



Design

The interview: Emanuele Chicco Busnelli on Neutra's rebirth and the art of crafting bespoke spaces

by Hamish McDougall
Photography by Jin Cheng Wong

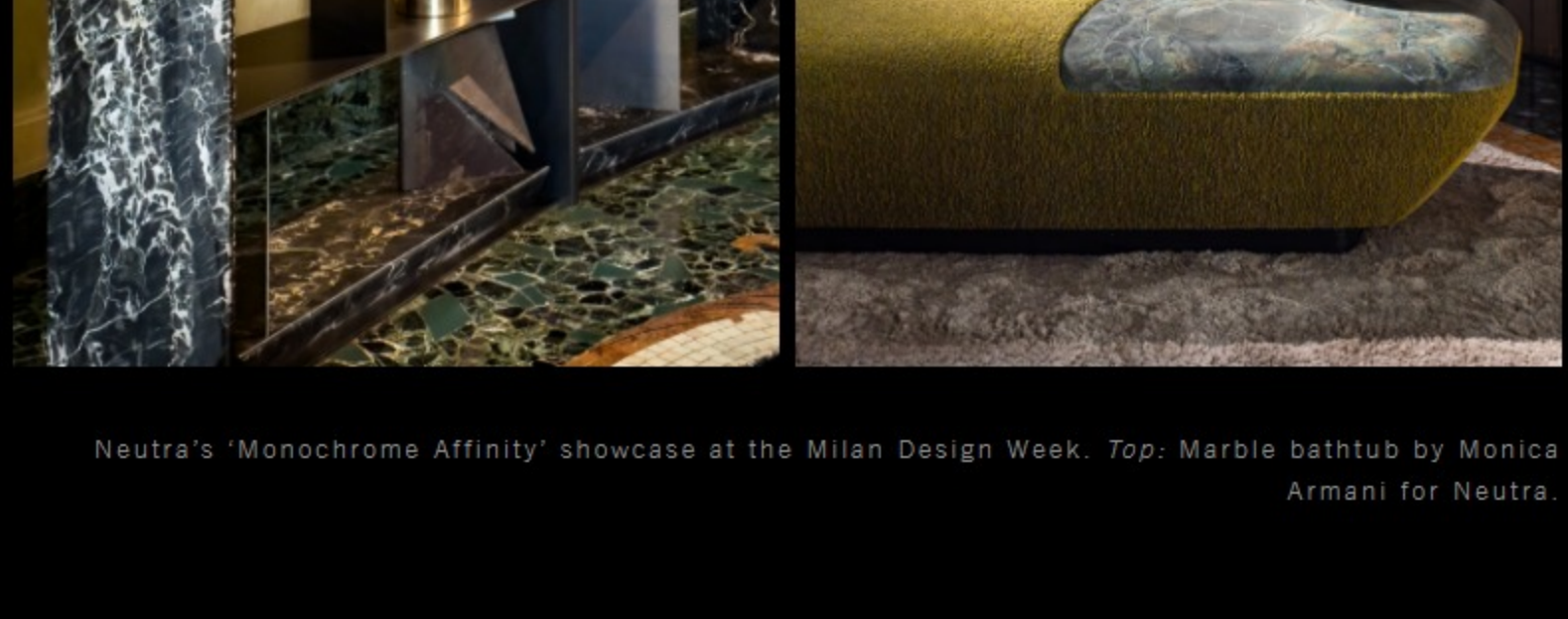


During the 2025 edition of the Milan Design Week, Neutra makes its highly anticipated return—a historic marble atelier reborn as a contemporary design brand after years of quiet. Originally founded in 1880, Neutra built its legacy on working masterfully with stone before expanding into luxury bathroom collections in the early 2000s.

Now, under the direction of Emanuele Chicco Busnelli—son of Piero Ambrogio Busnelli, founder of B&B Italia—the brand re-emerges with a renewed identity. Its latest chapter features limited-edition furniture and architectural elements that celebrate rare stones, bespoke craftsmanship, and a seamless harmony of material, colour and space.

This year's showcase marks Neutra's third launch since Busnelli acquired the house in late 2022—culminating two and a half years of meticulous planning, curation and craftsmanship. Inside Palazzo Visconti, the new Neutra showcase, "Monochrome Affinity", unfolds room by room like a private residence, each space expressing the brand's commitment to customisation, precious finishes and the subtle art of making every piece truly unique.

Boulevard sat down with Chicco Busnelli to learn how he is shaping Neutra's future, what defines its distinct vision today, and why, for him, true design lies in transforming every detail into something unique.



Neutra's 'Monochrome Affinity' showcase at the Milan Design Week. Top: Marble bathtub by Monica Armani for Neutra.

Boulevard: What defines Neutra as a brand today, and how are you shaping its future direction?

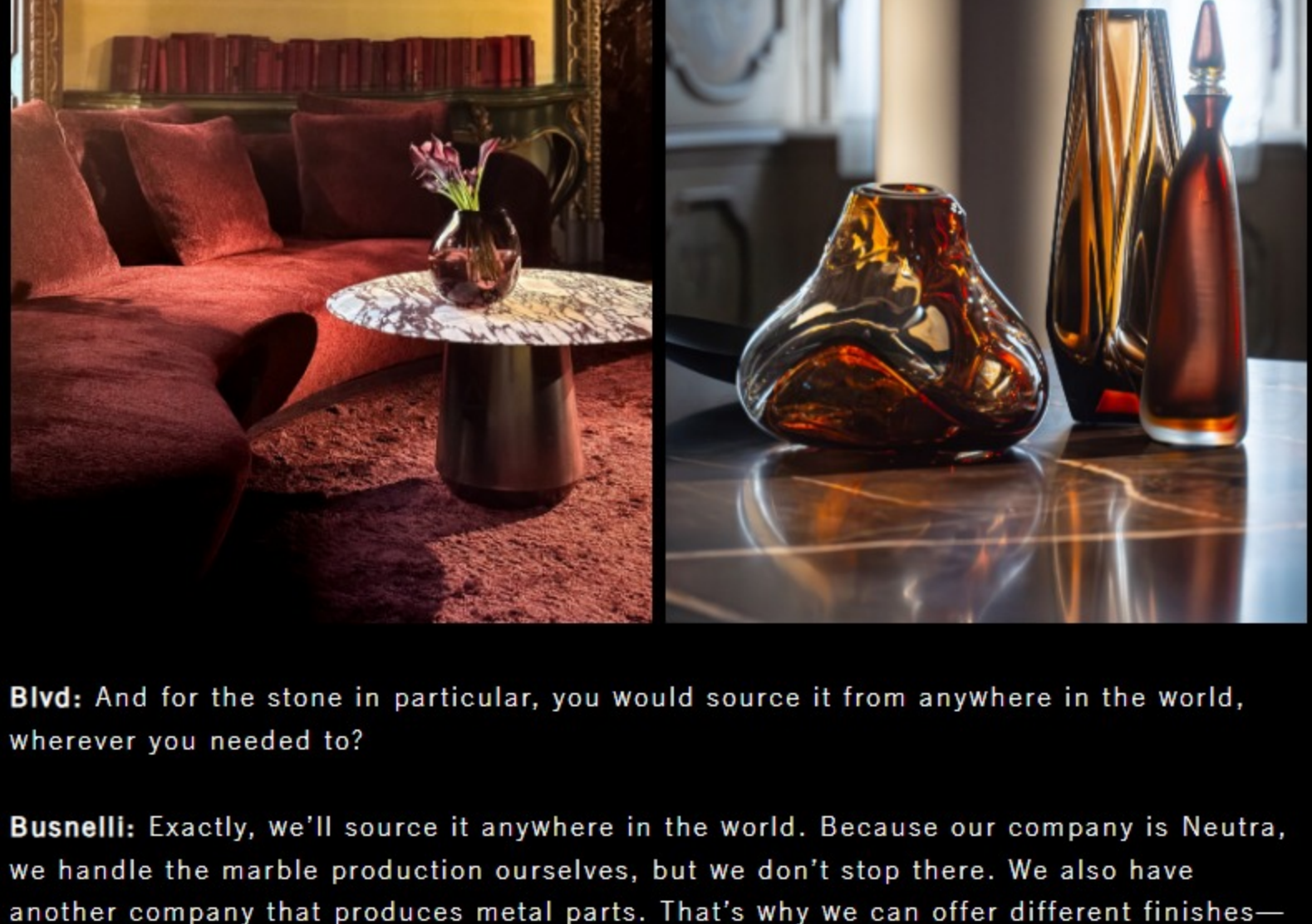
Emanuele Chicco Busnelli: Neutra is a very old company—it started in 1880, working with marble. In 2006, the family decided to launch their own line of bathroom products, and then around 2014 or 2015, they expanded into tables. In 2022, the daughter, who had been involved, stepped away from the business, and the son is a professional athlete, so the owner was left running the company with his wife and wanted to move on.

I had worked with them back in 2011 at the Café Royal in London, where they created all the bathtubs and sinks from single blocks of marble. After I left B&B Italia, I always felt my path would bring me back to the furniture market. So, in November 2022, I bought Neutra and started to think about how to make it a different kind of company. It has taken me two and a half years, but now I feel we're finally ready to approach the market—and you can see the results here.

The idea behind our Monochrome Affinity is deeply connected to nature. We always start with colours, as we have about 50 different ones. The idea is to turn any vision into reality. So, for example, you pick a colour—maybe a shade of green, blue, grey—whatever you like. We'll create a fabric in that colour, select the marble that works best with it, and match the metals accordingly. Then we'll propose a full concept and we'll create the entire look of your space based on the colours you choose.

Blvd: So if I chose a particular colour, you would then propose elements like a bathtub in matching stone to complete the space?

Busnelli: Yes. We'll find the colour that matches your choice, and then create the fabric you like in that exact shade. Together, we'll decide on the finishes for the tops and sinks so that everything works perfectly together. We'll even find a rug that complements your selection—everything will match your vision.



Blvd: And for the stone in particular, you would source it from anywhere in the world, wherever you needed to?

Busnelli: Exactly. We'll source it anywhere in the world. Because our company is Neutra, we handle the marble production ourselves, but we don't stop there. We also have another company that produces metal parts. That's why we can offer different finishes—like calamine, stainless steel and other types of metal—all done in-house.

The next step for us as a group is to add a small company to produce the sofas. Because with Neutra, the DNA is all about limited pieces. For example, a bathtub—we'll make just 20 pieces. Even if you choose a special colour, there will still only be 20.

Every piece we do is limited. A sofa, maybe 50 pieces—that's it. We don't want mass production, we want unique pieces for unique clients. If someone spends \$30,000 or \$40,000 on a sofa, they shouldn't walk into a friend's house and see the same one. That will never happen with us.

When we create something, it's truly unique. That's what I love about my work—finding the perfect slab or block of marble that's one of a kind. For example, in this showcase, we used the black sapphire marble. You may have seen black sapphire marble 200 times, but never like the ones we have. Normally, it's completely black with fine white or rust-coloured lines. We searched for something different—large dramatic veins—so each slab is special. It's the same with the Portoro marble. Normally, Portoro has lots of cream veins, but I wanted to find a unique, more grey version with just a few cream accents. Finding this marble wasn't easy. I probably looked at 50 slabs and blocks to find one so grey and black.

We also have the Calacatta Viola. These slabs are quite unique because they have so much purple in them. Normally, Calacatta Viola is whiter with just some purple veining and mostly brown colours, but it's rare to find pieces with so much purple. What we used in our showcase is dominated with a rich purple colour—it's a truly beautiful piece of Calacatta Viola.

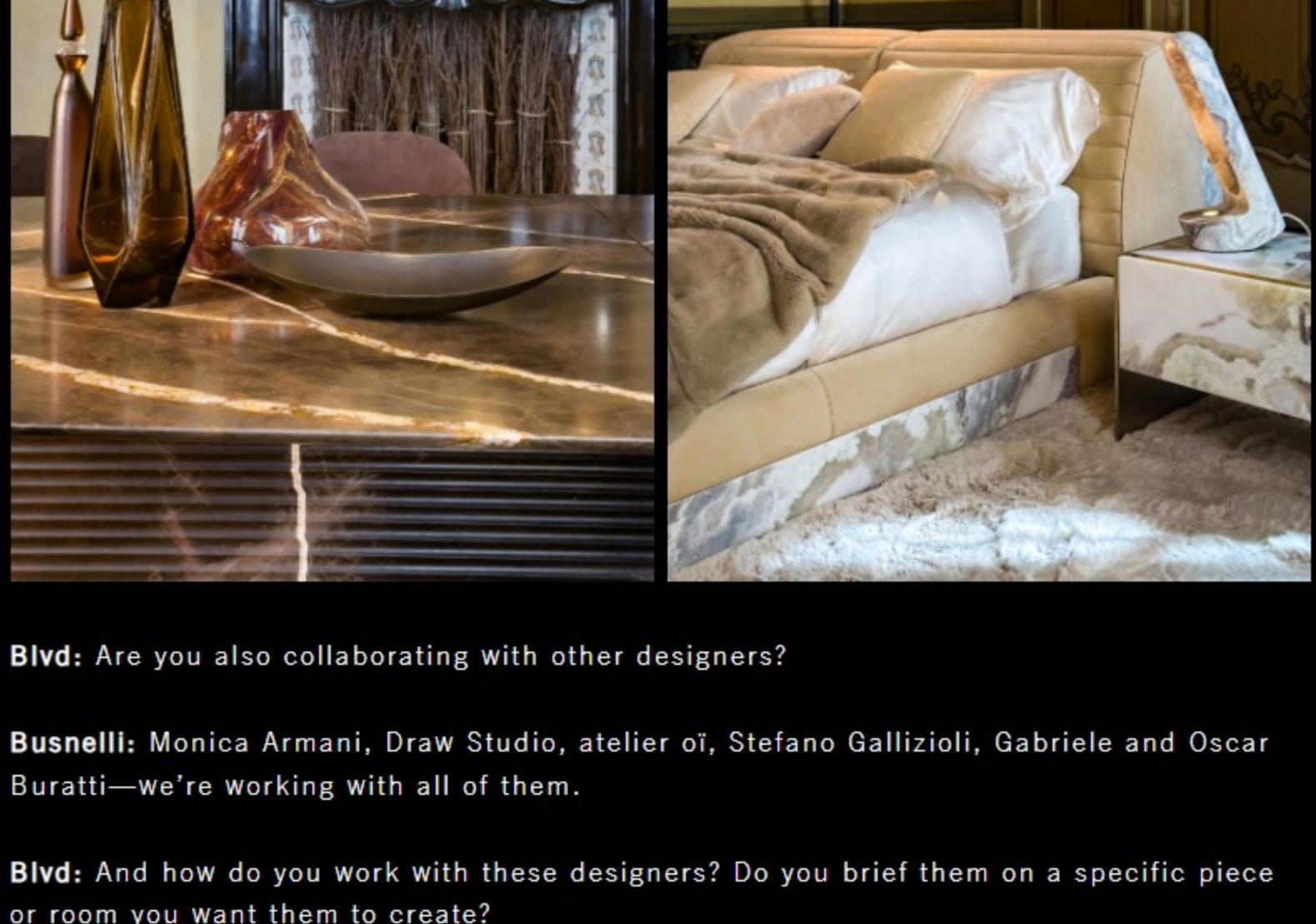
Blvd: Do you start with the design piece or with the stone?

Busnelli: I normally start with the stones. I love going out and looking for marble—when I find a beautiful block or a unique stone, I say, 'Okay, I'll take it,' and then I think about what I can create with it. Every piece begins this way.

That is the spirit of Neutra—everything carefully researched and designed so each element matches and creates a unique, harmonious space. You can see the richness in the base of a table and how every detail connects—the legs match the bookshelves, the chest of drawers, everything is part of the same vision.

Blvd: And is everything customisable?

Busnelli: Absolutely. Everything is customisable in terms of length, height and, of course, if we want to turn everything in another colour.



Blvd: Are you also collaborating with other designers?

Busnelli: Monica Armani, Draw Studio, atelier oi, Stefano Gallizioli, Gabriele and Oscar Buratti—we're working with all of them.

Blvd: And how do you work with these designers? Do you brief them on a specific piece or room you want them to create?

Busnelli: Well, working with designers is one of my favourite parts of this job—choosing the materials and discussing ideas with the architects. Together, we think about what the future of Neutra should look like. So with each designer, we discuss what we need in our collection and what we should develop next.

For example, with Monica Armani, we asked ourselves, 'Okay, we have the dining room, the living room, the bedroom—what's missing?' The idea was to make the experience inside Palazzo Visconti feel like being inside a complete home—the only thing missing is the bathroom.

So Monica designed the bathtub in our showcase. It was a wonderful collaboration—we talked about the concept and within a few weeks, she came back with these amazing ideas for the bathtub. When I saw the design, I thought, 'Oh my god, this is so beautiful and so unique.' It's a big bathtub and it's truly a masterpiece.

Blvd: Do you have a particular type of client or lifestyle in mind when you create these collections?

Busnelli: Well, of course. Our lifestyle is reflected in every single room you see in our showcase. Everything is connected—the colours, the materials, the atmosphere you want to create. It's always very refined and precious. The idea is that each room should feel like the room of the client's dreams—the one they've always imagined.

For example, my daughter sends me TikTok videos of how she wants her bedroom to look—that's exactly the spirit. It's about imagining how you want your bedroom, your bathroom, or any space to be, and then making it real.

That's what we do—we make your dream come true, with the colours and materials you love, and working with the best architects in the world to create the best possible design.



Blvd: And would you describe this as the relaunch of Neutra?

Busnelli: It's not a relaunch—this is the launch. This year, we are truly launching the brand, because now we're ready to be on the market. We have a strong collection of products, and importantly, we're prepared to deliver them within a reasonable timeframe—about six weeks.

For us, that's a big improvement. In my previous experience, production usually took much longer. Even though everything we make is custom, we've worked hard to keep production time short, so we can create and deliver a custom product in just six weeks.

Blvd: And finally, after your time at B&B and now launching this new venture, what are you still discovering or learning about design?

Busnelli: The details are what I'm still learning about every day, together with our designers. That's the most challenging part—because in design, everything comes down to the details. We always start by asking, what can make the difference in a furniture piece—like a sofa, bookshelf or a lamp? There are so many furniture companies out there, so finding something truly new is not easy. That's why we work so much on the details—they are what make a piece special.

Like what we have in our dining area showcase—we added a zip to the chairs. That came from an idea I had in one of our collaborations with designer Gabriele and Oscar Buratti. The chair's shape meant we needed to join the back in a certain way, but we didn't want a typical seam. I had my Tom Ford backpack with me at that time—Tom Ford uses zips in his accessories—so I said, 'Why don't we add a zip?' We did, and it turned out great. The zip can be made in any colour, so it can blend in or stand out with a contrasting tone. It's something fun and different.

Working on that with Gabriele was really interesting—for him, it meant going a bit outside his usual clean style, but in the end, he loved it. And that's what I'm always learning—how these small ideas and details can change everything.

It's the same for the bookshelves, the marble, the way we finish the metal. We spent a lot of time adjusting every detail—probably changed it 15 times until it felt right. That's what makes the difference. And for me, that's what design is always teaching me. It's about pushing every detail to find something new that no one else has.

This is part of a series of interviews conducted at Salone del Mobile—go further with the 2025 edition of the Milan Design Week.

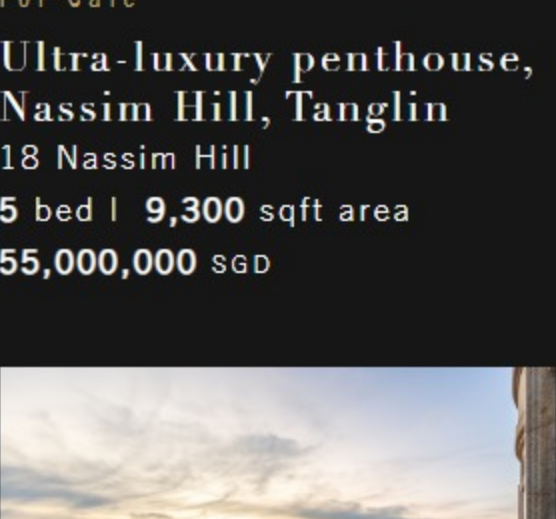
Read next:

- The interview: Edra's Monica Mazzei on choosing comfort and character over design clichés
- The interview: Cassina's Luca Fuso on timeless design and the revival of archival masterpieces

— Latest listings —



For Sale
Art-filled contemporary home, Lakeshore View, Sentosa
5 bed | 9,800 sqft area
POA



For Sale
Ultra-luxury penthouse, Nassim Hill, Tanglin
18 Nassim Hill
5 bed | 9,300 sqft area
\$5,000,000 S\$6



For Sale
The Super-Penthouse, Parkview Eclat
5 bed
\$50,000,000 S\$6



For Sale
Rare and exclusive luxury condo, The Nassim
3 bed
\$15,500,000 S\$6



For Sale
The Diplomat, Sukhumvit: A bespoke designer penthouse with sweeping skyline views
4 bed
POA