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AN EAR FOR DESIGN

FABIO BKK is one of Bangkok's newest showrooms, whose founder Fabio Bergomi designs bespoke Murano glass chandeliers and distributes fine furniture and traditional crafts made by small family businesses and artisans in Italy

Text : TRIN NAPATSAKORN Photo : MEI PHOTO CENTRE

A QUICK GLANCE AT FABIO BERGOMI'S PROFILE shows ample proof of this designer's creativity and customer satisfaction. After establishing RAINBOW LONDON in 1998 when he was just 21, he now has international celebrities and members of various royal families as clients and has collaborated with such noted designers as Ralph Lauren, Jasper, Conran, Matthew Williamson, Candy & Candy and Kelly Hoppen. At Decorex International 2007, RAINBOW LONDON was awarded by the British Institute of Interior Design for their "Product of Outstanding Quality" and "Design Innovation".

Since 2011, Fabio has brought his bubbly personality to the Sukhumvit showroom in Bangkok, which bears his own name. Having visited Thailand over the past decade, he was drawn by the country's sunshine, friendly people, relaxed pace of life, and emphasis on strong family ties similar to those of his native land.

His thriving London business is presently being managed by his elder brother, Davide, with support from his mother. Eventually Fabio will persuade his parents, who never did adapt to the cold grey English weather, to settle in Thailand over the next couple of years. "I think they'll have a great time here," he says confidently, smiling across the room at his father, Giampietro, who was watching the photo shoot with interest.

Intriguingly, Fabio had never studied art; he pursued courses in International Business Administration at both the London and Los Angeles campuses of the American InterContinental University. "I've always wanted to be a banker and work in Wall Street!" he laughs. He certainly had the brains for it: he graduated Summa Cum Laude and won the President's Award for best student of the year in just two years. "It wasn't difficult," Fabio explains, "Taking only three classes per term gave me too much free time, so I took five classes and still had lots of fun."

While on holiday after graduation, Fabio made a life changing decision. "My mother convinced me that I would not be a good fit for Wall Street and wanted me to get involved in the field she and my family knew best, antiques. She wanted me to set up an antique business of my own. Since I had already saved two years from school, I decided to give it a try for two years. I sold new things too because while few people had a budget for antiques,

many seemed prepared to spend on tailor-made pieces. Things went really well from there." In London, RAINBOW is known primarily for bespoke lights and chandeliers made of Murano glass which, Fabio says, "can be used to do anything".

"This business comes very easily to me," says the cheerful designer. Raised in Italy at Lake Garda in a family in the antiques business, Fabio "grew up surrounded by old furniture and ancient chandeliers", sourced from England and France by his parents. "That's where I got my passion and inspiration [for design]."

However, he is not one to impose his style. "I always believe that clients have to love what they buy. They have to live with their purchase for years. When I meet my clients, I listen. I'm very flexible and versatile, and guide them with options along the lines of what they like. I must have seen a million chandeliers, so I know what will work in each space. When clients describe what they want, I can immediately envision what it looks like. I'm not a designer by training and really draw badly, but I can explain things very clearly with the maestros in Murano. When it comes to business, it boils down to understanding what the customer wants."

"What I love the most about this business is when the lights are switched on and everyone is smiling and happy. You know you've done a good job. It's pretty much what always happens. That's the best part." That is why he has no plans to expand: "I want people to meet me. I'm the link between them and the maestros."

His Bangkok atelier, FABIO BKK, will be doing more than lighting up people's lives however. The venue will also be offering antiques and the home decorative items Fabio loves best, such as Pernici candles, handmade since 1892, and Salviati glassware of equally ancient lineage. He recounts how he stood at Bloomingdales as an 18 year old looking longingly at Salviati glasses he could ill afford. Fifteen years later, he secured the exclusive distributorship for Salviati in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Looking ahead, he plans to extend his product line and offer product sourcing services.

"I want to give back to Italy and show the world what good family businesses can do," says this ambassador of Italian art and design. "But mostly, I will focus on finding the best artisans from traditional small businesses to keep them alive." ■