

LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

# Robb Report

SINGAPORE



## A Regal Finale

Montblanc bids farewell to a 30-year-old tradition through the life-long romance and arts patronage of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert



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# THE TIES THAT BIND

Mario Andrea Vattani, the ambassador of Italy to Singapore, has ambitious designs to bridge both countries – starting with FIND – Design Fair Asia, which he tells us is a perfect match.

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DIPLOMACY WAS NEVER really much of a choice for Mario Andrea Vattani. Born and raised in a family of diplomats – both his grandfather and father served as one – it was only a matter of time before Vattani would likewise take up the mantle. In fact, his uncle Alessandro Vattani once hosted the late Lee Kuan Yew in Italy, during his time as ambassador here in the 1980s – a rather serendipitous bit of history, now that things have come full circle with Vattani's recent appointment as the ambassador of Italy to Singapore.

Naturally, his first order of business lies in further strengthening the relationship between the two. An outcome he hopes will be achieved at the inaugural edition of FIND (Furniture, Interiors and Design) – Design Fair Asia – organised by dmg events and Fiera Milano in partnership with the Singapore Tourism Board, the Embassy of Italy to Singapore and DesignSingapore Council. Set to take place during Singapore Design Week in September, the fair promises to showcase the best of Italian design, bringing together leading design brands, designers and galleries from across Asia and beyond.

**Design is** a great subject for collaboration because it has such ample meaning – you can tell the story of Italy through the evolution of Italian design. But at the most fundamental level, design is about learning to deal with challenges. In this way, FIND – Design Fair Asia is a wonderful experiment – a huge laboratory of ideas. On the one hand, you have a company steeped in history like Fiera Milano (founded in 1920); and on the other, experienced partners like dmg events that are well versed in putting successful events together. Coupled with the curiosity of a progressive Singaporean society – already familiar with Italian design – it is a perfect match.

**Singapore** plays a crucial role in Southeast Asia, especially since European countries are looking to increase their activities in the region. Seeing as art has the capacity to connect people and spur deeper conversation, I hope to bring Miart – an event held annually by Fiera Milano – to Singapore, and bring Singaporean artists

to participate back in Milan. There are already examples of such exchanges – like Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Third Paradise* installation at the top of Nanyang Technological University's School of Art, Design and Media; or the art works of Oliviero Rainaldi, represented here by Mucciaccia Gallery – and I intend to involve the Embassy more in Singapore's many cultural events. With the help of the Italian community in Singapore, my goal is to create a rhythm in place – transporting ideas, people and things across different fields from Italy to Singapore (and vice versa) – that will continue to grow with time.

**The diplomatic service** gives you the chance to live abroad and discover life in new places – not just as a cursory experience, but life as it really is. Across the years, I have lived in radically different countries – first in the US where I worked with Congress, then in Egypt as consul. After which I was posted to Japan for many years, which holds some of my fondest memories – although in Singapore's tropical climate, I must admit that the thought of sitting in a hot spring does not feel quite as enticing.

**Most of the challenges** I have faced are not so much in the embassy but in the consular service, which is intrinsically tied to people's everyday lives. A particularly difficult case involved some minors who had been taken away by one of their parents. Compared to the pressures and expectations of a state visit, trying to solve people's real world problems are much more exacting.

**The thing that worries me most** is the loss of education about history and culture. If people increasingly pass judgement without being open to learn, what society will be left with are trends – fashionable only at that point of time.

**Whether or not you leave** a successful legacy behind, it is important to do something and become good at doing it – perhaps learning an instrument or even a new language. I once travelled alone across Japan by motorcycle without the help of GPS. That to me was an accomplishment because it meant I had acquired the ability to move around freely, in a place where I initially thought I would not be able to. 