

# Night Vision:

Dark contemporary glamour meets neo-Gothic design in a furniture brand that's all about fantasy.



FOR THE MOMENT, minimalism really is dead, and flamboyant neo-Gothic design is doing a victory dance on its grave. And the latest furniture range in New Zealand to celebrate that dark, glamorous side of design is the Visionnaire collection from IPE Cavalli. Stocked exclusively at ECC Lighting and Living, the Visionnaire collection is a collaboration between Samuele Mazza, manager of the Visionnaire store in Milan, and architect/designer Alessandro La Spada.

The range was first launched at the Milan Furniture Fair in 2005, and since then it has grown in popularity as it continues to explore new heights of extravagance and fantasy in design. The original collection drew inspiration from an image of a mysterious wrought iron gate, with spear-tipped prongs, which caught the attention of the designers and led them into a fantasy about the kind of neo-Gothic house that might lie behind that gate, and the life that might be lived within it. "Our imaginations carried us to a non-existent world that nonetheless from that moment has lived distinctly in our minds," they say. "King, queen, castle, a royal palace, warriors, a ball room, talking animals, we don't exactly know, but there is, perhaps, a will to recount what we have imagined in the objects we design."

Those objects are a sumptuous mix of fashion influences, materials drawn from flora and fauna, and reinterpretations of medieval luxury. Reflective surfaces like chromed steel, crystal and retro-lacquered glass contrast with soft velvets, tactile leathers and suedes and rich satins. Bird feathers fringe mirrors and adorn chandeliers and furs line seat cushions and lampshades. Eel leather is used in preference to crocodile skin, as a more exotic but nature-friendly alternative.

Several of the collection pieces were originally inspired by the mood of the book

**ABOVE:** Opulent fabrics, exaggerated shapes and influences from nature form the basis of the Visionnaire collection at ECC.

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*The Da Vinci Code*, with its mysterious religious temple knights, cloaked monks, and vast, shadowy castles and cathedrals. For this reason, many of the proportions of the furniture and lighting pieces are oversized, their scale giving them a Surrealist edge. Later pieces took their cue from a 'Lost Paradise' idea, drawing on the paintings of Gustave Moreau and Lawrence Alma Tadema. These pieces looked more to the fantastical birds, plants and creatures that might surround the mythical castle – butterflies, swans, bears, tendrilled vines and blooming flowers growing in a surprisingly riotous winter garden. The vibrant greens, violets, teals and browns of these pieces form a stark contrast to the more austere black and white designs which preceded them.

IPE Cavalli, the parent company for the Visionnaire collection, is a long-standing name in Italian furniture design, having produced contemporary furniture in the Bologna area for almost 50 years. Designer Samuele Mazza describes the company founders as "visionary Peter Pans, like ourselves" and declares, "Together we have developed an aesthetic code that is encrypted in our minds but clearly visible in the products. I think it's called 'style' when you do different things, yet they resemble each other."

ECC Lighting and Living have been testing the market with one-off sales of Visionnaire pieces over the last three years, and now feel New Zealand is ready to dive in properly. "The Visionnaire collection is completely different to any of our other brands. Right now the market seems to be going for that edgy, dark, luxurious feel," says Debbie Quy from ECC. The collection will be arranged in its own store-within-a-store concept space at ECC, and will be available from late March. We'll be pushing aside the minimalist white couches to make room for some at home. **MW**

**THIS PAGE:** A dark, mysterious wrought iron gate led the range's designers to imagine a whole alternative interior world of furnishings.

