



Pretziada: celebrating traditional knowledge and the avant-garde

Pretziada – meaning “precious” in Sardinian – is a rare hybrid, representing a dialogue in a constant state of flux between design and craftsmanship, between the modern world and ancient history. The creative duo are passionate advocates of a new way of promoting Sardinia’s cultural heritage through design.

Pretziada are a creative duo who, after spending their lives between Milan and New York, decided in 2015 to leave the metropolis and head for Sulcis, in Sardinia, where their work unites design, tradition, enterprise and craftsmanship

**Text by Elisa Mencarelli
Photos by Pretziada**

The stories of Ivano Atzori and Kyre Chenven come from two continents. Atzori is Milanese, of Sardinian origin, with his roots in contemporary art and the counterculture; Chenven is Californian, a set designer with a background in fashion, who’s worked in New York and Milan. Their common interest in design set them on a shared course. But it was the call of Sardinia, with its raw and primitive beauty, that drove them to abandon the frenetic pace of the city, get back to basics and write a new chapter in their lives. This time entwined with the limitless fascination of an island of mythical features and ancestral traditions; a place as alluring as it is harsh and inhospitable.

Aware of this complex environment, Pretziada has made the Sulcis region its own. It captures the essence of the place and reshapes it by connecting local realities with international figures, creating a tangible conversation around Sardinia’s excellence and potential. Like an achieved Utopia, a project conceived from nothing, that over the years has spontaneously become a socio-economic model for all who choose to set up business in places generally ignored by entrepreneurs. They have the courage to talk about design in an uncontaminated land, surrounded by boundless rural horizons.

← Banded Carpet by Pretziada Studio & Mariantonía Urru

↓ Ivano Atzori e Kyre Chenven
Credit: © Valentino Congia



Pretziada rewrites concepts and shortens distances, starting from the distinctive features of a region that over the centuries has always been a world in itself, totally disconnected from the history and development of Italy. Pretziada rediscovers customs and traditions and gives them a contemporary interpretation, based on the principles of slow design. A leitmotif that rejects the repetitive cycle of beautiful projects devoid of soul and returns to a more reasoned, conscious approach.

This is where their programmes begin, with residencies for designers at their creative hub in Santadi, exactly 60km from Cagliari. An exchange of knowledge, both theoretical and manual, that starts with the commitment and desire of designers to fully embrace and become absorbed in this wild environment. A total immersion, like a mystical experience, to capture the atmospheres, materials and colours of the land, translating them into contemporary enchanted objects. These include Tunda and Marria vases by Valentina Cameranesi and Walter Usai, a reinterpretation of the Sardinian jugs traditionally given to brides for carrying water; tapestries by Roberto Sironi with Mariantonía Urru, inspired by the architecture of the Nuragic era (the civilization that was born and evolved in Sardinia from 1800 BC to the second century AD); and among the most recent, the Immortale project by Andrea Branzi and Fratelli Argiolas, small *menhir* (prehistoric monuments) in stone and iron, unique and mysterious objects like finds from an as yet unknown past.

To mark one exhibition of their latest collections we interviewed Atzori and Chenven to hear more about the Pretziada project.



Let's start with the basics: what is Pretziada?

A A company would be the most correct term. It isn't pure research, we're two slightly atypical entrepreneurs with a Utopian and nomadic imprint. We live in the rural world seven days a week, but we manage to keep actively communicating in modern, contemporary languages.

C Pretziada is a "creative practice". Calling it an e-commerce company would be reductive, but nonetheless it's become extremely important to underline that for us it's also a matter of economics. If we limited ourselves to talking about the beauty of a region without selling the idea to others, our presence here would be pointless.

For us, these are Utopian activities, we're not just about numbers and practicalities, but at the same time our work here also has a less romantic purpose, that of creating a market and giving something tangible back to the community.

You've created a link between the local context and the broader narrative – Sardinia is off the map in terms of design, which in Italy is above all concentrated in just a few areas of the north.

A I remember that in one of our first publications, following Rossana Orlandi's exhibition, we were described as "the couple who've put Sardinia officially on the map of international design". Pretziada is also about geography, we go much further than presenting a well-made chair. We really do believe in the possibilities of a productive rural dimension.

This is a very contemporary theme, but one that became a reality for you several years ago.

C&A It's six years now since we moved to Sardinia. We entered a world that was completely alien to us both in terms of our knowledge of design and of financial management. This has also been one of our strengths: we've never been frightened by the mechanisms that govern the world of design.

How did this change of direction occur in your lives? Was it a spur of the moment decision or something long-considered?

A With my background in contemporary art the thing that fascinated me most was seeing how fundamental design is in art as well. The nails, frames, installation, materials and tools that are regarded as second-class factors in art but are actually active players. Design is everywhere, it flavours our lives every day, also unintentionally. Together with our love of handmade objects we realised that this sector was in need of oxygen. Pretziada has managed to put the spotlight on an infrastructure in crisis, not only productively but also intellectually, a situation that unfortunately is typical of many contexts in Southern Italy and the islands. We had this desire to put all our knowledge, our cultural background, at the disposal of an area that was highly depressed and in great difficulty.

C It's no accident that we're here in Sardinia. We had a much simpler idea that we wanted to develop, that then grew and became what we are today. We've found a world that has enabled us to be much more artistic. Each collaboration we make is an ever-deeper exploration that enriches us.



Nannai Chair

→ Detail of Nannai Chair

This year in particular has shown that beating an already-known path and doggedly striving for certain social constructs is a failed model. You are living proof that it's better to start from zero and to fully map out your chosen route.

C With Pretziada we're realising in effect that the roles that exist within our work are fluid and mobile. From texts to installations, artistic direction and the artist residencies, these aspects are not set in stone. We've understood how we can be all of this, deconstructing the idea of work as a schematic and rigorous concept.

And do you yourselves have roles?

C Yesterday I was listening to a talk by the writer Michela Murgia in which she was saying how society has made us become used to models that extol the myth of the individual, the power of the chosen person. Pretziada shows us that, on the contrary, the real strength lies in the community, we all play our part and it isn't the work of the individual that produces the result. We're not talking about chairs by Chiara Andreatti, but chairs by Chiara with Pierpaolo Mandis.

A Our work covers every aspect: in addition to our relationship with the craftsmen and designers, we're responsible for the creative direction and for ensuring that traditions are respected and not merely appropriated. This is something that the design sector isn't sufficiently aware of, the importance of justifying a decision to reinterpret an item belonging to a tradition other than one's own. We're talking about an indigenous population. Sardinia is a more specific place because it's surrounded by the sea and for a long time, unfortunately, was subjected to attack and cultural absorption. This is a fundamental aspect in our residencies.

You're located on an island but you're not in isolation; over the years you've succeeded in establishing strong relationships with people who've chosen to work with you and be with you physically. What dynamics exist between you and the people who arrive from outside?

C In the design industry it's common practice for projects and collaborations to exist through the sending of PDF files via email, in a totally cold and detached way. It was clear to us from the beginning that any designer who wants to talk about a land, and specifically about Sardinia, has to experience it.

A People usually meet at design fairs and big events and then work remotely, often not seeing or even knowing each other. Well, Pretziada is the opposite. The creative artist's immersion in the land itself is an integral part of our design process. This is an investment in the value of the final object, because all that we produce always has a direct link with a range of anthropological and cultural factors. For example, the decision to create *scannu* (chairs used for sitting near the fireplace) with Chiara Andreatti was not a conventional choice. If I think of myself as an entrepreneur, producing this particular item is problematic for me because it isn't something people generally use. To overcome this I therefore have to achieve my aim by giving the designer an opportunity to understand the intrinsic meaning of the chair, what it represented for this land, its value. And without a residency this narrative potential wouldn't be possible.

C Our residencies are brief but extremely intense. They're a week during which we have no free time and are constantly at work giving our support, going and discovering



aspects of the area that might stimulate the designer's interest. From archaeology to craftsmanship, we make every effort to create a specific and targeted itinerary.

A With Roberto Sironi we started at one of the largest and most important obsidian deposits in the Mediterranean, Montiferro, where the first tool was made. From there we explored the concept of nomadism from the perspective of a raw material.

And it's this process that frees these items of any precise moment in time, they don't age, they don't have an expiry date, they remain milestones.

C If they remain evergreen it's because we're giving them a new life that becomes etched in the collective memory.

A One of the recent projects that I'm most proud of is our collaboration with Studiopepe. We were able to enter inside a vision and turn it into a tangible object. It's always an exciting challenge to work with designers with an established design background, who often have an ingrained way of creating things that's alien to what Pretziada represents. The duo was nonetheless able to show how it's possible to break with the rules of the strict system that design often is.

C Another of our new projects is the ceramics of Maria Paola Piras. This is a collection of wax-treated ceramic vases that take on a metallic appearance through oxidation, creating dark stains that have a big visual impact. The main thread underlying this new collection is the concept of archaic-futurism. Here we've done something of a U-turn because,



Eulogy to the rural world

Reconceiving the city, deconstructing the old urban models and redesigning revolutionary examples of smart cities and innovative districts. While some urban planners, designers and architects are at work on new prototypes for the city of the future, others have responded to the pandemic by recasting their daily lives in remote areas and the periphery. A new awareness has emerged that is increasingly causing the reversal of urbanisation, with a desire to abandon anachronistic lifestyles and seek wellbeing in rural areas, from deserts to the countryside.

John Pawson, an architect and guru of minimalism, has decided to move to the Oxfordshire countryside with his wife Catherine, converting a group of buildings dating back to 1610 into a farmhouse complete with three kitchens. And, by no coincidence, the couple have this year also launched their second cookery book, *Home Farm Cooking*, published by Phaidon. It is an ode to simple presentation and the rediscovery of healthy eating. Simple, wholesome recipes, an illustrated narrative that proposes a regained conviviality around the meal table, defining the luxury of a home environment in tune with the rhythm of the seasons.

Along with workcations, cottagecore aesthetics and monocabins, this trend has taken the world of property rentals by storm. Companies such as Booking.com and Airbnb have seen a record rise in bookings of mini-homes in isolated locations. Like Le Chacuel, in California's Yucca Valley. A minimalist refuge in the desert of the Joshua Tree National Park, transformed into an Airbnb by designer Mila Morris and her partner Jona Maaryn. An ethereal space, surrounded only by desert but with a wealth of refined details and luxury touches, for people who want to reconnect with nature without sacrificing comfort.

As well as being able to explore and launch cultural initiatives in an unknown environment, some people have chosen to combine enterprise, charity and sustainability. A prime example is Dan Colen, a New York artist represented by the Gagosian Gallery, who has founded Sky High Farm in the Hudson Valley. Not just a farm but a non-profit organisation that has pledged to donate all the income from its land to charity. This philanthropist's full schedule also includes a series of events for charity, many in collaboration with high-calibre fellow artists such as Jeff Koons, Jenny Holzer, Maurizio Cattelan and Takashi Murakami.

unlike the decorations and bright colours that distinguished our past projects, this one comes from a historical era that predated the control of light. The forms involved are more organic, rougher, with a greater use of black. The material is freer, less controlled, everything is deliberately imperfect.

Getting to the root of all that Pretziada represents, do you feel more like curators or innovators?

A The way we understand it, tradition is a continuous stratification of activities. This applies particularly to Sardinia which, with its geographical position surrounded only by the sea, has always been fertile ground for cross-fertilisation and settlement. Paradoxically, it's thanks to these invasions that we now have such an immensely rich artistic craftsmanship. Pretziada is just adding yet another stratum. It's right that traditions should sometimes be deconstructed, through exchange and dialogue, to ensure that the culture grows and stays alive.

C&A An image that represents us very well is that of a graft. Metaphorically we feel like new branches that are grafted on to a native plant. The history and existence of this land is like a deeply established root. Pretziada has an alien role but one that grafts well on to the existing root. This union leads to new, contemporary concepts, while always respecting the previous narrative.

THE AUTHOR

Elisa Mencarelli writes about design, architecture and interiors for *AD Italia* and *Icon Design* magazines. She also collaborates with the Salone Internazionale del Mobile in Milan.

