

Paola Lenti (left) with her sister Anna Lenti, company CEO since 2000, and the designer Humberto Campana.



COLORFUL WORLDS

Motivated by her love of nature and an unwavering drive to innovate, Italian entrepreneur ***Paola Lenti*** shapes the indoor and outdoor furniture market with visionary designs. For over 30 years, she has been creating pieces that blend aesthetics with sustainability, bringing vibrant colors to gardens, terraces and poolside spaces.

BY MERLE WILKENING





Paola Lenti's trademark: colorful fabrics made of sturdy, recyclable, handwoven hi-tech yarns.



The brand may bear her name, but Paola Lenti prefers to focus on her designs rather than on her person. Lenti's furniture speaks on her behalf. Form and function go hand in hand, and the look of her designs reveals the Italian entrepreneur's great passion: colors – the brighter and more intense, the better. Paola Lenti creates seating arrangements for outdoors that shine in every color of the rainbow. And the basic colors can be combined with other hues in countless ways. It all began with rugs more than thirty years ago. Today, the company's inventiveness and willingness to experiment are as strong as ever. Lenti herself was the driving force behind the company's tough, durable yarns and fabrics, which are aesthetically pleasing and sustainable too. In addition to indoor and outdoor furniture, the portfolio includes home furnishings and a playful collection produced from recycled materials. Company headquarters are in Meda, Italy, less than an hour's drive from the design capital, Milan. And the Paola Lenti showroom – how could it be otherwise – opens onto extensive gardens.

Signora Lenti, to what extent do the gardens influence your creativity?

The gardens in Meda are a source of inspiration for us all and a place of wellbeing. I have always viewed nature as the most important element in outdoor living. It is at the center of all of our projects.

“Outdoor is the new indoor” – would you agree?
We design all of our furniture and furnishings to be inviting, long-lasting, comfortable and attractive to look at. We want them to be able to enter into a harmonious dialogue with their

natural surroundings. New shades of color, exclusive designs, technical fabrics and artisanal production all define a vibrant outdoor living space. Outdoor areas are receiving a lot more attention these days. We realized just how important they were during the recent pandemic.

“We create colors that enter into a harmonious dialogue with nature.”

PAOLA LENTI

What are the challenges involved in designing garden furniture?

Creating products that blend in with nature rather than cluttering it up, and making the furniture as comfortable and inviting as anything designed for indoor use. We want to render beauty tangible and fulfill the wishes of discerning clients who are looking for exclusive products. When designing furniture for outdoor use, you have to follow strict requirements with regard to quality, durability and resistance to extreme temperatures or to particular conditions, like on the coast. It's also important to avoid releasing harmful substances into the environment, and to maintain recyclability. You can't just take something that was designed for indoors and adapt it for outside. Each space requires its own approach.

In the 1990s, there were fewer options and not so much available in the way of suitable materials. You were an industry pioneer. What made you decide to focus on products for outdoors? >>

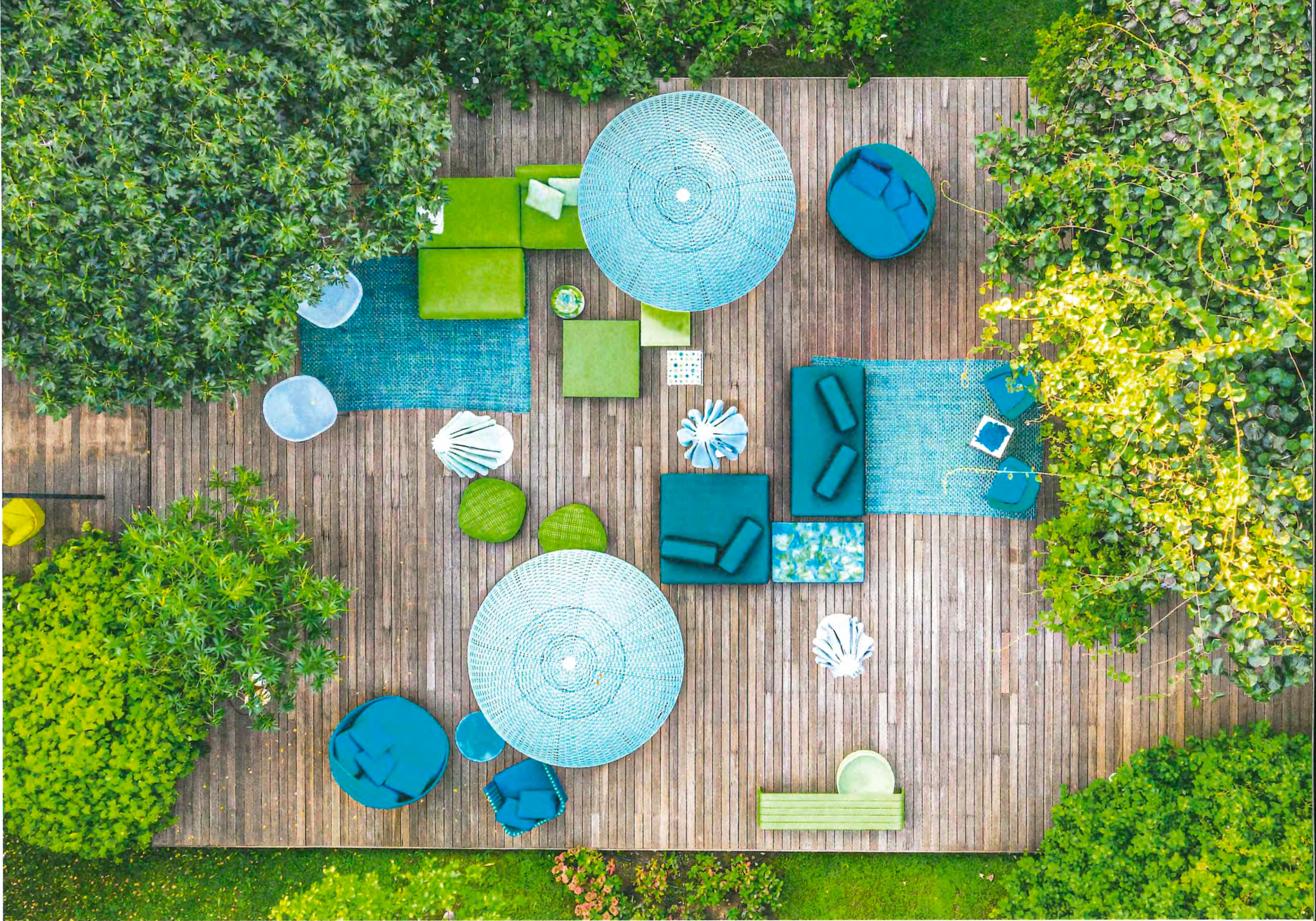
Fernando and Humberto Campana, well-known as the Campana Brothers, took inspiration from nature and its mutations when designing Metamorfosi. Paola Lenti sent crates of textile remnants to the brothers in Brazil, and they imbued these with new life as seating furniture – fascinating objects halfway between art and design.

The Metamorfosi collection was a collaboration with the Campana Brothers in Brazil.





Combined with seating elements and side tables, the Bistrò sunshade is an elegant eye-catcher in any outdoor space.



Functional and inviting, from sofa to rug. The structured fabrics and soft surfaces typical of Paola Lenti's cheerful projects create harmonious islands of color in an open-air living environment.



» When we established the company in 1994, most outdoor furniture was made of steel, wood or cast iron – and none of these materials were particularly comfortable to sit on. We wanted to bring comfort into people's gardens and onto their terraces. So we started looking for suitable fibers. Polypropylene, a synthetic fiber, seemed most suited to our needs. We collaborated with universities and research centers to study its properties, optimize it and adapt it for outdoor use. The result was Rope – the yarn that still forms the basis for numerous fabrics, ropes and textile structures in our collections. It was the first material we developed ourselves.

Paola Lenti collections are distributed in over sixty countries, and you recently expanded your presence in the U.S., Mumbai and Dubai. How do you preserve traditional values while simultaneously setting new trends?

We have always done what seemed natural to us, and invested in trying to find sustainable design solutions. Our yarn isn't additionally treated, for instance. Very often, the substances used to make something water-repellent eventually wash off in the rain and end up polluting the soil and groundwater. Our textiles are designed to be environmentally friendly, and they are very versatile. When developing upholstery and other products, we also try to revive traditional artisanal crafts such as weaving, which is at risk of dying out, and we have always managed to keep production in Italy. We are an industrial company today, but we work with tailors, upholsterers, architects, engineers and weavers. We try hard to maintain a purely Italian supply chain.

Your sister Anna Lenti has been CEO of the company since 2000. How important is it to you to have family support?

My sister's presence in the company is crucial. I'm the creative one, she's the rational one. I spend my days in the workshop, where my tools are yarns, fabrics and colors. Anna is often on the road, and her tools are her laptop and her Excel charts. I talk to suppliers, artisans and designers while she talks to agents and clients. But we keep each other up to date on everything.

“My sense of color is a gift, something I was born with.”

PAOLA LENTI

The Paola Lenti brand is known for its bright colors. How did you develop your sense of color?

My sense of color is a gift, something I was born with. I love to experiment. Colors are like notes in a piece of music, what's important is how you combine them. I love all colors. Sometimes I prefer more ethereal hues, other times I gravitate toward earth tones. Or I investigate the endless shades of green that nature has created – it all depends on my mood. More than thirty years of work has produced a rich vocabulary of color.

What are you focusing on this summer?

We will be adding new products to our indoor collection; there will be lots of natural materials, for instance, wood. With regard to outdoors, we will continue to experiment with the fabrics, colors and designs of our synthetic and technical textiles, all of which are constantly becoming softer and more inviting. **GG**

Francesco Rota and Paola Lenti have known each other since the late 1990s. Their years of collaboration reflect a common philosophy: a love of form and color, and quality manufactured in Italy.

The Linea chaise longue by Milanese designer Francesco Rota.

