

A Week In The Life of Alessia Civettini



Italian-born entrepreneur Alessia Civettini quit her profession in the fashion industry five years ago to pursue her first love – interior design. E-Side, her innovative online concept store, is dedicated to selling only the finest quality eco-friendly and sustainable designer furniture.

Intent on shaking up the general image of eco-design, Alessia carefully curates all products sold in the store, supporting new and emerging design talent while aiming to demonstrate how aesthetics and ethics can be combined to create irresistible yet durable pieces of practical art befitting of any contemporary home or commercial space.

Monday

My day starts at 7.00am, getting myself ready for the day ahead and ensuring that my son, Matteo, is all set for school. I like to walk my son into school everyday, as this can be the only time I manage to do some exercise. Running a business can be very hectic!

I arrive at the office at 9.30am and catch up with the team over some much-needed coffee. Here, we set out priorities for the day and the week ahead and share an update on the latest projects and orders from interior designers to ensure we fulfil orders and deadlines – we are a small, independent operation and everything needs to run smoothly.

Monday is usually the day where we process most of our orders from our e-commerce site E-Side.co.uk, as the weekend can be quite busy for sales. I leave this in the capable hands of my colleague while I concentrate on scouring the web looking for new designers to potentially work with in 2014.

I dedicate a good portion of my time to ‘talent spotting’, keeping an eye on emerging design talent and ensuring I am always up to speed on design trends. I like to read Design Milk, dezeen and behance. net for solid industry news as well as for a daily dose of creative inspiration.

E-Side is more about celebrating new designers rather than focusing on big and established brands. We like to discover new talent and, as a business, we are very supportive of them. E-Side has become almost an extended platform for new designers to showcase and sell their work.

We generally ask designers to send in their projects or samples and we evaluate the products once a month as a team. If we like the product, I continue the conversation with the designer.

Most of the time we approach designers who are not well known and are still trying to develop

a product. We help them by giving them lots of feedback on their concept and product, as well as on a commercial level too, be that on trade prices, retail prices and how best to approach the UK and European market. We don’t mind informing them on who are the best major UK retailers to approach for their specific products; it’s all part of the support we give them. I worked as Distributor and Sales Agent before launching into e-commerce, so I have deep empathy for fledgling designers.

Tuesday

I meet with a student from the local High Wycombe Furniture University. Many undergraduates come to us to get valuable candid feedback on their products. We’ve been liaising with the university for the past year; for us, it’s been a great way of identifying ▼

Alessia Civettini





Bamboo shelves and dining table

▲ talent at grass roots level, and while we do support emerging designers from across the globe, we have a particular mission to support British talent and start working more with homegrown designers too. The programme has so far been successful; we're already working with one graduate who uses bamboo in design and has created a range of woodland animal coasters, which have proved really popular with our customers. We're currently working with the same student to devise a range of contemporary design occasional tables, desks and stools all made from bamboo.

Later in the day, I meet up with a graphic designer to give a brief on a new flyer and marketing materials we need developed for a small shopping event we're taking part in soon.

Wednesday

We have exciting plans for the business



in 2014, including the opening of our first showroom and an office move, so I head off to London to visit a few potential retail spaces. I love the city; it's where it's all at – there are just so many things to see and so

many interesting people to meet, especially in the design world. As we move into the New Year, we aim to concentrate a lot of our energies on developing a service that caters furniture for interior designers ▼



Maria Westerberg's T-Shirt Chair

▲ and architects. We've already supplied some innovative furnishing solutions via our partners for public spaces in Europe, including shopping malls, universities, retail and even schools, and we want to grow this arm of the business as much as the consumer-facing online store. There is definitely an appetite for beautiful, cleverly designed furniture with impeccable green credentials, and it is our job to ensure we

make a compelling case for sustainable design by discovering and heroing products that are stunning as well as practical.

While I'm in London, I take the opportunity to visit my favourite shops, the Conran Shop and Skandium in Marylebone, for a spot of retail therapy, before catching up with a friend over lunch.

Thursday

We undergo a planning meeting for 2014 as the New Year will be very busy. As well as E-Side's major move into London, we will be attending the usual annual trade shows.

I frequently visit annual design fairs, such as the international furniture fair Salone del Mobile in Milan. It's always a vibrant and inspirational experience – an opportunity ▼



E-side's Leaf Lamp Trees feature in the University of Copenhagen

▲ to identify design trends and scope out what other designers and brands are showcasing, viewing some interesting prototypes and looking at new projects. Throughout the year I also attend London Design Week, Maison&Objet in Paris, Stockholm Design Week and Imm Cologne but, when I'm not able to go away, I do a lot of research online for fresh talent.

I have a private board on Pinterest where I bookmark all the products that catch

my eye. It's a great resource, simple and incredibly visual, and every now and then I approach designers if I think their product could work well on E-Side. We are very careful about which designers we choose to work with though, and we stringently check the processes, methods and materials used in all of the product designs to ensure that it meets our strict criteria of what is ethically and sustainably made.

Later, I schedule a call on Skype with Italian

architect and designer, Caporaso. His works – which include sleek chaise longues and striking modular shelving – are examples of cardboard furniture at its finest. He has a very unusual style, often marrying recycled cardboard with natural rustic materials like wood, stone and lichens, to stunning effect. We catch up on next year's plans for London Design Week where we plan to exhibit at 100% Design, as well organise a separate exhibition under E-Side's name where we plan to showcase a collection of fantastic ▼



Tappo Side Table and Lighting

▲ cardboard furniture. Cardboard furniture is definitely making its mark in sustainable design. People unacquainted with its beauty are fearful that furniture made from it looks cheap and won't last but, on the contrary, it's incredibly versatile, lightweight, durable and can look just as beautiful as any 'traditionally' made piece of furniture.

Friday

I wind up my working week by writing a post for E-Side's blog, Green With Envy, which is dedicated to showcasing our latest commercial projects. I complete the finishing touches to my latest entry – a collaboration with one of our partners in Sweden for the installation of some beautiful tree-like LED lamps made from sustainable birch, installed in the atrium of the University of Copenhagen. I also write posts on other commercial projects that catch my eye – these are usually shining examples of eco-friendly and sustainable design at work. Occasionally I contribute as a guest blogger to other design sites such as Inhabitat – which focuses solely on eco design. For me it's a great opportunity to really champion this sector, and all part of the process of showcasing how green design can be synonymous with gorgeous. I clock off at 5.30 to pick my son up at the childminder's and look forward to the weekend where I can spend some time with the family.



Caporaso on his Twist Chair

Sometimes we head off into London and visit a museum or go shopping.

I do of course still punch in the hours at the laptop after my son has gone to

sleep, catching up on emails and tying up outstanding work that I haven't been able to complete at the office, but when you're running a business and you're in the thick of the operations, it can be difficult to let go!