

Press Release

## Merano and Environs

### Music and Design

Martino Gamper was the first designer to be commissioned by the fashion house Prada to design a window display. Dimitri Panagiotopoulos and his fashion label were represented at the Berlin Fashion Week. And Harry Thaler's "Pressed Chair" made of aluminum opened the door to the world of design. All three were born in Merano and Environs, and although they now live around the world, all are still connected in their own way to their hometown.

Art and culture have a tradition in Merano/Meran as long as that of the spa industry. In terms of design, the city on the Passer river has also kept up to date. Projects such as the new Christmas Market, Pur Südtirol or the vigilius mountain resort designer hotel on Vigiljoch are all perfect examples of the possibilities of combining tradition and modernity.

### Tradition Meets Design

South Tyroleans are enthusiastic about continuing and maintaining their local traditions. But this does not mean that they do not remain open to new interpretations. In recent years, this small land in the Alps has shown that it is forward-looking in the fields of both architecture and design. At the same time, it has not lost touch with traditional ways of thinking, and employs a sense of caution while placing great emphasis on sustainability.

The **Pur Südtirol project** embodies these guiding principles. This initiative was launched by Günther Hölzl, head of the Merano Wine House (Meraner Weinhaus) shop, and Ulrich Wallnöfer, a marketing expert from Vinschgau Valley. The basic idea behind Pur Südtirol is to make regional products "attainable" for everyone so they can be more easily appreciated. The first store was built in 2010 in the Merano Kurhaus building, and today there are other locations in Bolzano/Bozen and Brunico/Bruneck. **Designer Harry Thaler** is responsible for the interior design concept. For Thaler, traditional techniques and high-quality crafts are central – so he is a perfect match for a company like Pur Südtirol that aims to raise the status of traditional farming. Using simple means, Thaler has created appealing showrooms, using wood-turned lamps made of local chestnut wood, porphyry floors from Sarntal Valley, willow braided baskets, apple boxes and more, all representative of South Tyrol/Südtirol. For these interiors, in 2014 Harry Thaler was named "Best Shop Designer of 2014" by the lifestyle magazine Monocle, also receiving the Monocle Retail Award. He is also the creative force behind the Pur Manufactur product line, which can be purchased in stores and from the Pur Südtirol online shop.

Born in Merano in 1975, he studied Product Design at the Royal College of Art in London. Today, he lives in London and commutes back and forth between there and Merano. Thaler originally worked as a goldsmith. He became known for his "Pressed Chair" aluminum chair, a chair milled out of a single square sheet, without seams and screws and its stability maintained through a circumferential recess.

His **designer colleague Martino Gamper** has designed a product for Pur Manufactur: a salt and pepper mill made of untreated local maple and walnut wood. He has also had notable dealings with chair design, but hundreds of them: in 2007, the designer, who was born in Merano in 1971, remodeled a hundred old chairs for his "100 chairs in 100 days" project. As a teenager, Gamper served as a carpenter's apprentice, and then branched out into the wider world. By the age of 21, he was working on his first large-scale interior design job in Hollywood. Ever since he can remember, he has been drawn to the arts. He and studied sculpture at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna,

and at the same time studied product design at the Academy of Fine Arts. After a year, he decided to focus on product design. In Milan, he completed an internship with Matteo Thun, a South Tyrolean, who is internationally active with a Milanese interior design and design studio. Gamper then moved to London, where he attended the Royal College of Art. Meanwhile, he also taught there, maintained a studio in London and produced semi-industrial works as well as limited editions.

Gamper's career has influenced his design concepts, which lie somewhere between art and design. His lack of concern for functionality is confirmed by statements such as "My chairs are rarely comfortable, but you can sit on them." His objects have also found their way into the collections of renowned museums such as the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Design Museum in London, the MAK in Vienna, and the National Gallery in Oslo. Martino Gamper now works for Miuccia Prada: he was the first designer commissioned by the fashion house to design their window display.

### Merano Couture

Also entering the fashion business with a bang is the South Tyrolean **fashion label Dimitri**. Founder **Dimitrios Panagiotopoulos** is a native of Naturno/Naturns, and following his studies at ESMOD in Munich and Paris, he completed a Master's Degree in Fashion Design in Milan. After early work experiences at Jil Sander, Hugo Boss and Vivienne Westwood, he founded his own label "Dimitri" in 2007. His studio is located in Merano, where for a few years he also operated a boutique. In 2010 Dimitri celebrated his grand debut at the Fashion Week in Berlin. Since then, his designs can be found in all major fashion magazines, from "Elle" to "Vogue".

Dimitri's style is characterized by narrow silhouettes and feminine elegance – and is therefore typically Italian. He often works with strong colors and combines contrasting materials like leather or fur with chiffon or silk. His outfits are often compared with the clothes of Greek goddesses – Dimitri seems to take inspiration from Greece, the homeland of his father. He repeatedly finds himself in the fashion capitals of London, New York and Milan to find further inspiration and new ideas.

Where fashion design is concerned, in terms of questions of aesthetics, architecture and furniture design go a step further. Here in this region, respect for nature and the careful use of natural resources, play a major role.

### More Than Just Beautiful Surroundings

Vigiljoch above Lana is a true natural idyll. This car-free area is only accessible by cable car. In summer, Vigiljoch is highly visited, as locals and visitors alike come here to stay in their summer homes when the valley basin below becomes too hot. But in winter, it is quiet and isolated. Vigiljoch has been a popular holiday destination since 1912. It was here that one of the first suspension railways in the world was opened for visitors. At that time, the *Berghotel Vigiljoch* mountain hotel also opened next to the mountain station.

In 2000, its dilapidated state necessitated the construction of a new building. The owner Ulrich Ladurner, founder of Dr. Schär, the global manufacturer of gluten-free food, was concerned that as far as possible, nature should be dealt with respectfully and a building created that would be integrated effortlessly into the location. For this reason, he approached **star architect Matteo Thun**, who also originates from South Tyrol. For the **vigilius mountain resort**, Thun designed a "wooden house of the modern age," a two-storey building which with its slight curve integrates gently into the intact landscape. Its facade has both horizontal flaps and glass fronts. Renewable resources and natural materials from the immediate vicinity of the hotel – larch wood, natural stone and clay – were used for its construction.

“Eco, not ego” is Thun’s motto – not about a builder imposing their own style, but a sustainable and ecological construction. The vigilius has *Klimahaus A* certification, a regional label for energy-efficient buildings, and in 2009 it was one of only seven hotels listed as “**Eco Hotels of the World**” with five green stars, the highest number of points awarded. Although the hotel is located on a site exposed to all weather, it has low heating demands. It is heated with wood chips derived from local mountain farmers. For its sustainable architecture, vigilius has received numerous awards, including the WWF association’s “Panda d’Oro” and that of the “Legambiente” environmental organization. “Geo Saison” magazine has also given several awards to the hotel, including in the categories Design Hotel and Mountain Hotel.

While the vigilius mountain resort sits high over the Merano basin and has a fantastic view, **Pension Ottmanngut** lies in the center of Merano – but is not a typical urban hotel. Ottmanngut’s specialty is its personable character. This bourgeois villa in Merano’s Verdistrasse Street has a long tradition – the estate was formerly an agricultural estate with vineyards, and in the 19th century it welcomed its first overnight guests. During the 20th century, it was a restaurant and guest house, and during the First World War was also used as a military barracks. Since 1850, it has been owned by the Kirchlechner family, who in 2010 decided that the old fashioned house needed fundamentally renovating. The young owner retained the older structure, meaning its history is always in view. Old stucco ceilings, wood and terrazzo floors, and other artifacts of days gone by, such as the antique grand piano and ancestral paintings, have survived. Antique furniture dating from the Josephine, Biedermeier and Art Nouveau eras help complete the overall impression. In 2013, Ottmanngut was opened as a “Suite & Breakfast”. It is a jewel in the literal sense: with only nine rooms, a small dining room, an orangery and a garden with Mediterranean charm and palms and cypresses. It sounds like a country guest house, but Ottmanngut is located just a stone’s throw from the center.

### A Sustainable Merano Christmas

**Merano’s Christmas market** is designed around the sustainable use of natural resources. The South Tyrolean Christmas markets attract thousands of visitors every year – but what is even more important is the awareness of environmental issues, as a lot of energy is spent on the organization of the markets, and a large amount of waste produced as a result. In cooperation with *Ökoinstitut Südtirol*, the Institute for Applied Ecology in South Tyrol, a solution was sought for several years to help protect the environment during the Advent season. The solutions include not only economical use of resources and waste management, but also environmentally friendly mobility, and the use of seasonal and regional products. The South Tyrolean Christmas markets are now certified as “Green Events”.

In 2012, the Merano Christmas Market got a new look. The innovative stands made of fir wood were designed so that even with a large rush, no crowding would occur. The new designer huts are reminiscent of the old, small wooden huts that previously dominated the Christmas market in their design, but their clear layout corresponds to the newer, more modern principles of the Merano Christmas season. This is modeled on the irregular ups and downs of the pitched roof on the South Tyrol logo. The stands were designed and manufactured by local companies using local raw materials.

The Christmas market attracts many people from all over the world in winter, and in the late summer, the **Merano Music Festival** is also a crowd favorite. This tradition-rich event is held every year in August and September, and brings the top names of classical music to the stage.

### Merano the Music Town

For over 150 years, music has held a favored position within the Merano cultural scene. Around the turn of the 20th century, the **Kurorchester spa orchestra** played daily concerts on the promenade,

in the *Kurhaus* building or at the *Stadttheater* municipal theatre. During the 1911-12 season, the musicians staged 500 performances. After the First World War, when the development of tourism came to a halt, the Roaring Twenties did not pass Merano by. In 1919 the spa administration counted less than 400 guests, but by 1924-25, the number of overnight stays had risen to over a million. Numerous events and initiatives, including the Merano Music Festival, now bring guests to the city again. The festival was held for the first time in 1922, and at the final concert, Richard Strauss personally accompanied the soprano Lotte Schöne on piano. Strauss also held private concerts several times in Merano, including at Pienzenau Castle for his friends, the Chrobak family. In 1923 the second Merano Music Festival was held – the highlight that year was a concert by the Merano spa orchestra conducted by Bruno Walter.

Today, the **Merano Music Festival** is characteristic of the musical offerings of the city. The first edition of the modern classical music festival took place in 1986, for the 150th anniversary of Merano spa town – it has since taken place at the same time for 30 years, and life in the town cannot be imagined without it. In addition to the Kurhaus building and the spa promenades, the Thermenplatz square also acts as a venue. Highlights of the Merano Music Festival have included concerts of the pianist Martha Argerich, star violinist Daniel Hope and klezmer clarinetist Giora Feidman. For the Bach Year in 2000, Merano was a station for Sir John Eliot Gardiner's "Cantata Hike", and the same year the mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli sang arias by Antonio Vivaldi, accompanied by the "Giardino Armonico" Baroque orchestra. In 2015, the concert of Cameron Carpenter at the Thermenplatz with his Touring Organ was one of the highlights of the season. Recitation evenings where literature and music are combined are also legendary. Famous actors such as Bruno Ganz, Senta Berger and Klaus Maria Brandauer have been featured guests.

A more recent initiative is the "**meranOjazz' Jazz Festival**". Since 1996, international jazz musicians have performed concerts in the theater in the old town, the *Rafflkeller* discotheque and various cafes. The US jazz singer Sheila Jordan, as well as Chicago trombonist Ray Anderson and avant-garde guitarist Marc Ribot have all visited Merano. The festival also includes a Jazz Academy, where renowned musicians give workshops. Since 2005, the Academy's final concert has been a high point of "meranOjazz". The Academy is headed by Merano native Franco D'Andrea, one of the most experienced jazz musicians in Italy.

During the summer, in addition to these two great festivals, there are also numerous other music events – including the **Garden Nights in the Gardens of Trauttmansdorff Castle** and the **Soirées at Tyrol Castle**. Against the medieval backdrop of Tyrol Castle, sounds echo from around the world, from tango and Irish folk to Renaissance and Baroque music. The outdoor concerts at the Seerosenteich lily pond in Trauttmansdorff Castle offer a varied program that range from Norwegian pop singer Marit Larsen to the reggae band The Original Wailers, film composer Yann Tiersen and German rock band Revolverheld. No wonder the Garden Nights are considered one of the most important world music festivals in Italy.

In terms of design, sustainability and music, Merano has opened up considerably in recent decades, without losing any of its history and tradition. So the town on the Passer river has shown that it can be more than just classical and elegant.