

Achille Salvagni, a New Participant at PAD London, Explains What he Loves About This City

BY ARCHANA KHARE-GHOSE | OCTOBER 03, 2018



Architect-designer Achille Salvagni, who has his flagship atelier in London's Mayfair, is participating in PAD London for the first time. (Paolo Pertignani)

London, like New York and Paris, is so well-known and so high on the wish list of travelers that it almost seems unlikely you could find something new about it. Yet, every visitor has his own unique version of London, which makes it worth a fresh discovery on every visit.

With fairs such as the Frieze Masters, Frieze London, PAD London and 1:54 African Contemporary Art Fair, the city is in the middle of an energetic cultural season that also features top annual art auctions, and new exhibitions in almost all big museums and galleries.

In order to provide some guidance to arts-oriented visitors, BLOUIN ARTINFO spoke with Achille Salvagni, the Roman-born architect who is known for his award-winning designs for luxury residences and super yachts and who is a new figure at PAD London.

In 2002, Salvagni established his architectural and interior design firm Salvagni Architetti, and in 2013, he founded Achille Salvagni Atelier, a studio devoted to the production of his limited edition furniture and lighting. In 2015, he opened the London flagship atelier in Mayfair. Represented by Maison Gerard in New York, Salvagni is a frequent visitor to London and enjoys the unique position of knowing the city both as a local and an outsider. He shares all that he loves about London here.

What is the most exciting thing about participating in PAD London?

PAD London is one of the major events for collectable design in London during the autumn, participating in it for the first time after only three years of existence in London is a real honor and very challenging. We are looking forward to present our work in Berkeley square and finding a new audience.

When did you first visit London and what has continued to pull you back to the city since then?

I came here from a young age and have always been amazed by the energy and really unique status that London has within Europe. It constantly evolves and improves and this is why I chose to open my flagship store here rather than anywhere else. It occupies a unique place in the world and continues to attract a global elite of discerning collectors and thankfully now also boasts some of the best restaurants in the world.

What is your favorite time of the year to visit London and why?

The autumn in London is a particular time of year where a lot of events happen. The energy of the city is at its peak and the atmosphere then is very unique. The trees turn their beautiful autumnal color and if it's not raining I love walking the streets under the street lamps once it has turned dark and observing passers by.

Given your unique position as a non-resident who knows the city as well as a resident, what do you think is the most defining feature of London?

London can be defined as much for its generous mix of cultures as for the discerning taste of its residents. The art, design and fashion scene here is extremely strong and the fact they celebrate all these things with various art, design and fashion weeks is amazing. There is always something to look forward to which is a very nice state of mind to be in.

What do you think makes London great and what is the best manifestation of that greatness in the city?

I love the history of this great city, and of course we have great history in Rome also. But I think that there is a much larger cultural mix here and seeing all of those cultures rub together, crossover and inspire each other is amazing, it really allows you to believe that anything is possible.

Could you recommend some iconic London landmarks — touristy or non-touristy — that one must visit if they are on a short trip?

The Royal Academy of Arts, especially as they are now celebrating their 250th anniversary and opposite to Fortnum and Mason for their quintessentially British take on retail.

London is a city rich with cultural heritage. Which is your favorite heritage venue of the city that you want to keep going back to?

Westminster Cathedral — it's not all that old, but it is an amazing piece of architecture and it is filled with a collection of mosaics by numerous different artists of the early 20th -century arts and crafts movement.

What museums or galleries you would recommend one must definitely visit in the city, even if short on time?

The Victoria and Albert Museum, it has a world-leading program and is really tuned into design which is very refreshing.

Where do you like to eat out when in London and what do you like best about the fare served in those restaurants? Any favourite London savory that you recommend visitors must definitely try out? And where?

Breakfast at the Wolseley always makes for a great start to the day and my local restaurant, Isabel, is always a pleasure to dine at, the staff is superb and the food is delicious. I am looking forward to trying out Hide when I come over for PAD as I have heard very good things.

What would you do if you had a free morning or afternoon in London?

I would have a sneak peek at the vintage design shops of Pimlico, visit the auction houses to see what they currently have for sale and tour some of the big gallery shows, particularly if there is some Italian influence to be found.

Where would you dash off to for a quick coffee and/ or snack?

Chucs on Dover Street, it's intimate and you immediately feel at home there.

What are the best bars in the city to hang out at?

Brown's is one of the most iconic hotels in Mayfair where you can find excellent cocktails in a unique British atmosphere. In the summer I also really enjoy the American Bar at The Stafford, they have a wonderful cobbled mews with tables outside.

Could you recommend some streets to hang out at to absorb the city's night life?

I am an early bird but occasionally I would spend my evenings either in Mayfair or in Chelsea. Recently I have had dinner at Helene Darroze at the Connaught, Sketch, Alyn Williams at The Westbury and Mark's Club. Each one very different but all memorable experiences.

What are your favorite theatres to check out new plays and other live performances?

The Royal Opera House and the Royal Albert Hall, both institutions within London always have outstanding programs.

Do you have a favorite London book? If yes, what do you like best about the way it describes London?

The city guide by Louis Vuitton where you have a selection of unknown places divided by neighborhoods. It emphasizes historic places, which are really refreshing.

Where in the city would you go to catch up on a book or to catch up with a friend?

I would go to Maison Assouline for their selection of books as well as for the Swans Bar they have there.

Where would you advise visitors to go shopping?

We are a bit spoiled in Mayfair, between the fashion on Bond Street and the wonders of Selfridges and Fortnum and Mason, however, for a truly memorable experience and to find something a little bit extraordinary I always enjoy the Burlington Arcade, especially at Christmas time and of course Savile Row.

What's the best souvenir to take away from London?

Memories of a great visit, good meetings and enjoyable meals with friends.

Anything unusual or any hidden surprises about London that you have discovered in your trips yourself, something that a guide book does not mention?

The Foundling Museum, their art collection is inspiring and their story is wonderful.

If you were to have one London photo as a display pic on any device/ social media account, what would it be?

For me it would have to be an aerial shot, bird's eye view of London, showing it's great breadth and the river Thames snaking through it. Although London is still learning how to use its river effectively, if I was to live here I would definitely want to have a river view, it is mesmerizing and ever-changing which keeps it interesting, like London itself.

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