

Empire

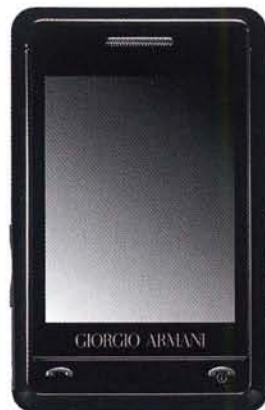
Armani

An Italian
claims
creative

By Julie

legend

new
territory
Taraska



GIORGIO'S WORLD: (Left to right, top to bottom) A brushed-steel Adelchi table; a portrait of Armani; the Burj Dubai, future home of the Armani Residences and Hotel; from the '08-'09 collection, the Bastien lamp; an Armani-Samsung mobile phone; this season's tubular Baloon chair; a limited edition Bach bar cabinet; the velvet-clad Boris daybed



Ask Giorgio Armani what inspires his work, and he'll say, "People. Human beings in their everyday life." It's a pretty simple answer from the man *Forbes* dubbed the most successful designer Italy has ever produced, with a personal fortune estimated at \$5 billion. But it's also a telling response. Since founding his eponymous company in 1974, Armani has been deliriously successful in applying his aesthetic – "understated and elegant, true to yourself and at ease in every situation" – to a myriad of lifestyle products, from fashion (he now has eight clothing lines) to anti-aging cosmetics, high-end furnishings and fitted kitchens. And the 74-year-old is far from finished. For his latest efforts, he's partnering with the Dubai-based Emaar Properties on a series of Armani-branded hotels, resorts and residences, expanding his electronics line with Samsung and introducing new limited-edition pieces for his furniture line, Armani/Casa.

The first fruit of the Emaar agreement, the 130,000-square-foot Armani Hotel Dubai will open in summer 2009 at Burj Dubai, the country's tallest building. The hotel will include 160 guest rooms and suites, two gourmet restaurants and a spa. The project will also include 144 luxury residential apartments, also designed and furnished by Armani. Yet unlike other mega-developments overseen by a single talent, such as the forthcom-

ing SLS and Yoo Hotels decorated by Philippe Starck, Armani will curate every aspect of the properties' living and entertainment environments, from the carpets on the floor and the chefs cooking in the restaurants to the brand of toiletries stocked in the bathrooms.

Armani says his desire to move into real estate was prompted both by personal experience and his own forays into furniture design. "I tend to find that many hotels lack privacy and contain decor that really doesn't make me feel I am in a luxurious place at all," he says. Instead, he will concentrate on creating spaces "in which people can really relax," with soft, diffused lighting, custom textiles and made-to-measure Armani/Casa furnishings and fixtures in special finishes. After Dubai, the next Armani hotel will debut in Milan in spring 2010, with an Armani resort in Marrakech, Morocco due in fall of that year. In all, the partnership will produce at least seven luxury hotels and three vacation resorts within the next decade.

Moving from large scale to small, Armani is also collaborating with Samsung on a second Armani-branded cell phone. The Emporio Armani mobile will join the designer's first effort for the company, a matte-black smart phone released in September in Europe, Korea and

Russia. Although no date has been set for the new device, Armani expects both to be available in the States eventually, with the same prediction for his Samsung flat-screen TV (a 52-inch version is expected in late summer, following the recently launched 46-inch model).

Finally, in April, Armani unveiled two new entries in his Armani/Casa "1/50" limited-edition furniture collection: only 50 of each will be made, each numbered and autographed by the designer. The first, the Borromini chaise longue, features a sensuously curved body and ebony-colored arm rests. In contrast, the Bach bar cabinet boasts glossy black-lacquered wood cladding arranged in triangular patterns that create a pleasing optical effect. But look inside and you'll get a surprise: the interior is lined with a lobster-pink techno fabric.

For many, segueing between so many design disciplines and mediums would be dizzying. But not so for Armani, who sees them all coming from the same root. "Today fashion has expanded to encompass our way of life – not just how we dress, but how we design our home, the hotels we stay in, the car we drive and the technology we buy," he says. "In fact, we make as much of a personal statement with the mobile phones we carry as we do with the shoes we wear." ▶