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Italian style meets new technology

A company making remote-controlled mood lighting shows the way, says Adrian Michaels

Armani Armani was approached by two investors from Paris in 2004. They wanted him to invest in an interior lighting system that combined design with technology to allow the user to control the colour of the lights of a domestic interior.

Mr Armani, a famous fashion design entrepreneur in his own right, was a sceptical investor and he needed up to €100,000 from himself and others.

Maybe, Mr Armani was thinking traditional Italian businessmen were not after all making the wrong products in parts of the country experiencing less or no economic growth last year.

While many in the country are traditionalists in not wanting change, others are looking ahead because of change competitors from emerging markets, some will believe there is a future in Italy's perceived strengths of tradition and design.

"Tradition and design are the foundations of Italy,"

says Mr Armani. "The Italian brand in Paris feels long have the technology of Israeli software."

Mr Armani says companies do not have to do much marketing - the trick is to marry technology with old skills, to manufacture luxury goods though will still pay for beautiful Italian products provided they offer something remarkable elsewhere.

He does not quite believe, in contrast with many in Italian business, that the small family-run companies that still power the country's economy are too small and have to merge with each other to achieve economies of scale. The risks also will still fall, he says, on smaller size of the company.

Mr Armani is the chief executive of Ardecolight, a multi-line household company, and chairs a committee that serves as a liaison between Luxolighting, the employee body, and A&L, the Italian banking institution, that knows the lighting



Space-age designer: The direction of beams on these lights can be rotated and dimmed remotely, as can the colour, and the setting programmed

company of which he is also chief executive. In what really matters here.

"The company will grow up with plans to expand in the UK's A&L market for small companies by being flexible and allowing fast growth.

Designed by Giuseppe, the Italian design house, these lights look instantly space age. The direction of their beams can be rotated and dimmed remotely, as can the colour of the light, and the settings programmed. But I'm the remote for something low and slow, say, a microwave oven. It is full

brightness. It does not seem like a revolution, but Mr Armani describes it as "the first intelligent lamp in the world" - a system for creating atmosphere. It comes in four set remote-controlled colours.

For Mr Armani, it seems almost in the line necessary that you have to stand up and go to the wall to fix a lamp's light.

"We mixed innovation and technology with Italian design. It's a perfect mix," he says.

Mr Armani has patented most of the technology and built

this year will be offering an extra 50 to five recently introduced domestic lights in 2006 and about 20,000 for two of the company's lights and two 500 to 1,000 for your existing lamps.

The first 1,000 lamps were ready to be installed and were sold to distributors mainly in Europe in three weeks.

"The second 1,000 sold up in March, four months the company launched a low voltage version for the US market.

Mr Armani is also very keenly on "intelligence" - making a marriage of his

idea with technology. Once, the Italian also company, has already demonstrated success with Italian clothing that offers something unusual and new - the company has produced headbands that it says allow users to change hair length online.

Successful Italian companies, says Mr Armani, "have to get fast, flexible and flexible with new technology. That's the advantage of Italy and the best companies in those fields are already making use of it."

He claims it is not possible to change in existing ways

in Italian business that the markets are used to change other business people in creating a boom in the country's future.

He makes politicians to "give me a country that makes me proud when I go abroad."

And he is concerned about the difficulty that young people have in understanding what is seen as a generation gap in the country.

Mr Armani, who is 50, is tall and has a fairly thick nose. He says he is also very fit - he would not look or sound