

New York City. Italian Architects and Designers Share Their ‘American Dream’

Federico Ghelli (September 09, 2016)



The latest edition of “Meet the New Italians New York,” sponsored by the Italian consulate of New York, featured a session with architects and designer who spoke about their professional experiences in the United States.

Sept. 9, 2016, in a jam-packed room at the Italian General Consulate of New York, a panel composed of high-level professionals in the New York area shared their thoughts in becoming successful in New York. They also gave tips to young students on how to approach different situations, from visas applications to adapting to a different culture.



Participants included architects Rossana Capurso, founder of Rossana Capurso Atelier LLC Manhattan, Francesco Breganze and Virginia Valentini, from the studio Spazio Primario, Matteo Milani, of the New York studio Pei Cobb Freed & Partners. Stefano Giussani, designer partner and CEO of Lissoni Inc., moderated the conversation.

Coming from a family of architects, Capurso had no other choice but to become one. She had the dream of studying abroad and then return to Italy, but the course of events favored her staying in the U.S.

"I studied in London, Paris, and Berlin, but a trip here to New York made me fall in love with the city. I saw buildings that I was studying on books and that strengthened my passion for architecture," she said.

Capurso encouraged the audience to try an experience abroad, since it helps getting a better understanding of the world and learning about different professional approaches.

"At the beginning here all my friends here were architects, but then I understood that to find more clients I had to change circle," she said. "Now, I have all lawyers as friends."

Valentini and Breganza studied in Milan for eight years. After noticing a downfall of the design industry in Italy, they decided move to New York to find inspiration for new ideas.

"We arrived here with a simple tourist visa but it was during a time where the economy was running well and studios were looking for new talents, especially Europeans," Valentini said.

Then, they both started an internship they were offered jobs in two different studios within one year. Three years later, they decided to start their own business venture in the U.S.

"We applied for investor visas and that required a lot of physical and mental energies. We also had to quit our jobs and give up our health care. It was a gamble, but it paid off well," said Breganza.

Giussani as well started in New York from scratch. He was working for a studio in Milan, but he then decided to expand and try to approach the American market. His first step was to retrieve information about the U.S., the different laws and regulations that applied to the business he intended to start.

"For us it was also important to find a way to translate the Italian method and style to make marketable to the American culture," Giussani said. "The business approach here is totally different, so we had to learn how to deal with customers in a totally different way. In the end, we always keep the quality of the Italian products, but we offer it in a way appealing for the market here."

Milani's way into the United States, instead, was probably the easier than his colleagues. He arrived in New York in 2006, after participating in an international competition for the design of the Lombardy region building. At the time, he was working for a studio in Milan, which entered the competition in collaboration with a studio in New York. In 2004, his company won the competition and started the project. In the meantime, Milani finished his Ph.D. at the Polytechnic University of Milan.

"Once we finished working at the project for the Lombardy region building, I was offered a job at the studio in New York," he said. "My hardest task was to convince my wife to move here."

"Meet the New Italians of New York" is a project promoted by the Italian General Consulate of New York, which follows the strategies outlined by the Italian Embassy in Washington, DC. According to the consulate website, the program has the purpose to attract the new generation of Italians and provide them with a reference point in their journey of integration in the United States.

In October, the initiative will focus on gastronomy, with an event titled "Meet the New Chefs of New York."



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