

# BUSINESS CLASS

*Prototypes of the perfect design school are being rolled out  
all over the world in a bid to bring know-how where it's needed*

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**CANAL PLUS**  
The newly combined  
NABA/Domus academy  
is located in Milan's  
Navigli (Canals) district

About ten years ago, a private education provider called Laureate was sniffing out the crème de la crème of the world's hospitality universities. They found two of the top three world ranked schools, Glion and Les Roches in Switzerland, and swiftly purchased both.

Laureate has since taken these two elite hotel training zones and replicated them with ferocious speed and some aplomb: ten clones of Glion and Les Roches can now be found in locations ranging from Mexico, Ecuador and Chile to Brazil, Spain and Shanghai. 'We're now the largest hospitality education provider in the world,' says Marc Ledermann, CEO of Laureate's Italian arm. 'In eight years, we grew ninefold by expanding where the students are. We're giving university access to those students and bringing elite programmes to their country.'

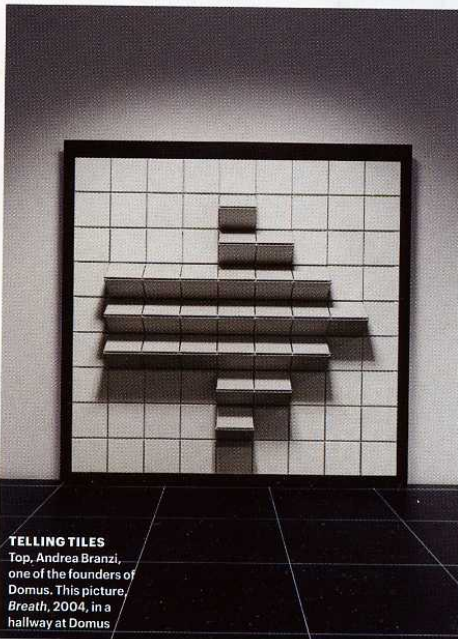
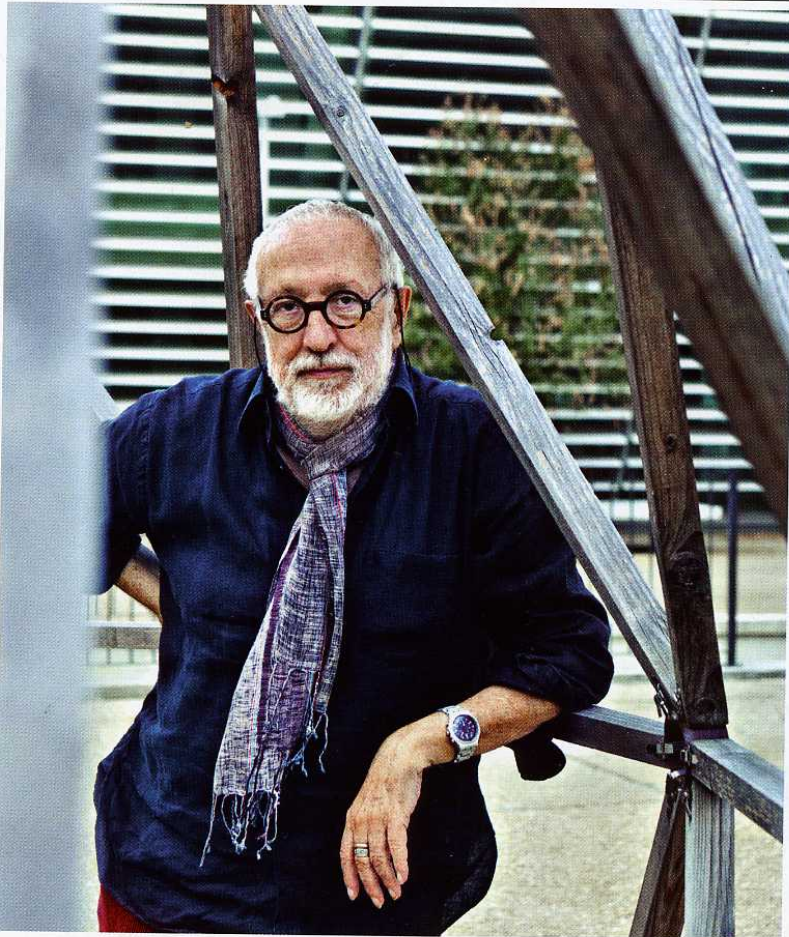
The Baltimore-based company, which operates 65 universities in 28 different countries and counts Bill Clinton as an honorary chancellor, has now applied those same principles to art and design. And again it has done its homework, buying up leading institutions in the field and getting to grips with their inner workings before rolling out more colleges.

Two prototypes from which future schools will be replicated are Milan's prestigious Domus Academy and NABA (Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti Milano), the latest in a series of recent design school acquisitions that began in 2008 with the New School of Architecture and Design in San Diego, California, and continued this year with Auckland's Media Design School in New Zealand.

'There's really a need for creative professionals, especially in the Asian continents,' explains Ledermann of the new push. 'A lot of countries have a huge manufacturing base, but to bring things to the next level, they need innovation and design. And they need quality design programmes that are accessible.'

The company's CEO, Doug Becker, was already an innovator at the age of 19 when he invented a new technology for medical records that was eventually bought by insurance giant Blue Shield. Becker soon moved into education, first running a company specialising in high school tutorials and developing computer-based testing for standardised exams. In 1999, he bought his first university in Spain, the first of what is now a worldwide network.

Laureate now owns six design schools around the world that currently cater to a total of 35,000 students out of the company's 600,000 total student body. But it is Domus and NABA, bought in



**TELLING TILES**  
Top, Andrea Branzi, one of the founders of Domus. This picture, *Breath*, 2004, in a hallway at Domus

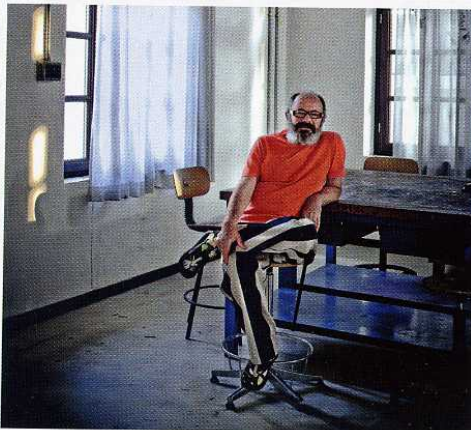
2009 and now merged on a single giant campus in Milan's Navigli district, that Laureate sees as the perfect model for its chain of design schools.

'We did an extensive market survey and Milan is an exceptional centre of excellence in fashion and design,' says Ledermann. 'It's the accessibility to the industry that made it so attractive to us.'

Domus, founded in 1982 by a group of influential designers including Andrea Branzi and Alessandro Mendini, has been tied to the design industry since its beginnings. 'It was a historic laboratory at the time because it changed the teaching model,' remembers Branzi of Domus' start. 'The focus was on the teachers, so you had great international people like Gianfranco Ferré, Mario Bellini, Ettore Sottsass, Vico Magistretti and Philippe Starck. It shocked everyone.'

Though not shocking now, the same principle continues in the school's master's programme where seasoned designers and architects like Branzi, Marc Sadler, and Setsu and Shinobu Ito have served as visiting professors for more than a decade. Meanwhile, in NABA's undergraduate programme, architect Italo Rota serves as the director of the >>

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design department, while Branzi's wife, Nicoletta Morozzi, serves as director of the fashion design department.

Luckily, none of that will change with Laureate's involvement. 'The key to Domus' success is that 95 per cent of the professors are professionals,' says Ledermann. 'They have their own studios, their own case studies. This is what makes it so rich for the students, most of whom are already working professionals.' The expansion of Domus, therefore, will be restricted to what Ledermann calls first tier cities, where they can find professionals who benefit from this model. In October, for example, a hybrid programme launched in Shanghai, with designers and faculty being imported for workshops and students on flexible course schedules.

As an undergraduate school, NABA is more academically rather than professionally driven. Laureate's plans, therefore, are to expand NABA's programming into existing partner universities around the world. 'The idea is that we can add a fashion or design programme to an existing university in Mexico, for example,' says Ledermann.

'This is right for the times,' remarks Branzi of the exportation of his country's design schools. 'We can't just teach in

**PRIVATE PRACTICE**

The 'marketisation' of education is a global trend. And it's not just giant 'educorps' such as Laureate that are filling the gaps left by retreating governments. Sufficiently funded private citizens are also driving the trend. Rajshree Pathy, a southern Indian sugar baroness is a defining example of the form. This year, she is launching the Coimbatore Centre of Contemporary Arts (CoCCA) in a former textile mill owned by her family. Coimbatore has a reputation as the 'Manchester of South India', but it is also a major university town with over 100,000 students. Looking at New York's School of Visual Arts as a model, CoCCA will initially concentrate on postgraduate arts courses, with both hi-tech facilities and links with local craftspeople and industries, from stonecutters to metal workers. Pathy hopes to help fill the huge gaps in arts education in India, especially training for curators, before adding design and architecture courses. An on-site museum will house Pathy's art collection.

[www.cocca.co.in](http://www.cocca.co.in)

**STUDENT UNION**

Clockwise from above left, one of Domus' visiting professors, designer Marc Sadler; Geodesio Structure, 2009-10, constructed by NABA interior design students outside the college's art studio; architect Italo Rota, director of NABA's design department

Europe anymore. Design provides innovation in every sector now, not just furniture, and it's become a much more mass profession. The delicate thing is whether you're exporting a brand or exporting a philosophy. It's the latter that's most important and hardest to do.'

But Laureate's management seems geared to the task. 'The Italian design approach is based on lifestyle and the needs of daily life,' says Ledermann. 'It is actually easiest to take abroad.'

Meanwhile, back home, the Italians are benefiting from the swift action allowed by no-nonsense management with deep pockets and endless resources. The best example of this is the new Navigli campus for Domus and NABA.

'There's nothing else like this in Milan,' remarks Alberto Bonisoli, the dean of Domus. 'The campus atmosphere, the new developments, the best design library in Milan. Suddenly it's something to really be proud of.'

'This is my fourth year here,' says a NABA design student, happily browsing the school's light-filled library. 'It's all happened so fast. Suddenly there are hundreds of English-speaking students running around. When I first started, there wasn't even a computer room.' ★ [laureate.net](http://laureate.net)