

The power of an original idea

Contrary to common belief, the market is not saturated, but to impose oneself as a leader, an original idea is necessary. Katia Paracchini has focused on an exclusive market niche



The prestige of Italian products is not only a matter of taste and quality. It also comes from the initiative of some entrepreneurs who choose to invest in unexplored market niches, focusing on selected targets. Knowing how to find new action fields is a matter of creativity, originality, but also taste for risk: in other words, this is the Italian genius. A sample experience is that of Katia Paracchini, founder and Director at Elka Design, who decided to focus on the taps and fittings sector for camping vans, mobile homes and boats, designing and creating a wide range of customisable products.

Bathroom accessories for camping vans. How was such an original idea born?

"I was born in the area of Orta Lake in Piedmont (Northern Italy), in the district of the most famous taps and fittings worldwide. I began to work in the assembly line of one of these enterprises, but it was not my cup of tea: this is why in 1996 I started a subcontracting business in the same field. In 2003 I finally founded Elka Design: the first taps and fittings



Katia Paracchini, founder and Director at Elka Design in San Maurizio d'Opaglio (NO)
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CUSTOMISATION

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line for camping vans, a market niche which was snubbed by everyone because of its low sales figures and even lower earnings. This was due to the fact that nobody had ever produced something according to customers' specific needs. I can proudly say that, when I introduced my first collection, everyone was astonished. At last, bathrooms for camping vans and vessels could be designed according to the amount of space needed by their users. In 2004, my products were chosen for the outfitting of the first camping van and in 2006 for the first project of a shipyard."

Then the years of recession came. "The 2008 global crisis was the opportunity for us to introduce ourselves to major manufacturers and stand out at the first international trade fairs. From that moment onwards we have kept growing, exceeding our expectations: in 2012 we supplied bathroom fittings for the set of Prometheus movie directed by Ridley Scott. At the age of 18, when I used to pack taps having the brand of another firm, I would have never imagined something like that."

How would you describe competition in this industry?

"Prior to our arrival on the market, manufacturers had to adapt to what the traditional taps and fittings distribution channels were able to provide. They were cer-

tainly excellent products, but rather standard, and therefore not suitable for special designing such as that of vessels or caravans. Elka has been the first to introduce its catalogue and say: "this is our starting point: you can change everything."

What are your main targets today?

"Ours is a very diverse clientele sharing, however, a common need: customising products. We address caravan, mobile home and shipyard manufacturers as well as interior designers, architects and even private individuals."

Today you are an internationally renowned business.

"We started our business in 2003 in Italy, then we expanded to France, Germany and England. Today we also export to the USA, the Middle East and China, following the latest market growth trends of these countries. Our product supply ranges from simple plastic handheld showerheads to pump-equipped installations for swimming pool cervical massage waterfall. The price range is also very diverse: from cheap hangers to luxury products such as "Cellini": this is not a simple tap but a true artwork made of gold and diamonds by an Italian master goldsmith."

What trade fairs do you participate in?

"Amsterdam, Dubai, Miami, London and Düsseldorf: national and international exhibitions for boat, caravan and furniture high-quality design."

What are your future prospects?

"This year we have started Elka USA with headquarters in Miami: this business will allow us to provide the American clientele with the same quality design and customer service already appreciated all across Italy and Europe."

■ **Giulia Panzacchi**

ELKA DESIGN PRODUCT MANUFACTURING PROCESS



"Every product that Elka manufactures includes a very specific ethical code: its shape shall not affect its functionality" tells Katia Paracchini. "Firstly, there is need, a request from the client who, due to technical or esthetical reasons, requires the customisation of an already existing item or the implementation of his own idea. After a first briefing with our designers, the client request takes shape on a sheet of paper. Afterwards, our research&development department makes the product ready for industrialisation by taking into account the high esthetical value and attractiveness it should have, as well as the ease and speed of installation, since that product will be part of a production chain. An example? On a 52 foot yacht, the designer did not have enough space to install a sufficiently comfortable shower in the crew cabin: the result was a shower panel equipped with controls and pipes integrated in the cabin access door, needing less than 2 minutes to be installed." ■

