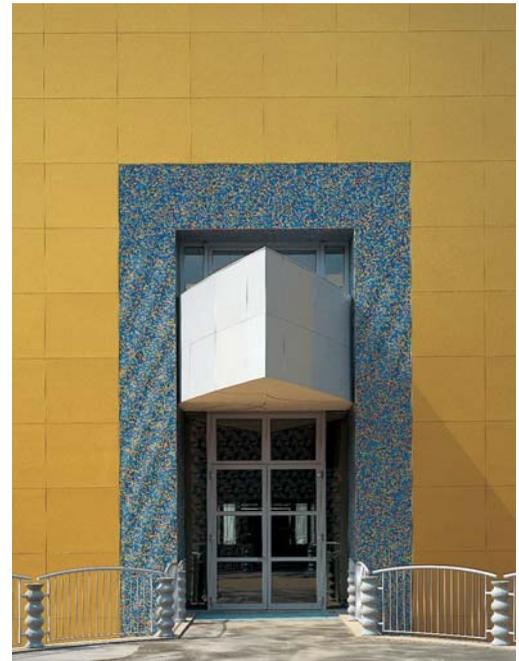
Together, such items comprised the face – or ‘house style’ – of a company or industry, a new category of art born of advances in reproduction technology. Osthaus also acquired industrially manufactured materials, which had been used for temporary interiors and exhibitions – things intended from the beginning to be destroyed, and otherwise destined to be lost. In addition to linoleum, he collected carpets, tiles and wall coverings such as wallpaper and fabric. Items he could not obtain as originals were registered and photographed – such as the furnishings of cruise ships and trains, shop-window displays and exhibition installations. He also documented theatre facades, stores, offices and factories.

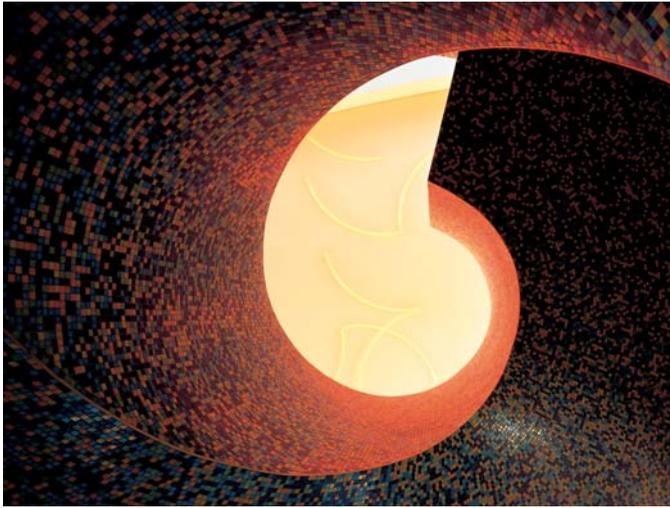
Osthaus organised an exhibition of his collection that travelled throughout Germany, to Austria and the United States. While his

From the beginning, it was Mendini’s aim not simply to decorate a number of arbitrary objects with dots, but rather to create an entire space in which every component would sport the pointillist stipple.

*Interno di un Interno* – literally: ‘Interior of an interior’ – an installation in which the walls, floor, ceiling, furniture and accessories are all executed according to the Proust concept. The piece was acquired by the *Groninger Museum*, itself a demonstration of how the motif can be applied in architectural proportions. It begins with the entrance, framed on the

## The mosaic-clad winding





## **staircase is intended to evoke the atmosphere of an Oriental palace**

outside by a mosaic border that illustrates how the pointillist painting technique can be integrated into architecture. The interior wall is also decorated, this time with tiles that should be seen as a rectangular enlargement of the Proust dot. The mosaic-clad winding staircase, which leads to the exhibition spaces, is intended to evoke the atmosphere of an Oriental palace.

The largest and most spectacular application, however, can be seen on the exterior of the art pavilion. It is made of a laminate specially designed and developed for the *Groninger Museum*. Here the motif is so magnified that its pointillist character is visible from a distance. Its function is to signal to the passer-by that this part of the museum houses modern art.

### On the way to the art factory

death in 1921 meant that a permanent museum was never built, there is another reason only a small portion of his holdings has survived (now in the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld). Of far more disastrous consequence was the art theory of the 20th century, which declared the supremacy of the autonomous work of art over that which is serially produced. As a result, such supposedly 'lower' forms of art were almost entirely neglected.

Andy Warhol understood this situation perfectly, and moved to remedy it on two fronts. First, like Osthaus, he put together a large collection of applied-art objects in which no one else was apparently (yet) interested; unfortunately, these were all auctioned following his death.

Far more important, however, was Warhol's ambition to produce independent works of art mechanically. He was driven by a desire to equal Picasso's oeuvre in both scope and significance – something that eventually led him to the notion of serial painting.

**Since its introduction, more than 100 different products with the *Poltrona di Proust* motif have been put on the market, varying in size from a wristwatch to the wing of a museum – and the end is nowhere in sight, as we learn from the following conversation between Frans Haks and Mendini on the latter's design for Forbo Marmoleum.**

# Rammendini

Frans Haks

You've often said that when collaborating with a company, 50% of the input comes from you and your studio, and 50% from the client. Can you explain how that worked in this case?

FH

Was the request for a new design in the Proust tradition using existing Marmoleum too restrictive?

FH

What were your criteria when choosing the colours?

Mendini

A product is never mine alone. When I have a good idea, I try to realise it and then choose a company. If it's a bad company, then the result is a bad product, or no product at all. A strong company, on the other hand, has all the necessary technology and productive capacity at its disposal, as well as internal and external communication, a marketing strategy, publicity and many outlets. So every product has a father *and* a mother. If firms such as Forbo, Alessi, Swatch, Flos or Artemide can be seen as the mothers, then I regard myself as the father. More often than not, what we're talking about is not a 50-50 ratio, but rather 20-80 or 70-30. In the case of Forbo, I had access not only to all their technical facilities but also to their many employees, who were extremely capable, always available, dedicated and understanding. Everything went so smoothly that we only needed to meet four or five times.

M

As a rule, restrictions are quite useful: there are fewer problems to solve. In this case, we never needed to think about a new colour palette, as the assignment was to use existing material, which of course means existing colours... There were lots of these, but none of them bright. Apparently it's technically so difficult to produce white that nobody has ever done it.

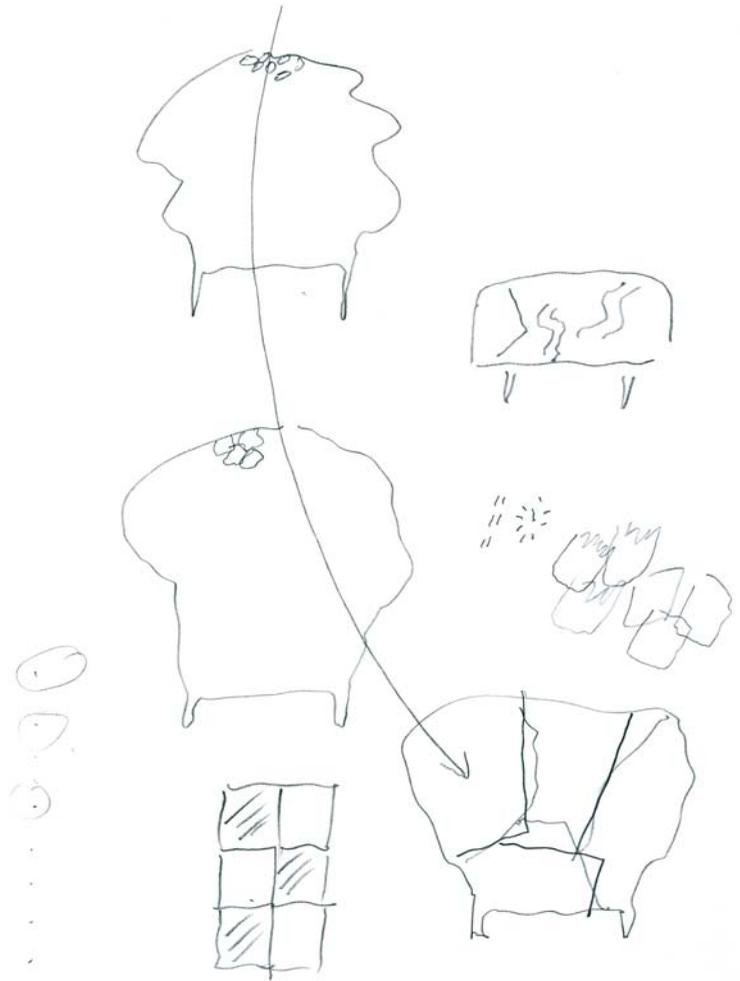
M

To achieve the greatest possible variety. To accentuate this we sought out the most appropriate forms. The result is a combination of very strong colours and one of more subdued, greyish tones, both in the same geometric pattern. Soft and contrasting pastel colours are worked into

### On the way to the art factory

He began referring to his studio as the 'Factory', and it was here that he invented a new kind of art: the silk-screened painting on canvas. Using this method, he could make (or have made) as many copies of a work as he wanted – each of the same quality and value, as they were all exactly alike. Whereas Osthaus collected and championed the industrial artworks he found in the world around him, Warhol took things one step further by mechanically producing his own art in series.

Mendini's philosophy and work are perfectly in keeping with both Osthaus and Warhol, partly because of the way he cooperates with industry as an advisor and artistic director. The huge array of products offered by Alessi today would be unthinkable without the collaboration between Mendini and Alberto Alessi, the duo that transformed this manufacturer of kitchen utensils into one of the world's leading design companies. Their approach is to bring in artists and allow them to design the things they dream of, convinced that it is better to *create* a clientele



**I leave the further development of  
so they have the freedom  
that my original dots can now be found  
in all kinds of**

diamond shapes, and finally there are the more painterly forms – alluding to brushstrokes – in bright, contrasting colours and in shades of grey tending towards black.

FH

Do these solutions fit in with the Proust tradition?

M

Yes. Absolutely. Pointillism was originally contrived as a new way of representing the world in painting. Instead of tonal planes, primary coloured dots were used. These were applied so close to one another that from a distance they could evoke light, air, water, whatever. The original aim of pointillism was to create a new method of reproducing the visible world... In the 20th century, this innovative style was regarded as so important that it came to be thought of as marking the dawn of contemporary painting.

That was reason enough for me to use this quintessential avant-garde art form to decorate a piece of furniture. I wanted to show that the art of painting could be beneficial to the decorative arts. In other words, that autonomous painting and the applied arts could be treated and used as equals. Over the years I've modified my ideas considerably, for example, by using the stipple technique as a sort of veil to obscure the difference between frame and upholstery in the *Poltrona di Proust*.

**ideas and designs to my team,  
to create variations on my initial concept, with the result  
colours and shapes**

This was how the rectangular gold and black variants came about, and from the moment we realised the stipple could be reproduced in mosaic, there was a prospect of integrating painting and architecture.

### On the way to the art factory

by producing highly desirable serial art objects than to simply *meet* consumers' demands. Both men believe strongly in this way of working, and are proud of the opportunities they have created for the development of mechanically produced art. This is why since 1998 Alessi's annual catalogue has been known as the *Fabbrica dei sogni*, or Dream Factory.

On the threshold of the third millennium, Mendini took *La fabbrica dell'Arte* – the 'Art factory' – as the title for an overview of Italian design he organised in 1996 for the Louisiana Museum of Contemporary Art in Humlebaeck near Copenhagen. With this title, he boldly proclaimed that there was no difference between autonomous and applied art – the belief that also informed his Marmoleum designs for Forbo.



***Rammendini* was the name given  
to the craftsmen who specialised  
in making new clothes  
from old scraps of cloth**

I once asked the artist Tarshito to have a carpet made for me in India using the Proust motif. For one reason or another, he came up with these particular forms. For me, this was a totally unexpected solution.

FH

Were you happy with this solution and did you then use it as the basis for new variations?

M.

Yes, that's how the diamonds in pink, blue and lilac were born. All this has something to do with my name, by the way, which was originally *Rammendini*. That was the name given to the craftsmen who specialised in making new clothes from old scraps of cloth. I like the etymology because it's an allusion to my way of working. I also start with existing colours, forms and motifs, and combine them in such a way that the final result entirely fulfils my wishes. I once visualised this idea in a self-portrait; in it I'm dressed in clothes made from light-coloured pieces of fabric.



## **Because it looks something like a Pierrot, I decided to call it *Self-portrait as a harlequin***

At the moment, I'm participating in a project in which architects have to design a costume for themselves. I like doing this, because I consider clothing the smallest form of architecture. Mine will be a harlequin costume.

SANDRO VESTITO  
DA ARLECCHINO



**The effect is much stronger when they  
it then becomes**

FH

Is the linoleum design for Forbo also something of a self-portrait?

M

Absolutely. The idea of using existing Marmoleum is perfectly in keeping with the family tradition of taking old pieces of fabric to make new textiles. This was the inspiration for translating the forms from my self-portrait into diamond shapes. In this way, the Marmoleum pattern has become more geometric than the decoration I used for my clothes and shoes in the past.

FH

Do the light colours help to strengthen the character of the portrait?

M

No – they were chosen in order to offer the greatest possible contrast: very light colours in the diamonds, very strong colours in the brushstroke forms, and in between two different solutions for the rectangles.

FH

Is the result meant only to be used on the floor?

M

The commission from Forbo gave me the opportunity to design a Proust floor in Marmoleum. The variations are keyed in such a way that they are easily recognisable and can be used one after the other – for the floor of a store, for example. But the effect is much stronger when they are combined in a single space – simultaneously on the floor, the walls and the ceiling. The advantage here is that the walls then function as a Marmoleum showcase and a sort of three-dimensional Marmoleum catalogue.

**are combined in a single space:**

**a sort of three-dimensional Marmoleum catalogue**

text **Frans Haks**

Frans Haks, former director of the *Groninger Museum* in the Netherlands, has a close professional and personal relationship with Alessandro Mendini. Because of his admiration for Mendini and strong affinity with his work, Forbo asked him to write about the architect's designs.

drawings **Alessandro Mendini**

photos pages 9, 10, 11 Collection Groninger Museum, photo John Stoel