By the late 1800s, Italy had been a stop on the Grand Tour for over a century thanks to the vestiges of its past and the treasures of the Renaissance. After the publication of Goethe's *Italian Journey* in 1816-17 and John Ruskin's series of books on architecture, *The Stones of Venice*, the last of which was published in 1853, Italy became a legendary destination for artists, intellectuals, and the cream of the crop of international society. The era's greatest writers set their novels in Italy after having visited it - Edward Morgan Forster's *A Room with a View* stands out - while rich bibliophiles collected antique editions of the *Divine Comedy*, which they displayed in the so-called “Dante cabinets” of opulent mansions and the neo-Renaissance castles of Gino Coppedè (1866-1927). During the second half of the 19th century, Pre-Raphaelite painters held sway. They adopted Dante and the Italian Middle Ages as an incomparable model of aesthetic beauty, the perfect union between the artist and the craftsman, which they set against the rampant industrialisation that was taking place in England. Their fame reached Italy through the magazine *Emporium*, founded in 1895, which dedicated monographic essays to each one of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, although it should be said that a decade earlier Gabriele D'Annunzio already owned copies of their paintings, which were admired by the cosmopolitan elites who attended his parties. Additionally, as early as 1881 Edward Burne Jones (1833-1898) had designed the mosaics and William Morris (1834-1896) the majolica decorations for the first non-Catholic church in Rome, St. Paul Within the Walls, supported by the collector and philanthropist J.P.Morgan, after a newly-
united Italy in 1861 had made freedom of religion possible. In 1893 the Roman painter Giulio Aristide Sartorio (1860-1932) travelled to London to study their paintings and meet them in person. Sartorio’s own paintings would be highly influenced by his stay in London, and he was one of the first to write an essay on Pre-Raphaelite painting, published in the Italian magazine *Il convito* in 1895.

There were multiple links between Italy and England, which looked to one another, and the historical reappraisal of the Renaissance was especially lively in its cradle, Florence, where the English presence had been particularly well established starting in the mid-1800s. Bernard Berenson studied and re-discovered the painters of the Renaissance, and in 1906 he moved into the *I Tatti* villa in Fiesole.

Artistic and cultural interactions extended to the decorative arts. Importantly, every winter between 1892 and 1914 Florence hosted the most famous of all Pre-Raphaelite ceramists, William De Morgan (1839-1917), who had his own workshop there and employed local painters for his “papers with colours” to be applied to tiles as decals. De Morgan, who was a member of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society founded in 1888, had fruitful exchanges regarding pottery techniques with Ulisse Cantagalli (1839-1901), whom he often saw, and who owned a factory specializing in the production of a great array of Renaissance-style ceramics, which had been very
favourably received at the London Exhibition of 1888. While attending the exhibition, Cantagalli, who had married a Scotswoman, visited William Morris and met Walter Crane (1845-1915). Another member of the large English colony in Florence was the collector Federico Stibbert, whose mother was Tuscan; between 1878 and 1906 Stibbert was a tireless purchaser of Cantagalli ceramics. The alliance between Ulisse Cantagalli and Stibbert was cemented by their shared passion for reproducing ancient majolica pottery and bricks, all rigorously painted by hand. Indeed, as part of the extensive works in the castle of Montughi (now the Stibbert Museum in Florence), the Florentine ceramist was responsible for the floor of the Sala Moresca and for many ceramics in the Loggetta.

In Rome, the circle of artists that coalesced around the artist and craftsman Duilio Cambellotti (1876-1960) was inspired by medieval pauperism, and adopted the classic modalities of Arts and Crafts: the abolition of nails in favour of boltless construction, exposed wood with visible grain, and the lack of ornaments. The group of artists expressed itself through the magazine *La Casa* (founded 1908), which used illustrations and rare photographs to depict simple, modern living quarters, inspired both by the ideological and stylistic dictates of William Morris and by the works of the Vienna Secession, for a modernist renewal of the Roman scene, which was very traditionalist and academic at the time.
In 1898 in Bologna, a small group of artists, decorators, and artisans specialized in conservation restoration created a “guild” called Aemilia Ars with a clear English inspiration. The group’s members designed and produced full sets of furniture, complete with elaborate wall decorations, wrought-iron works, ceramics, and illumination. The group, which was supported by a wealthy Cavazza family, participated with success in the Turin International Exhibition of 1902, but it proved to be short-lived: it broke up in 1903, and only survived in the embroidery sold in a beautiful Art Nouveau store located in the centre of Bologna, in a building that still stands today.

The “Ville Lumière” was the other European beacon: for Italians who could afford it, the key stop on the tour for all the latest on art and fashion at the end of the 19th century was Paris. The legend of Paris attracted painters, artists, and the intellectual avant-garde as a place to work, study, and especially to breathe in freedom and partake of the unconventional behaviours that were stifled in provincial Italian towns. Among the Italian artists who enjoyed a measure of success there were Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920), Giuseppe De Nittis (1846-1884), Giovanni Boldini (1842-1931), and Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938). Indeed, the Futurist Manifesto of 1909 was published for the first time in the French newspaper Le Figaro.

In Italy, a country that was still very much agricultural and with a very low level of industrialization, the gap between the few rich and the multitude of poor was huge. The rich and the aristocrats would travel to renew their wardrobe from the leading tailors and to be apprised of the latest trends: everything that was fashionable, chic, and in good taste came from France, and the rest of Europe copied it.

The first opportunity for many to showcase themselves abroad and directly experience the varied output of foreign artists was the major World Fair held in Paris in 1900, a must for critics,
entrepreneurs, and intellectual and social elites. Starting in September 1990 and through that winter, Giacomo Balla (1871-1958) lived in Paris: one of his paintings - a small, dreamlike nightscape of the World Fair's Luna Park lit by hundreds of light bulbs - testifies to his astonished admiration for the city.

The art section of the Italian pavilion saw the participation of a number of avant-garde painters - Giovanni Segantini (1858-1899), Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo (1868-1907), Giovanni Boldini, Angelo Morbelli (1853-1919) and Giulio Aristide Sartorio - along with a group of innovative furniture-makers: Carlo Zen (1851-1918), Eugenio Quarti (1867-1929), and Carlo Bugatti (1856-1940), all three from Milan, Vittorio Valabrega (1861-1952) from Turin, Marshall Cutler and
Carlo Matteo Girard, active in Florence, the ceramist Galileo Chini (1873-1956), who as early as 1896 had founded an innovative workshop, Arte della Ceramica, near Florence. The Paris expo, attended by millions of visitors, was an opportunity to compare one's work with that of foreign contemporaries. Indeed, immediately afterwards, almost as if hit by a jolt of electricity, a committee to organize an international exhibition of decorative art was put together in Turin, the most Francophile of Italy's cities; the exhibition would be held in 1902. The imperative for all participants was to exhibit “modern” works; copies of older works were banned and Italian artists and firms were encouraged to make efforts towards a radical renewal in order to have a highly original, harmonious exhibition of the new energy of youth throughout the country. Eleven foreign countries took part (Scotland separately from England). This was the first world exhibition to be dedicated exclusively to the decorative arts; until then, the world fairs that began in 1851 were exhibitions in which participants showcased all sorts of products.

Eugenio Quarti, one of the great woodworkers of Italian Art Nouveau between Bugatti and Ernesto Basile (1857-1932) was sent to Paris at the age of 14 to serve an apprenticeship at a renowned Paris inlayers' workshop, where he stayed for several years. Upon his return to Milan, he trained briefly under Carlo Bugatti, who introduced him to the city's artistic circles; in 1888 he opened his own workshop, where he initially produced copies of Bugatti's furniture. Over the course of the 1890s, he developed his own highly refined style, sophisticated in both design and execution, an original and personal adherence to modernism and one of the best expressions of Italian Art Nouveau. His debut was influenced by his early French training and his apprenticeship with a cosmopolitan artist: as early as the 1880s Bugatti had a studio apartment at Rue de Suffren and exhibited his work in Paris.

France also deeply influenced the careers of the Palermo-born furniture-maker Vittorio Ducrot (1867-1942) and the architect Ernesto Basile. Their partnership resulted in one of the high points of Italian Art Nouveau, fuelled by the cosmopolitan worldview of the Florio family, wealthy Palermo entrepreneurs who had introduced the avant-garde to Sicily's elite. The Florios travelled to Paris twice a year to renew their wardrobe and jewellery, their special wagons loaded with linen, servants, and cooks. They staged adventurous car races illustrated in their magazine Rapiditas,
Duilio Cambellotti,
stock bond for the Ducrot company, 1907

Victor Ducrot was a French engineer who had designed and overseen the construction of the Cairo-Ismailia railway line in Egypt probably during the sixties of the 19th century, after completing his work, he boarded a ship to Marseilles along with his pregnant wife. The ship stop over at Palermo in Sicily, where Ducrot’s sister-in-law lived and worked as a milliner for the local aristocracy. The couple wanted to pay her a visit, but earlier the ship stopped also at the island Malta, where several of the passengers who boarded it were ill with cholera. An epidemic broke out on board, Ducrot died, and his wife disembarked in Palermo, where Vittorio Ducrot was born in 1867. Subsequently his mother married Carlo Golia, who owned a furniture store that would import furniture from France and make copies. In 1899 Ducrot, who took over from his stepfather Golia, hired as a designer Ernesto Basile, a young architect who was the son of another important Sicilian architect. Together they would produce furniture, lamps, rugs, textiles, glass works, and wrought iron, and hired other artists for decorations. They took part in all the major exhibitions of their day: Turin 1902, Milan 1906, and the first editions of the Venice Biennale in 1903, 1905, and 1909. The Ducrot - Basile partnership was a key turning point for Italian Art Nouveau. French entrepreneurship and taste were a key complement to Basile’s talent, which could blossom to its fullest, safe in the perfect renditions of the Ducrot firm. Basile expressed an autonomous and original modernist vision, contaminated by Norman and Arab elements, which was among Italian avant-garde the highlights. Ducrot, with his Francophile culture (he married a Frenchwoman, Jeanne Durand, who had a conservation restoration workshop for the precious and ancient textiles her husband-to-be bought in Paris) and an entrepreneurial spirit highly atypical for a Sicilian, launched his own line, summoning expert inlayers from France. They introduced a typically French style featuring coils and decorations that recalled Majorelle’s contemporaneous works, albeit with a more rigid approach featuring sophisticated fruitwood inlays adorning the smooth parts. Ducrot became a major manufacturer, and would eventually specialize in outfitting transoceanic lines. Basile, whose partnership with Vittorio Ducrot ended in 1909, became one of Italy’s leading architects and designers.

It is worth relating how fate impacted the history of Art Nouveau in Sicily. Victor Ducrot was a French engineer who had designed and overseen the construction of the Cairo-Ismailia railway line in Egypt probably during the sixties of the 19th century, after completing his work, he boarded a ship to Marseilles along with his pregnant wife. The ship stop over at Palermo in Sicily, where Ducrot’s sister-in-law lived and worked as a milliner for the local aristocracy. The couple wanted to pay her a visit, but earlier the ship stopped also at the island Malta, where several of the passengers who boarded it were ill with cholera. An epidemic broke out on board, Ducrot died, and his wife disembarked in Palermo, where Vittorio Ducrot was born in 1867. Subsequently his mother married Carlo Golia, who owned a furniture store that would import furniture from France and make copies. In 1899 Ducrot, who took over from his stepfather Golia, hired as a designer Ernesto Basile, a young architect who was the son of another important Sicilian architect. Together they would produce furniture, lamps, rugs, textiles, glass works, and wrought iron, and hired other artists for decorations. They took part in all the major exhibitions of their day: Turin 1902, Milan 1906, and the first editions of the Venice Biennale in 1903, 1905, and 1909. The Ducrot - Basile partnership was a key turning point for Italian Art Nouveau. French entrepreneurship and taste were a key complement to Basile’s talent, which could blossom to its fullest, safe in the perfect renditions of the Ducrot firm. Basile expressed an autonomous and original modernist vision, contaminated by Norman and Arab elements, which was among Italian avant-garde the highlights. Ducrot, with his Francophile culture (he married a Frenchwoman, Jeanne Durand, who had a conservation restoration workshop for the precious and ancient textiles her husband-to-be bought in Paris) and an entrepreneurial spirit highly atypical for a Sicilian, launched his own line, summoning expert inlayers from France. They introduced a typically French style featuring coils and decorations that recalled Majorelle’s contemporaneous works, albeit with a more rigid approach featuring sophisticated fruitwood inlays adorning the smooth parts. Ducrot became a major manufacturer, and would eventually specialize in outfitting transoceanic lines. Basile, whose partnership with Vittorio Ducrot ended in 1909, became one of Italy’s leading architects and designers.

Dedicated to the recently-invented automobile, and yacht races whose first prize was jewellery designed by René Lalique (1860-1945). The cosmopolitan Florio funded Ernesto Basile’s first Modernist building, Villa Igea, which was built by the Ducrot firm in 1898 and remains the most elegant Art Nouveau hotel in Palermo to this day.
France also played a key role for Carlo Bugatti. Born in Milan in 1856 into a family of artists and inventors - it was said that his grandfather, a sculptor, investigated the origins of perpetual motion - he attended the Accademia di Brera and subsequently, between 1879 and 1885, the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. His style achieved the full maturity we know today in 1888, when the gallerist Vittore Grubicy organized a major exhibition of Italian divisionist painters in London. Carlo had close intellectual ties with the divisionist group, and additionally his sister Bice was Segantini’s partner (they would have four children together), and when the couple moved into their home in Maloja, in the Alps, he designed its truly astonishing furniture, some of which was painted by Segantini himself.

We know that the Liberty department store sold his works in London and in its Paris branch at Avenue de l'Opera, and we also know that a major Italian furniture manufacturer Meroni and Fossati based in Lissone, Lombardy and with a plant in Clamart (Seine, France), advertised in a 1899 French-language catalogue a series of Meubles et sièges mauresques that were in fact Bugatti's models. Bugatti, who had always kept a close eye on copyright issues (to protect himself from his many imitators) had sold the rights to sell copies of his works abroad.
At the 1900 World Fair in Paris, three different stands featured Bugatti's works: his own stand, titled “artistic furniture” and which was awarded the silver medal; that of his former partner and brother-in-law G.B. Osio, who displayed “Bugatti-style” furniture; and the firm Meroni and Fossati stand with his so-called _Meubles mauresques_.

The furniture he displayed in 1902 in Turin was totally transformed: the wood was fully covered with white parchment and forms were decidedly zoomorphic and ovoid. Imagination completely took over function, so that the displays looked entirely unfamiliar and incomprehensible for the audience, while the critics were nonplussed; additionally, their cost was beyond the means of even the wealthiest of buyers. Likely due to his disappointment in failing to sell his new products, Bugatti sold his workshop in Milan and nearly fifty years old, moved to Paris around 1904, where he established a partnership with the caster Adrien-Aurélien Hébrard, in whose factory he would produce highly inventive bronze and silverware.

Thanks to documents published on the occasion of the Bugatti exhibition held at the Musée d’Orsay in 2001, we know that as early as 1894 the artist had a home on Avenue de Suffren, and in that same year he exhibited at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Although he never gave up his Italian passport, the second half of his life - and that of his famous children, the animalier sculptor Rembrandt and the inventor of machines and motors Ettore - took place in France.

Bugatti was influenced by no one, having himself been credited with creating an original, autonomous style - albeit rooted in the exoticism that was fashionable in Europe at the time. His cosmopolitanism, his international clients, and his entrepreneurship were fuelled by the time spent in Paris as a youth, and indeed in the latter part of his life he returned to France, his second home.