

modernroad

Capturing conversations.

This first volume is a celebration of art in its raw state. This is a lively project that captures the different interconnections of art. A creative experience and an international journey through different points of view, different guests, different moments.



VOL. I

Meet Joana Astolfi, one of the most complete artists and architects, with her own studio in Portugal: Studio Astolfi. Her name resounds loudly across the international scene and we interviewed her to get inside one of the most creative brains to date. From the Hermès windows to the interior design and architecture of the best restaurants in Portugal, Joana Astolfi turns art and her passion into her whole life.

JOANA ASTOLFI



INTERVIEW BY INÉS TELL
PORTRAIT BY CATARINA INÁCIO



We actually have a lot of information about you and your most recent projects but what we wanted to know more is about what moves you and inspires you. We can see you are a very relentless and energetic mind so we imagine you have a lot to tell us, about everything.

But let's go to the beginning, what inspired you to become an artist and architect? The story of my relationship with art and architecture I am sure comes from way back because my father is an architect and my mother had an art gallery. I am an only daughter so I spent a lot of time with both of my parents, either in my mother's gallery or my father's studios so of course I grew up in this kind of world of artists and designers and architects, intellectuals cause my house was always full of friends, my parent's friends. There was always this kind of hub, creative hub fermenting and growing inside my house. And I grew up with all of those inputs so for me, that was very natural. I also loved painting and art, so that was the way I spent most of my time. I would always be away with my sketches and my pencils. So I think I was born with art, it was in me. It all comes together.

But then I had to decide what I wanted to study, I was divided between art and architecture, and at that time, 20 years ago, things were different, they weren't as hybrid as they are today. You either were an architect or an artist or you are a product designer. Whereas I felt quite divided, because what I wanted to do, what I felt my strength was in creativity but I was still a bit where am i going to manifest this? And so, I had a conversation with my father, and that was the first time he actually manifested his opinion on me, because he never wanted to influence me before. And he said that If I was feeling as passionate about art as in architecture, I should study architecture, guarantee my base and then, I can always go for art because I will always have that inside of me. So we travelled to the UK and selected universities and went ahead and studied architecture.

I spent 12 years abroad from Wales where I started an internship in Munich, then back to finishing my degree in London and started working there as a freelancer. Then I came back to Portugal but quickly went to Italy for two years. I went to Fabrica, the center of creative research powered by Benetton and based in Treviso. For me It was very stimulating, normally people would spend around 6 months but I stayed there for two years. And because of Fabrica I had a lot of opportunities. It was really immersive. That experience helped me to realize I wanted to work more on interiors and details rather than designing from a blank sheet of paper. For me, I was more interested in transforming spaces.

When I came back from Italy to Portugal, everybody was asking what I was. *Are you a designer? An artist?* And I would say: I am a fusion of all of that.

So I wanted to start my own studio but step by step, slowly. So I embarked on working with objects, creating from scratch different art pieces that were sold very well. And then I moved into bigger scales, more like art interventions, so when Hermès came into my life I needed a team because we were doing things on another level. I needed artisans, project managers, etc. So that's when Studio Astolfi started to grow.



1



2

Courtesy of *Francisco Nogueira - Wow Project Lisbon*



How did the Hermès windows arrive?

That is a very funny story. I always admired the vitrines of the Hermès shop in Chiado, the center of Lisbon. I lived around there (I still do) so I would always pass by and think, wow, I would love to do that one day.

And one day, it just hit me and I entered the shop and I said that I wanted to talk to the shop director and ask how that worked. And she told me that actually at that moment they were looking for someone else to do the vitrines so I said I was really interested and she asked for my portfolio. So I sent it.

Then I received a call from Spain and we started doing one season in 2014, the Summer season for the Lisbon shop, and it went really well so they invited us to stay as the designer for Portugal. And that is how it has been since then. We still do them. Not as much as before, when we used to do four seasons per year, now we do two seasons, sometimes one. This year we are also doing the Spain vitrines: Marbella, Barcelona and Madrid.

If I had not entered that shop that day, it wouldn't have happened.

I want to go back to your first job, your internship in Munich.

Yes, I was there for a year.

What does that Joanna have in common with you now?

My father told me that it was a great decision, I was going to perfect my technical skills. What I think I got from working in Germany, in that studio in Munich was discipline and the follow through on a project. From the creation and starting point until the actual construction project, I even got the chance to go to the construction site to see the progress. Of course I wasn't doing the drawing alone but still I got the chance to understand how it works. Till this date, I don't do all the process alone, I have a great team in my studio that does it, even though I am very present on every step: the briefing, the ideas, the moodboard, understanding the layout, etc.

We started with your past, now let's talk about your current inspiration: music, art...

My inspiration comes from many places but I am always scanning, my eyes are always scanning. I am very aesthetic, I am always looking at the details, the materiality. I would say my travels are my inspiration. I travel for work but I also love to travel as much as I can.

I like to stay at hotels that inspire me so then I can design new hotel projects. Walking in the streets, going to restaurants, old shops, markets, artisans studios... I like the pleasures of life and that means going to spaces and everything that involves that.

My head is like an encyclopedia and I have many ideas, sketches, pictures and when I design I go to those memories, I click them.

Like Andy Warhol said: I never read, I just look at pictures.

Art and music of course too. I grew up listening to Jazz and Bossa Nova at my house, so of course that is also an important part of my life.

It's an ongoing learning and absorption process that I think I will go throughout my whole life.

I also love human life stories like Picasso, Peter Zoomthor, Georgia O'Keeffe...

Now I would love to talk to you about the pandemic, how it affected you personally and of course your work.

It has been two mad years. In the beginning, I must say, when it first started and there was a lockdown and we had to stay home for about two months, for me, that pause in that acceleration of my daily life was super welcoming. I really enjoyed those first days, I really nested.

I took the time to finish my house, bringing more furniture, finishing details. Spent time with my daughter, Duna who is six years old and her father. You take time to do all the things you never have time to finish because you are always running around. So for me it was positive in that sense.

But after work, it stopped a little bit in the sense that we had two big projects going on and we kept them but no new projects were going on.

So I had less work. Of course that scares you, you start to think: What if I don't go back to the work I had before? What is going to happen? But, let me tell you, I spent the whole summer working at the beach, I took my computer, my daughter many times, and I was just making the best out of the real situation that we were in. That is who I am, I always try to see the positive side of things.

If everything is fucked up, I am going to try to see where positively I can go.

And then, the second lockdown was really, really difficult because I didn't want to be inside again any more.

I think this whole pandemic situation has made people realize and connect with their true essence, I think there is going to be a big creative boom afterwards. It is already happening in my field.

People are thirsty to express themselves and create, more than ever. Everybody is more dynamic, more proactive. They are ready to take risks.

For me it is the same, I was on a very long journey with myself and my work but it really helped me to focus deeper.



Courtesy of Studio Astolfi - Hermes Boutique



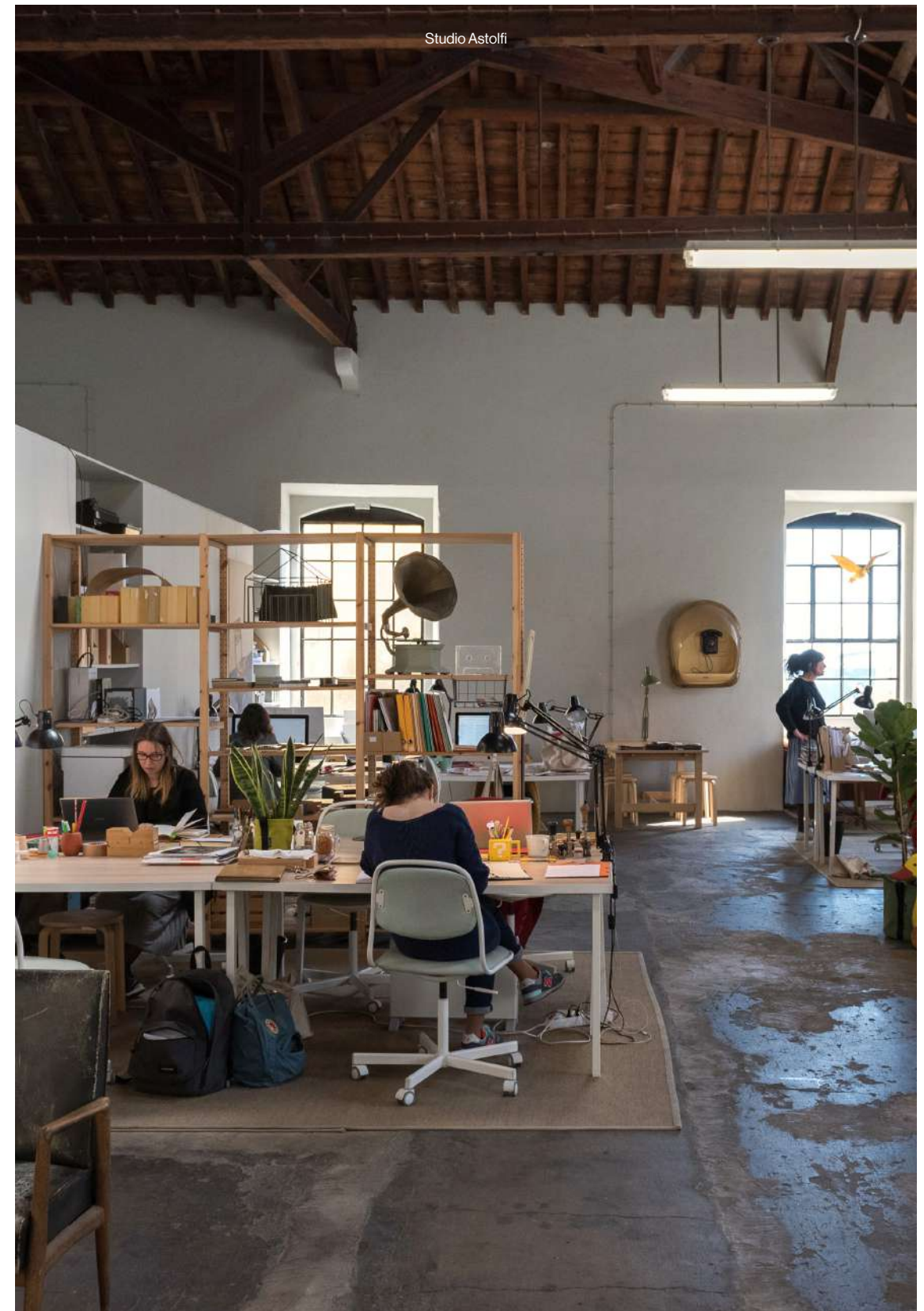
Courtesy of Studio Astolfi - Hermes Boutique

And what are your goals and what is important to you at the moment? Well, right now we have at the studio much more architectural work than art work. Our main client with art is Hermès but we have eleven architectural projects going on. From houses to restaurants, hotels and shops.

I want to work more abroad. Not all projects outside Portugal of course. But I have lived abroad many years, I love different cultures and it makes sense for me to take my language abroad also. We are very established in Portugal so I am ready for different dynamics, I am ready to explore the market outside. Not only with architecture but also with art. I want to explore everything.

Also I am starting an Astolfi line of furniture and objects. We are already designing a lot of products that will be launching on our website soon. On every project we take we always design something from a table to an object so some of those pieces I will love to include in the line and some of them are new from scratch. So yeah, there will be an Astolfi line of furniture and objects, something that I had already been brewing for long and now it is the time.

For me it's very interesting when art fuses with design and I want to keep exploring that. While exploring with functionality in furniture I can be more creative and play around the objects. We are also collaborating with the best artisans so we are keeping our production very local so we can capture the craftsmanship and heritage from our location. We always celebrate each one of our projects sometimes with a subtle reference to that heritage, at the end is part of my DNA.





The studio in Lisbon



Sketchbooks at the studio



Product design by Studio Astolfi



Product design sketches by Studio Astolfi



All images are property of Studio Astolfi
Special thanks to O Apartamento