



Michael Anastassiades
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I will find something else to do.
If I don’t fail, good for me”

Interview by James McLachlan
Portraits by Alice Mann

his year, Michael Anastassiades celebrates ten years of his eponymous lighting brand.

To mark the occasion, the London-based designer is embarking on his biggest showing in Milan to date. But it has been a long road for Anastassiades, whose oxymoronic brand of decorative modernism went underappreciated for some time. On the eve of Euroluca, he spoke to Icon about those early struggles, his love of materials and why his engineering background is irrelevant.

ICON What are you planning for this year's Euroluca?

Michael Anastassiades It's the fourth time I'm showing at Euroluca and this is the first time we are showing only new pieces. We will have a much bigger stand than previous years. Milan really is about showing people that you're there. It is expensive, but you can't do anything less. If you're a serious sort of brand, if you're a serious company, I think that's where you need to be.

ICON Tell me about the first time you exhibited there.

MA The first time was in 2011. I was in Milan the previous October and everything was closed. All the participants in Euroluca were confirmed. I knocked on the door of the organisers, Cosmit, and said, 'I think I should be at this fair.' They asked me who the hell I was and I gave my catalogue to this lady. She went out the back and started talking to somebody. She came back and said, 'OK fine, you are in.'

ICON Did this come naturally to you? Are you a natural entrepreneur?

MA I don't think I'm a born entrepreneur, to be honest with you. I mean, the fact that I developed entrepreneurial skills is because I wanted to prove my products had great potential. Since nobody else was interested in investing in me, I decided the only way out was to do it myself.

ICON What you were asking companies to do was too demanding?

MA Well, of course. I mean, as a designer you graduate from college, you want to design for XYZ brand and you want to start building up a career of royalty deals. It was a model followed by the world and I had to follow that model, but then I realised that it was an impossible system to break into.

ICON Is that model now on the wane do you think? That idea?

MA With social media, the internet, you can be somebody without doing much. But

the reality is, if you actually do strike that deal and you enter into a company and you design for that brand, that is a completely different story.

ICON But that wasn't your story.

MA So at the time I was thinking 'OK, you're not letting me in. Maybe you don't want to work with me because I'm not established and famous at the moment. Maybe you might not believe in the product. But I believe in the product and that's what matters.'

And so I said, 'Why am I there trying to convince other people to believe in my work? I should take things in my own hands.' In the beginning I was doing everything: product development through to engineering development through to manufacture, through to marketing through to sales.

ICON So how did you do it? Did you have to find a backer to invest in you?

MA No, absolutely nothing. I worked out that I needed something like £40,000 to put a collection together so I spoke to the bank, borrowed the money and just did it. I sold the stuff and paid it off. One thing led to another and I learned as I went along. Nobody taught me the formula for how to do it and how it needed to be done. I went on intuition.

I found a way actually to establish this model because it was not common then. Tom Dixon existed at the time, but he was somewhere else – he had a backer. And that worked for him as a formula, but I was following a different model. But to be honest with you, why should I expect money?

If I fail, it doesn't matter. I will find something else to do. If I don't fail, good for me, I'll take the next step and see where this takes me.

ICON The common thread in your work seems to be the combination of simple forms realised in decorative materials. Is the new collection an evolution of that language?

MA Everything still remains in my collection and it still sells very successfully but I wanted to have something completely different. So we have these indirect lamps in Argon red and we also have an amazing architectural collection, which is made out of porcelain. Everyone wants to steal the show with a statement chandelier in a stairwell. I am really interested in those fixtures that remain discreet and unnoticed inside the house and only when you see them a second time you see that it is a beautiful feature. ►

BELOW Table composition with earthen red paint finish (2017)



“I’d be honoured if I were called a modernist”



LEFT WPS-W-D2 wall lamp in glazed white porcelain (2017)

BELOW Floor composition with earthen red paint finish (2017)



“Would you say that if you use a certain type of wood you are being old-fashioned? It is unacceptable”

ICON You continually work with spheres. Why is that?

MA It's that idea of familiarity. There are a lot of references in nature to spheres: the Earth, the Sun. A sphere is the perfect shape and I like that idea, that what you communicate is like a perfect sphere. I mean, if you look at this piece [Flos's IC floor lamp], the fitting itself and how it rests, everything is resolved to actually communicate that it's nothing but a sphere that balances on the edge of a stick.

ICON Do you find it curious that people often tend to focus on your training as an engineer?

MA Its importance is non-existent in my view. You know, if anything it is completely the other extreme – anything illogical and anything completely out of the expected is what I am after.

ICON The materials that you work with, such as brass, seem to be everywhere at the moment. Can we look at material in terms of fashion?

MA About 15 years ago when I designed my first products I said I would only use brass. Everybody was looking at me and thinking, 'Why the hell are you using brass? This is so old-fashioned.' But how can you possibly think of a material as being old-fashioned? Material is material, there's beauty in every single material, whether it's chrome or black or brass or wood. Would you say that if you use a certain type of wood you are being old-fashioned? It is unacceptable. ►



LEFT Double Sconce
wall-mounted light in
polished brass (2017)

“Rather than operate
from greed, I have
to be thoughtful”

ICON So are you a modernist?

MA I'd be honoured if I were called a modernist. I like reduced design in that sense. There needs to be a reason why information should be out there and if there is no reason for information to be out there, then it shouldn't really exist.

ICON Did you expect to be here when you started ten years ago?

MA I don't even know where I am, to be honest with you. If you had asked me this question ten years ago, I would have said to you I'm in a very good place, even back then. Maybe I took a very long route to get where I am, and there's always a voice that says to you, 'I wish I had done it quicker,' but it wouldn't have been the same.

It only feels like yesterday when I was knocking at doors and trying to make appointments and having the door slammed in my face. And it's interesting now that companies are asking me to design for them. If these opportunities had been given to me ten or 15 years ago, I would have just jumped off my seat and said, 'Absolutely, we can do this, we can do that and whatever.' But now I don't react in the same way. I say, 'Thank you, I'm flattered, thank you for approaching me for designing this and I'll have to make my own assessment.' Does it make sense? Can I contribute towards this? Does it make sense to me? What part does this take in my creative process?

Rather than operate from greed, I have to operate from a different place, to be thoughtful and I think if I had done it faster, it wouldn't have been like this. And now at least I can assess the matter responsibly and say 'Yes, I want to design for this brand, it makes sense. It's a good match, it fits.' ♦

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ABOVE To The Top
table lamp in satin
brass (2015)