

# INTERIOR DESIGN®

## 10 Questions With... Achille Salvagni

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By Edie Cohen



Arrivederci 2020, benvenuto 2021. It's tough to say what we've been missing most: family, friends, colleagues, trips abroad, whether for pleasure or to eagerly awaited shows such as Salone del Mobile and Cersaie. We do know that the new year brings hopeful light at the end of the tunnel thanks to vaccines. In the meantime, we're enjoying a virtual European visit with the young and multi-talented designer [Achille Salvagni](#). His architecture and design projects range from the quotidian, i.e. supermarkets, to the sublime, such as luxury apartments and yachts. He also designs high-end furnishings and has participated in the prestigious PAD exhibitions in London, Monaco, and Geneva.

A native of the Eternal City, Salvagni studied at the Sapienza University of Rome as well as at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm on a grant. In 2002, at 32, he established Achille Salvagni Architetti, the studio's enviable location on the Palatine Hill next to the Roman colosseum. Within a year, the firm grew from two to eight and currently numbers 24. Little more than a decade later, he launched Achille Salvagni Atelier as the furnishings operation. Pieces are made by artisans, from cloistered nuns stitching embroidery to bronze and stone workers who do restoration work for the Vatican and Quirinal Palace. Though steeped in history and traditional craftsmanship, Salvagni's collections are contemporary in aesthetic. In 2015, he expanded to London. This past year he expanded again, moving his namesake Atelier to Grafton Street in the Mayfair area. Pre-pandemic, he split his time between the two European capitals. For now, he is staying put in London.

**Interior Design: Despite COVID-19, you've been busy. Tell us about your accomplishments during this period.**

Achille Salvagni: Because I have not been traveling, I have been able to be focused in one place, and it feels like I have never been busier. Between completing the new gallery and launching new additions to the collection, I have also been working remotely from London with my team in Rome on all our architectural and yacht projects, moving part of the studio to a larger production space, and quietly working behind the scenes on the day-to-day running of the businesses. The new collection embodies several cabinets, a huge chandelier, a sofa, new Murano glassware, some small accessories, and sconces. Everything is kept to limited editions as everything is handmade to order. We are lucky because all of our craftsmen operate in very controlled environments that they have been able to work for most of the year and bring these dreams to life.

**ID: What are your sites like in Rome and in London?**

AS: The studio in Rome is contemporary and designed as a working space for myself and the team there. The new London Atelier has been designed from the beginning as a showcase to the world. While one environment favors the industrial activity of a busy studio, by nature the gallery is a more serene, open space where we can entertain clients and show off the work in the best possible way.



A bedroom on Endeavour, yacht interiors designed by Achille Salvagni. Photography by Paolo Petrignani.

**ID: What was the impetus for the new London space?**

AS: When we first opened, the original gallery was like a small jewelry box to showcase a snapshot of our collection. The new gallery is three times larger affording us more exhibition space as well as a meeting point for clients to go through important presentations and review material samples. Being in London is important as the best window to the cosmopolitan world. Rome is great for my creativity. New York, for a short buzz of excitement and energy that you cannot find anywhere else.

**ID: What is your arrangement in New York?**

AS: Maison Gerard represents my work like an art gallery represents a painter or sculptor. They sell my editions and also bring in commissions for site-specific pieces. Before I was represented at Maison Gerard, Benoist [Drut] discovered the furniture and lighting pieces I created for a penthouse overlooking Central Park designed by my architectural practice.



Owner's Cabin on Azimut, yacht interiors designed by Achille Salvagni. Photography by Paolo Petrignani.

**ID: Speaking of New York, tell us about The Benson, the recent ground-up condominium building on Madison Avenue's Upper East Side. How did it come about and what are some of the public areas' salient features?**

AS: I had designed a yacht for the client, who was impressed by the artistic quality and attention to detail. For his new project, I wanted it to have the sensibility of a chic "Parisian maison," starting with iron double doors leading to an oval jewel box of reception. The entry vestibule features elegant woods and stones. The lobby, taking inspiration from wooden stringed instruments, has a rounded ceiling, fluted walls, and a central, backlit onyx fireplace. I also designed the cinema room with stadium seating.

**ID: Let's return to Rome and the Vatican artisans. How did you find them?**

AS: I searched everywhere in Rome for artisans able to match the high-level work I wanted to produce. One day I saw some workers going into the Quirinal Palace and because I am inquisitive by nature, I asked them if they might be able to help. We had conversations, and now I am responsible for 80 percent of their output. They get to mix their old restoration work with realizing contemporary designs for me. Because of the opportunity they have been able to train a new generation of craftsmen so these skills are not lost in time. This is one of the things I am proudest of, restoring that heritage.



Another bedroom on Endeavour, yacht interiors designed by Achille Salvagni. Photography by Paolo Pettrignani.

**ID: When this is over, how do you plan to divide your time?**

AS: I hope to split my time more evenly of course. Since my family is in London, it will be more weighted in favor of being here. The biggest change will eventually be able to get to New York. Usually, I am there every four to six weeks. I haven't been since February, which is extraordinary to me.

**ID: What did you learn during this period, and how do you intend to play it forward?**

AS: As a studio, we've learned there are many things we can do remotely. The meetings we can have over video means that 80 percent of things can be resolved without having to wait for my next studio visit. In that respect we can work even faster. That said, key things require a presence: whether it's a face-to-face meeting with a client, seeing material samples and production techniques in person, or just having that natural human contact. I miss the markets, the physical aspects of an art or design auction, being able to host or attend a dinner party. All these things we took for granted and never dreamed there would be this crazy year where it was all taken away.



The Benson lobby. Rendering courtesy of Achille Salvagni.

**ID: What were your earliest memories of design?**

AS: From a young age I was always interested in design, whether it was collecting Swatch watches or taking in the Roman architecture I was surrounded with as a boy. Growing up, I knew I wanted to be an architect. I was always taken by the great midcentury architects and designers such as Alvar Aalto, Gio Ponti, Jean Royer, and Jules Leleu.

**ID: You're multi-lingual; in which language do you dream?**

AS: Italian.



Indore cabinet. Photography by Simon Upton.



Silk White Parchment. Photography by Simon Upton.



Aldus EOS Con Ali. Photography by Simon Upton.



Aldus EOS Con Corna. Photography by Simon Upton.



Aldus EOS Con Serpenti. Photography by Simon Upton.



Aldus Ninfa Centerpiece. Photography by Simon Upton.



Aldus Ombra 1, 2, and 3. Photography by Simon Upton.