

**Casa Italia** as a Hospitality House for athletes of the Italia Team during the Olympics has become a recognised brand associated with the excellence of Made in Italy since the idea was founded at the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. It is the place where medals and records are celebrated and each edition is a true challenge. The Tokyo 2020 edition is located in the The Kihinkan - Takanawa Manor House, a two floor villa with garden from the 19th century, in the Minato district about 10 km from the Olympic Village.

The concept that guides the Tokyo 2020 edition is **Mirabilia** curated by Claudia Pignatale (Interior Design Curator) and Beatrice Bertini with Benedetta Acciari (Art Curator) features a term from the famous rooms of wonders where, between 1500 and 1700, collectors gathered pieces of art (artificialia) and natural objects (naturalia), preserving them together and showing them without placing a difference of hierarchy between them. All objects were called mirabilia. Casa Italia thus becomes the universe that collects, preserves and exhibits the “wonderful”.

In between of many mirabilia from famous contemporary Italian artists and design companies, stand out the numerous unique editions by a brand called **Hillsideout** that can be found on both floors of the liberty villa. There is a certain visual and mental style that connects all the pieces and make them right away recognisable. There are shown in the games room an American pool table and a table football, then closer to the catering there is cocktail bar and a paravent. All these pieces are connected by a strong aesthetic character easily recognisable which must be the use of wood but it is more. They are definitely eye-catchers due to their size and their detailed handcraft and their functional use makes you think that it must be design. However, on the second sight you go beyond the surface, you go further the artisanship and it makes you think that it could be also art. You find wooden shapes that remind ancient temples in the billiard table, heavy bronze columns which’s surface remind pixels in the football table, photographical prints on film material and Japanese paper in the cocktail counter and as it would not be enough even a shape of an indigenous mask made of nuanced coloured Murano glass in the paravent. And you think, yes, maybe this is more than just functionality or design, it could be art, functional art or art design. What is it? Is it Art? Who is Hillsideout able to fill in whole rooms with this uniqueness? And where does this name come from which does not sound Italian at all? Let’s go beyond.

**Hillsideout** is the brand of a couple, a duo formed by Andrea Zambelli and Nat Wilms which was founded in 2009 firstly as an experiment of collaboration between a man and a woman, an Italian furniture restorer and a German artist with a formation in Italy. The brand name features this internationality in their roots and in the mental direction where they aim to go: Out. Hillsideout met and got inspired in the hillside of Bologna, in the Apennines where the couple went in nature to find stories, pictures and material in the many abandoned houses there but that was not where they wanted to stay. The brand grew and started collaborations with galleries, architects, concept stores, collectors but also with other artists and artisans and they do travel to find more inspiration.

In the games room on the ground floor which is one of the highlights in the villa Hillsideout exhibit the American Pool “Olimpia” produced with Hermelin Billiards Milan and the table football “Pirli” made in collaboration with the artist Michele Balestra. “Olimpia” is made of an elegant and light design, completely handcrafted woods choosing only certified and extreme high quality wood which’s final treatment makes it to a touchable experience. The way the wood is kept naturally

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makes you fall in love in this material which you have seen so many times but not in this way. However, the more you leave the wooden details behind the shape of the piece catches your eye. From the distance you can see a triangle form that reminds ancient temples that were found in deep forests on several continents. It has something of an architectural piece due to the table legs and the stairs applied on the lateral parts of the playing surface that immerses you into ancient wildness.

Other the piece next to it: The table football "Pirli" which combines bronze with wood. The table legs made of bronze by Michele Balestra appear like heavy columns able to suspend the playing ground for the football players. Suddenly the wood seems to be light, the beautiful game seems to make fly and forget due to the strength of the pillars. They hold all and seem to bring a gift like on a plate. Who does not want to touch this fine combination of heaviness and lightness just in one piece? You must play.

There are more surprising discoveries approaching to the cocktail counter called "font of fortune" which firstly represents a warm welcome by offering you Italian food and drinks. It is thought like a wishing well where fairy tales wishes are fulfilled, where the needles of the princesses fall and where the enchanted frogs come out. Hillsideout dedicates this site-specific piece to the sign of luck. Sport is based on constant discipline and talent but as we can see even more in this historical period, to say the least extraordinary, good luck is always needed. More than Europeans, the Japanese have a great history linked to lucky symbols. Therefore Hillsideout chooses to put photographic compositions inserted in wooden frames around the counter which feature images of rites with the sun, rice, frogs, cats, dragonflies, koi fish, bonsai, bells, paper knots called omikujii or zigzag paper that try to attract luck, health, harmony, perseverance and hope. The used woods are Italian woods from north to south which can be also found in Japan like walnut, larch, maple, chestnut, olive and elm. The trees that we have in common despite the distance make you feel closer and more similar, we are not so different and our countries do have things in common. Often we just forget about this. CONI - the Italian National Olympic Committee - will keep this piece in their collection in order to use it for upcoming events but in different forms since the piece is transformable into further bar situations by using it as box like a well or by splitting it in two separated pieces or in a line.

To conclude the visual tour there is a colourful screen to mention. Their shades in the openings are made of Murano glass and be going more far away you notice a mask that remind indigenous rites as if it would look at us. What could it hide or reveal? Hillsideout continuous remembering us of how many mysterious mirabilia we are surrounded, better look twice. The couple is based in Milan being small, creative, artisanal, contrasting and hybrid. All their pieces shown at Casa Italia celebrate nature and the importance of ancient wisdom in a light contemporary living.

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Exhibition: **Mirabilia** curated by Claudia Pignatale (Interior Design Curator) and Beatrice Bertini with Benedetta Acciari (Art Curator) from the **23rd of July until 9th of August 2021**

Venue place: Casa Italia at The Kihinkan - Takanawa Manor House in the Minato district in Tokyo  
<https://tokyo2020.coni.it/it/casa-italia.html>

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**HILLSIDEOUT** [art design studio]

by Nat Wilms and Andrea Zambelli

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