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- 01 Newform's 'Samurai' shower, on show at designEx 2008
- 02 'Pillow' basin by NIC available from Studio Bagno
- 03 '3D Chain' tiles available from Di Lorenzo

BRIGHT future

Text by Lee Melrose

For a long time it has been taken as a faint accompli by many of us that all manufacturing is moving or will move to Asia; that European companies had given up and would simply move their operations to China, Taiwan or India. While this has certainly happened to some extent, this year's Cersaie ceramic fair has shown that a whole new scenario is developing.

The new scenario is design-cool marketing. New shapes, new concepts and super quality. It seems that Italians must wake up each day and think about what can be designed. For years we have been seeing example after example of this at the Salone del Mobile where companies constantly reinvent furniture concepts. There has not really been an equivalent company in bathroom products to match something like B&B in the furniture sector.

I would have said that companies such as Flaminia, Antonio Lupi and Gessi

would have been the only contenders to this type of mantle – until this year's Cersaie. This year, it seems that the importance of design has spread to many other manufacturers. NIC Design has been sitting on the periphery of something big for a few years now and this year has emerged as a major contender for coolest boutique supplier. Products like 'Pillow', 'Cult' and 'Canale' are amazing examples of beautifully proportioned pieces. The first bathtub from NIC, called 'TUB', is an extraordinary piece.

Flaminia which developed the 'Acquagrande' range some seven years ago has started a wave of creativity from several companies that are producing seriously cool ceramic basins, wash planes and WCs. Companies like GSG, Disegno, and Hatria had amazing pieces on offer. Even companies like Kerasan which have been "off the pace" (to put it

mildly) over recent years, emerged with a credible offering. Catalano was as usual very good without being exciting.

Devon & Devon, who have been making retro pieces for many years, have refined the ranges with pieces like 'Lady Console' and the 'Fusion Bath'. These types of products are allowing designers to look at the bathroom as a furnished room rather than as a purely functional space. Luxury and functionality can – and do – go hand in hand.

In tapware, Gessi was the clear winner – sophisticated marketing, groundbreaking products and an amazing stand. This company has inspired many other smaller manufacturers to commence the difficult and expensive path of innovation that is required for survival.

So the message this year from Cersaie is that the Italian ceramic and bathroom industry has emerged from

years of doubt and is looking at a whole new future dependent on design, innovation and quality.

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promos@promosexpo.it
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