

# Siman

2018





# Urbi Et Orbi introduces Siman

*a capsule collection of concrete  
tableware designed by Gian Paolo  
Venier and inspired by traditional  
Iranian architecture*





Siman,  
the collection



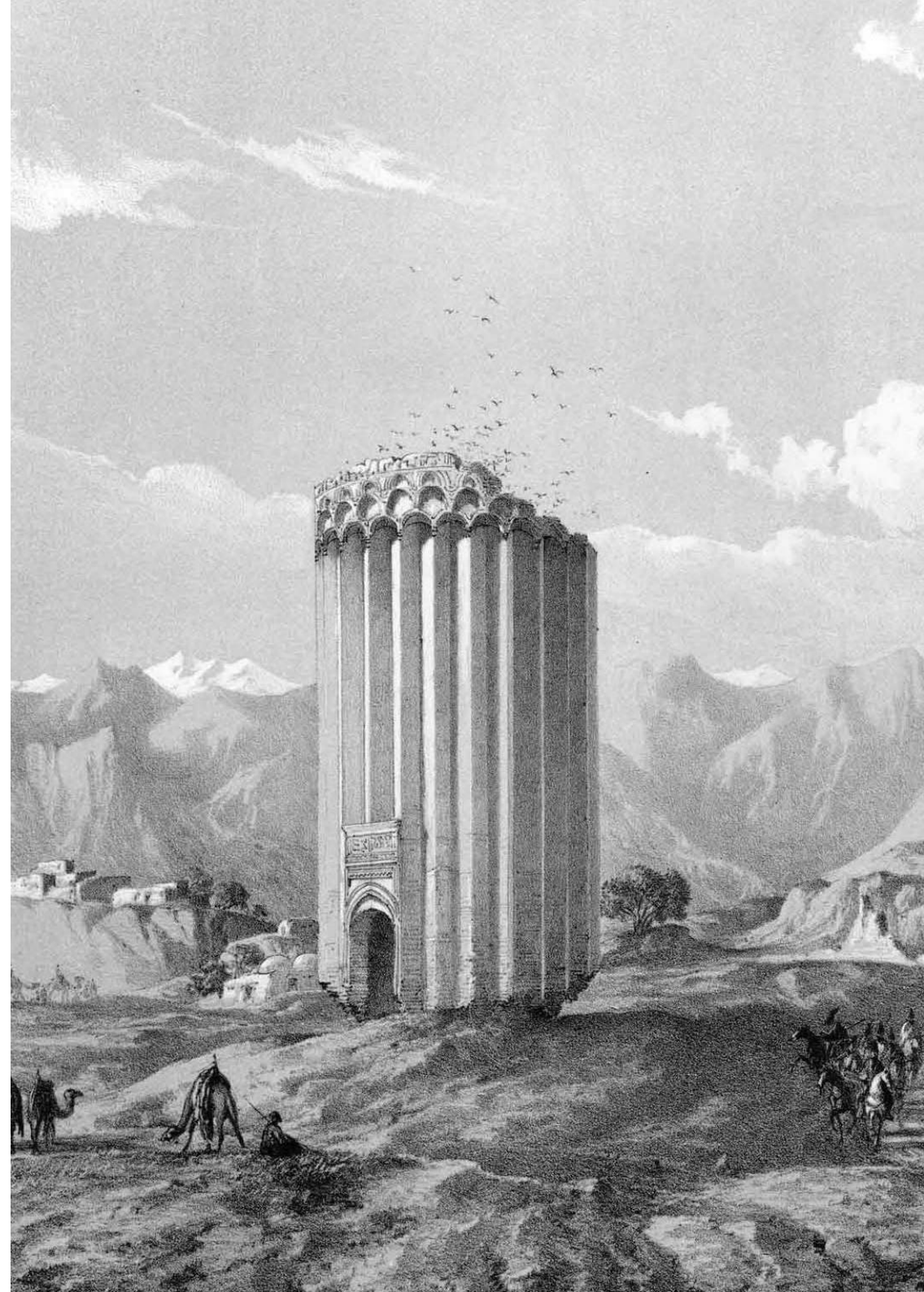
## Intro

A postcard representing the ancient Toghrol tower, situated near Teheran (Iran), that the designer received from an old friend, was the starting point for the conception of this family of tableware.

The name of the collection comes from the term "siman", which means concrete in Farsi language.

Marked by the iconic pleating, which creates ever-changing games of shadows and depths, the pieces carry a strong sculptural identity.

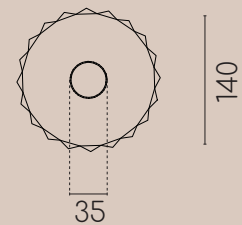
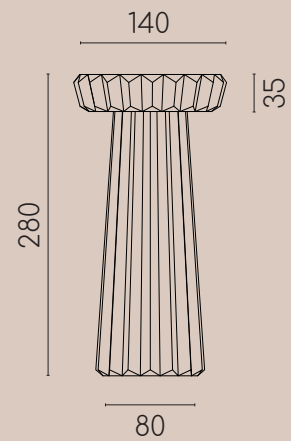
As a collection of little architectures. Siman populates interior landscapes with a highly graphic and timeless personality, casting a new light on concrete, traditionally considered a poor and rude building material.



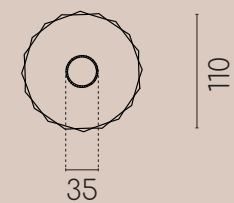
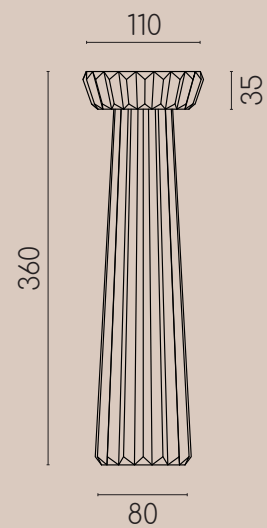
Candle holders



DIMENSIONS



Weight  
3,2 kg

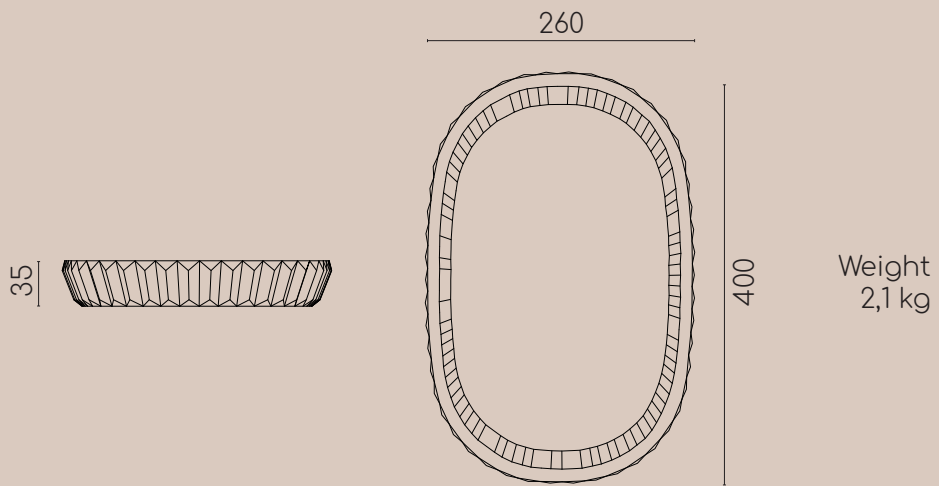
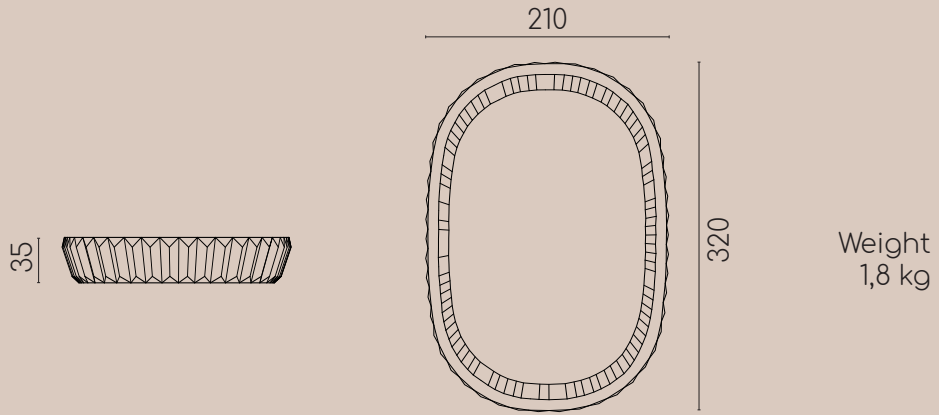


Weight  
2,7 kg

\*all measures are in millimetres

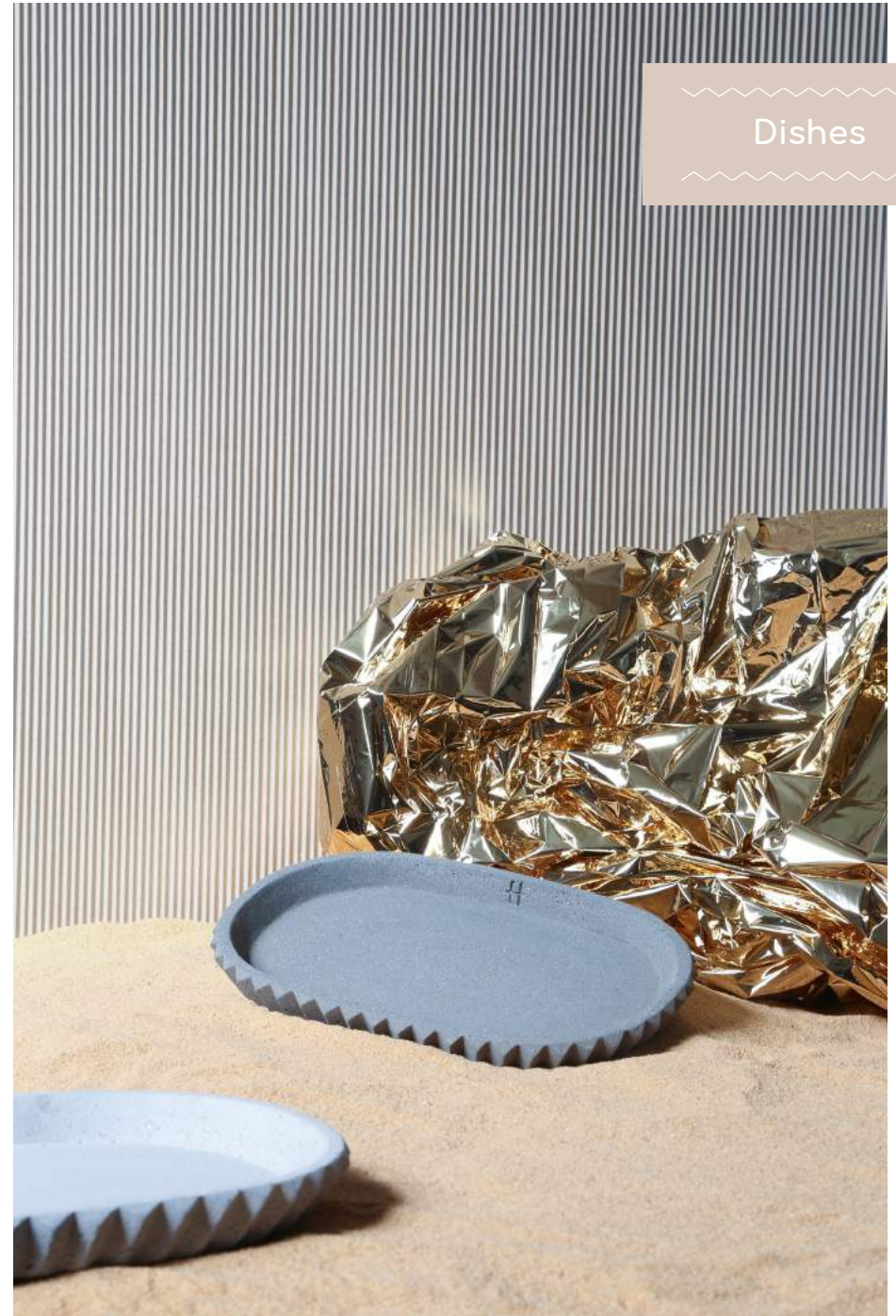


DIMENSIONS



\*all measures are in millimetres

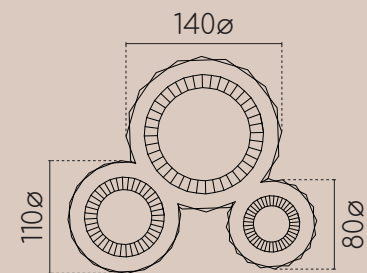
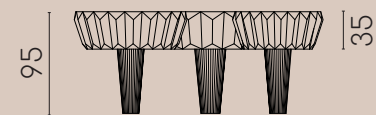
Dishes



Catchall



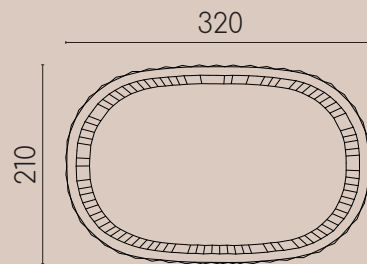
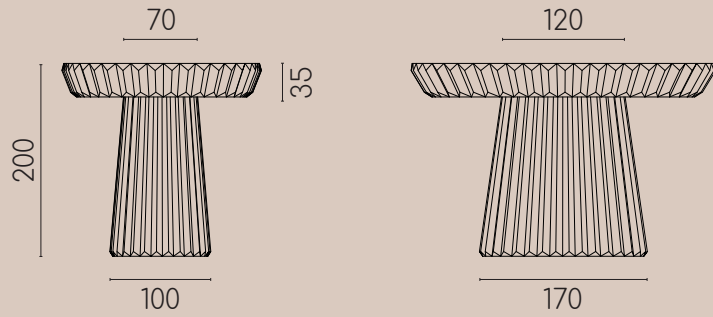
DIMENSIONS



Weight  
1,1 kg

*\*all measures are in millimetres*

DIMENSIONS



Weight  
4 kg

\*all measures are in millimetres

Cake stand

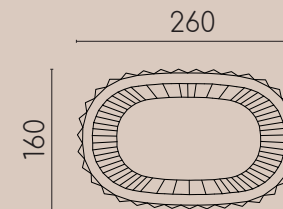
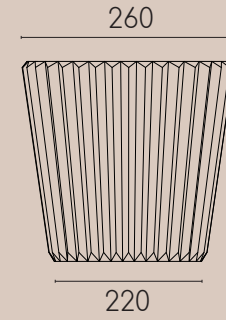
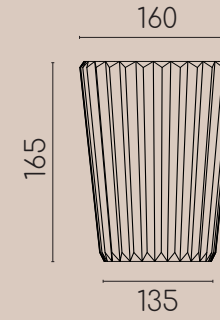




Bowl



DIMENSIONS

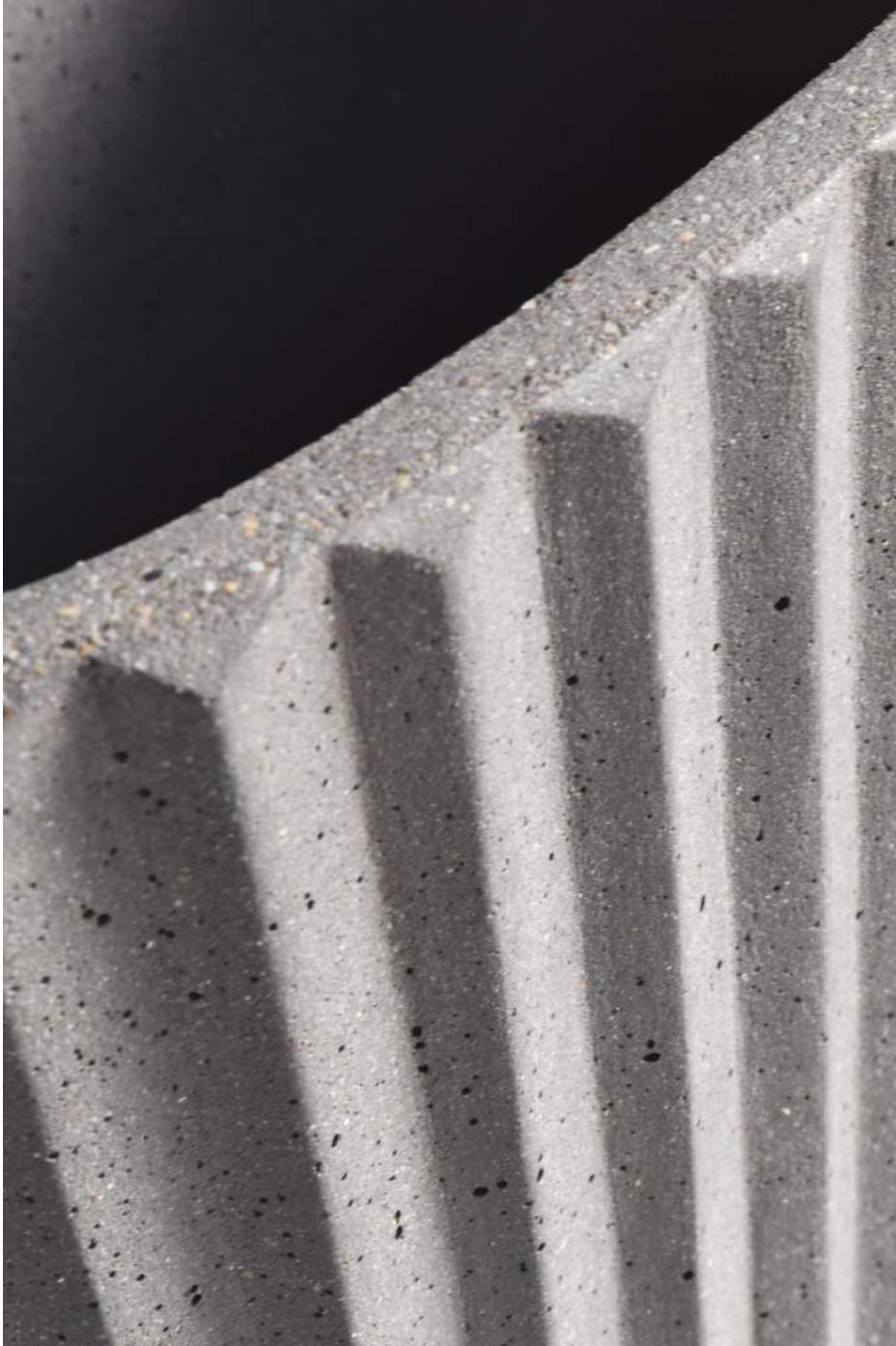


Weight  
4 kg

*\*all measures are in millimetres*







~~~~~ MATERIALS & COLOURS ~~~~~

All the pieces come in two different shades of grey. Please note that every piece may exhibit color variations on its surface, as well as among other pieces of the same product or sample products. The concrete surface exhibits surface voids that are caused by the air. This is a natural property of concrete.





Gian Paolo Venier,  
the designer





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## A chat in the clay workshop

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*A passionate traveler, Gian Paolo Venier is in constant search of afar atmospheres to contaminate his design vocabulary. Designer and creative director at international level, his distinctive signature combines a cosmopolitan elegance with the highest attention to materials, textures, tailor-made creations and sophisticated colour palettes.*



Interview by Laura Maggi



The theme of distant cultures is deeply rooted in your work. It is visible through the colour palettes, the shapes, the materials and the textures you use, but also from unexpected details. Your area of research ranges from the Mediterranean to the Far East, but it is perhaps the first time that the reference is so circumscribed. **How was this choice born?**

I have always been attracted by everything that is different from my context of origin; I am fascinated by how places and traditions affect our aesthetic language and the relationships we establish with everyday objects. The curiosity for other cultures translated very early into the necessity for travelling, which has now become an integral part of my life. And of course, like everyone else, I relate to people that share similar curiosities and hobbies. That is how I met this old friend of mine who has been living in Tehran for a while now. He often sends me messages and photographs of the discoveries he makes travelling around the country. That's how I came across the image of an old postcard depicting the Toghrul Tower before its restoration.

**Siman, a name that intrigues. Why did you choose it?**

Siman means concrete in Farsi. It might seem a trivial choice, but we wanted to emphasise the material rather than the shape. Concrete is the centre of this work, what we were passionate about when

developing the project. You have already designed collections of tableware, but it is the first time that you use concrete in a domestic context. It is a radical choice: What fascinates you about this material so dear to the masters of architecture, from Le Corbusier to Tadao Ando? Concrete immediately evokes architecture, true, but I like the idea of modifying (albeit slightly) the destination of a material or an object. In architecture, it often appears almost as an enemy of comfort, but it is still a plastic material that lends itself to being modelled. I was interested in seeing if we could achieve a "friendly" collection of pieces with it!

**Let's talk about the making of Siman. You went through various steps - from hand drawings and sketches using clay to 3D printed prototypes - working between Italy and Greece. Tell us more about the moulds you used, the problems that arose and how you overcame them.**

I love working with clay. It is an excellent way to begin to understand the relationship between the texture and the dimensions of an object. Hand modelling helps you find the correct balance. But then you need a second step, made of precision. And that is when 3D modelling comes into the game. For Siman, we did a first phase of modelling at the studio and then collaborated with a specialised studio to move to





3D printing. Geometry was complex and varied considerably depending on the size of each object. It was a bit like writing a formula that required a slightly different ingredient depending on the object to which it was applied. When we finished the 3D prototypes, we shipped them to Greece, where the Urbi Et Orbi team produced the silicone moulds and poured the concrete for the first time. I can tell you: It was a real joy to see the pictures of the final pieces! After all those months of research and development, it definitely felt like a much-needed reward.

**Did Urbi Et Orbi leave you carte blanche in terms of typological (tableware) or aesthetic choices?**

For Urbi et Orbi it was the first experience in the world of tableware, while on our side, we had no previous familiarity with concrete. In the beginning, they, therefore, had to transmit us their know-how to avoid any design mistake. It was a real advanced course on concrete! Despite being an ancient material, the innovations to modify its technical characteristics are many, and the Urbi Et Orbi artisans master them proficiently. It is a bit like entering the laboratory of a contemporary alchemist. We worked a lot together: We trusted them regarding technical abilities, and they trusted us in terms of design and art direction.

**The pieces have a strong architectural identity: The surfaces recall the grooves of Doric columns, but the resolute treatment of the shapes and the edges give them a contemporary feeling. How did the final designs take shape and which kind of scenery did you want to suggest?**

There is always a delicate relationship between the first inspiration and the outcome of a design project. The simple gesture of redesigning an architecture is already a translation gesture and, one could say, a sort of betrayal. The pieces were born thinking about the Togrul Tower but the final shapes, abstracting from the original referent, have become something else. If I look at them now, with their plastic simplicity, I have the feeling of coming across the classical ruins that I meet so often in the most remote parts of Greece. Most probably those sceneries, which I regularly attend during my vacations, have unintentionally influenced the final aesthetics of the project! The seven elements of the Siman collection act like characters and draw a miniature metaphysical landscape.



*“A passionate traveler, Gian Paolo Venier is in constant search of afar atmospheres to contaminate his”*





Urbi Et Orbi,  
the artisans





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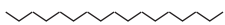
Giannis  
Kyriakakos  
and the  
Urbi Et Orbi  
philosophy

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Based on an interview  
by Laura Drouet



*"Concrete is generally considered as a rough and uninteresting material. Our specialty lies in its processing: in giving it form, colour, shape, texture, and character."*



## HOW IT ALL STARTED

We started our activity in 1998 working in the field of large-scale concrete constructions. Our business kept flourishing until 2009 when Greece experienced the first signs of the economic crisis. In order to survive, we had to adjust to the new state of things: I always follow new product technologies and trends in the field of interior design and thus started to think of new ways to go forward. It was back in 2010 that we began testing unexplored possibilities in the workshop and in 2012 our first range of products was released. I remember the many sleepless nights vividly; I was anxious to return to the studio, where I would discover something new every day. My mind was racing and the hours of the day were not enough for my thoughts to take shape. I was exploring the boundaries, of the materials and myself.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE NAME

The name of our brand comes from my passion for the Latin language. Many old Latin phrases, made up of only one or two words, capture notions that other languages need many sentences to describe. Urbi Et Orbi is one of those. When we launched our first collection, the Greek market was showing signs of exhaustion. Our goal was, therefore, to realise products that we could offer to markets all over the world. And that is what Urbi Et Orbi stands for: "to the city and the World".

## AN INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION PROCESS

The first step in the development of a new design is always the realisation of a prototype. Modern 3D printing and CNC technologies allow us to do this in unprecedented ways. For instance, in the past, it would have been impossible to make the Siman pattern. Without 3D technology, a sculptor would not have been able to render the design with such accuracy and detail. After the prototype, the second step is the

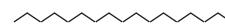
production of the mould. Depending on the final object, we use either silicone, polyurethane rubber or polyester. When the shape is ready, we can cast the concrete. The resulting object, however, is not the final product. It needs to mature and to be processed to be functional and to adopt its final shape.

## CUTTING EDGE MATERIALS

Architecture and Design created the necessity for the development of highly advanced concrete mixtures. Materials such as Glass Fiber Reinforced Concrete and Ultra-High Performance Concrete guarantee an excellent durability for applications that the ordinary cement mortars would not allow. These materials enable us to make products which have low thickness and weight, and that, at the same time, are safe and functional. Moreover, a superfluid mixture such as Ultra-High Performance Concrete facilitates the casting process significantly. By being able to imprint even the smallest detail, it gives us unlimited design possibilities. Glass Fiber Reinforced Concrete, on the other hand, allows for more application techniques. Amalgamated materials change their final properties. For instance, we use three different types of fibre, and each one of them is specifically appropriate for a different product. With these materials at hand, we genuinely feel that we can achieve everything and anything!

## COLLABORATIONS ARE VITAL

I feel lucky that, over the years, I have met and worked with people that have a vision like me. All of my collaborators have contributed significantly to the growth of Urbi Et Orbi through their knowledge, talents and experience. Exchanging views and ideas is vital to stay up to date and to keep learning. That was the case when I met Gian Paolo in 2017. I liked the way he viewed concrete as a material, as well as the "psychology" - the frame of mind- he wanted to instil in the objects. To develop the iconic texture of Siman we had to test a construction technique that I had never tried on objects with so many details. It was a real design challenge, and I am happy that we managed to achieve a satisfying result together!





# Credits



## ART DIRECTION & DESIGN

Gian Paolo Venier

## 3D MODELLING

Marta Priore

## CATALOGUE CONCEPT & TEXT EDITING

Olivier Lacrouts

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Giannis Kyriakakos, Olivier Lacrouts,  
Tomaso Lisca, Massimiliano Ornaghi

## THANKS

Design research & consulting by Fabio Muradore  
3D prototyping by Brignetti Longoni Studio  
Interviews by Laura Drouet and Laura Maggi

## Archive image

Tower and ruins of Rhey Yezid, by Eugène Flandin

