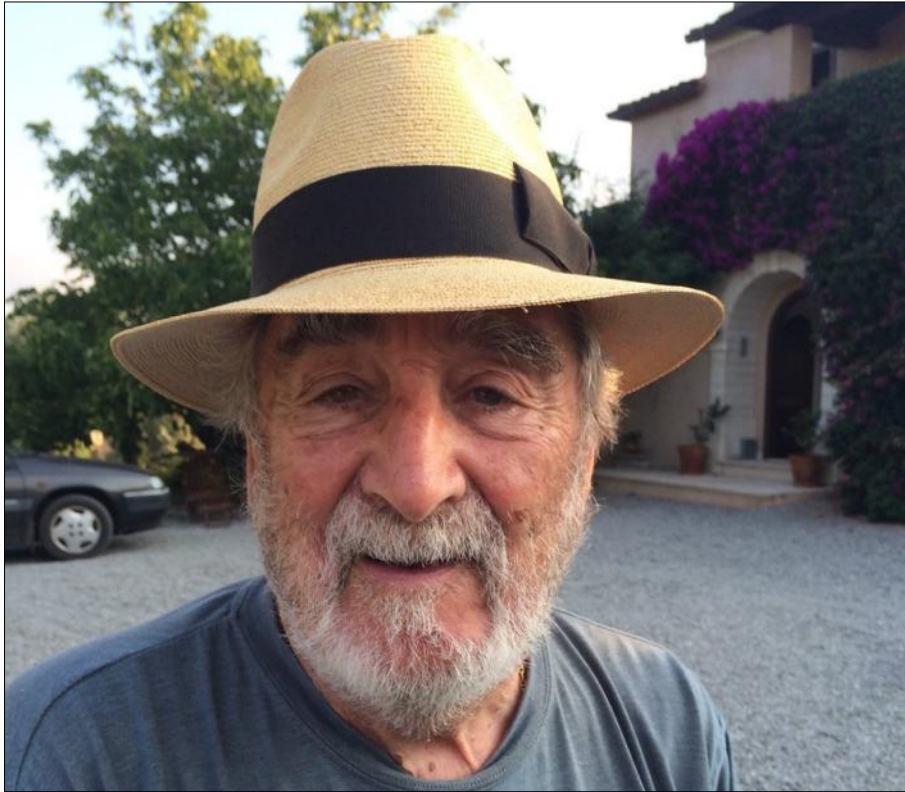


Luigi Giffone

Born 1927

Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk



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1. Living with Design

*John Worthington (right), a co-founder with Luigi Giffone of DEGW, wrote the following as a foreword to Giffone's book *The Briefest of Briefs*, which was published in Italian.*

The Briefest of Briefs encapsulates a very special architect's reflections of over seventy years of life and practice driven by design. For Luigi work and living are intimately interwoven by the continuous exploration, questioning and testing of propositions through the medium of design.



I have had the enjoyment of knowing Luigi for over fifty years as a professional colleague, friend of the family, mentor and guiding light, but above all as a collaborative explorer of ideas, generous in sharing insights and open to divergent opinions with common values. This is also the story of DEGW a unique global strategic design consultancy, founded in 1973 and active for forty years before becoming Strategy Plus within Aecom a global multi-disciplinary engineering practice. The name and values of the founders Duffy, Eley, Giffone and Worthington, lives on as the DEGW Living Archive at the University of Reading. Housed in the Special Collections are the founding partner's project and papers from our rich and varied careers in practice, teaching, communicating, mentoring and contributing to civil society. Luigi's thinking both contributed to and has been shaped by the development of the practice focus on the management of change and thinking through design.

Design is *the plan or specification for the construction of an object or system* and as a process is shaped by the brief which explores and articulates *what a new project or product should do*. Design and Briefing are integral, iterative and inclusive bringing together physical and organisational innovation. Thinking through Design as Luigi identifies is of critical importance to both politicians and architects, equally relevant to both innovators of built structure and organisational and operating systems. If Architecture is the *meaningful making of spaces in their light* (Louis Kahn). I would define **inclusive Design** as *the meaningful and elegant allocation of resources*. The word elegant being used as in describing a mathematical equation.

Taking design out of the exclusive role of physical creation and giving the opportunity for all to engage in meaningful and effective dialogue is at the heart of Luigi's five essential elements of a design brief:

1. The goal: Identifying the nature of a problem and agreeing the outcome expected. A continuous process of evaluation adaptation and improvement which continues through the life of the building. Kahn, who was continually searching and refining the meaning underlying his design would remind us that *you only know what to build when the project is completed*.
2. Ways and means: the definition of the problem may have been defined by the need for a new building, the most effective way of solving the problem might

not be a new building but to use the information technology more effectively and restructure the way of working.

3. The budget of resources: Identifying the range of resources required and using them effectively
4. Monitoring implementation: In a rapidly changing world continuously monitoring and measuring performance against expectations
5. Maintaining validity through time: At the heart of DEGW's thinking was change and the layering of time to recognise the permanence of design decisions from changing **Settings** several times a day to the life span of the building **Shell**.

Luigi has always recognised that in design *there is no space for single mindedness*. We live in a paradoxical world of conflicting demands. We wish to be *both* secure *and* accessible, have privacy and yet be part of a community. Solutions are a balance between seemingly conflicting interests and expectations, providing the vitality, ambiguity and inclusiveness that creates places we enjoy and value.

Luigi brought to his personal relationships and practice a desire for a plurality of inputs, mediated by dialogue, and steered by agreed principles and shared values. This publication, above all testifies to the value he continues to place on the act of drawing to formulate propositions, communicate the outcomes, share ideas and stimulate action.

Design to Luigi is a way of life and drawing a means of imagining, modelling and testing outcomes. I commend the Briefest of Briefs to all who wish to create more inclusive, enjoyable and pleasurable places through capturing the additional value from **Inclusive Design** bringing together both spatial and organisational innovation.

Thank you dear Luigi for a lasting friendship and providing a shining exemplar to guide me in the final stage of my career.

2. Working with IBM

This chapter is formed of extracts from Luigi Giffone's Annual DEGW Founders' Lecture given at the Royal College of Physicians, London, in November 2004.

One day in 1954 I was given the chance of a lifetime, a three month summer of work experience in the USA. This was eventually extended to become three years of total immersion in the world of the Anglo Saxons, the first of several such experiences. My Mediterranean tendencies towards passivity and reaction were transformed by the proactive quality of American life. For me the phrase 'Let's have a plan' became a lasting legacy of working and studying in the New World.

I began to understand the pluralistic nature of the American architectural profession, the vital importance of communications in all design projects, the necessity for and the benefits of listening to and exchanging ideas with colleagues, as well as the ethical obligation to find ways of helping even the most taciturn and reluctant of clients to articulate their needs and aspirations.

It was refreshing, in fact inspiring, to experience personally the unpretentious approachability of Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe. Seeing Ludwig Hilbersheimer on his push bike and casquette pedalling down Lake Shore Drive in Chicago was the complete antithesis of my Roman maestros, who, in the midst of post war austerity, were accustomed to arrive at the campus in their chauffeur driven limos.

At DEGW we had many happy client relationships, and let me explain just one – with IBM Netherlands for whom we worked in the 1970s, on the briefing, space planning and office interior design of their Plant Administration Centre near Schipol Airport and then on two major interventions on the interior design of the plant itself. The offices turned out to be highly satisfactory, so much so that the workers on the assembly line demanded the same attention to their working conditions.

This result was much more than a straightforward interior design exercise; the whole plan of the assembly line was revolutionised. Instead of the original simple linear assembly line where only the handful of workers in charge of the finishing processes saw the finished work procession machines (the technological wonder of their time) a series of much smaller assembly 'loops' were created in each of which a team of fifteen to twenty people was given complete responsibility for creating the finished products from beginning to end.

This re-planning, which in terms of the design of the work process was a major advance on Taylorist principles of factory production, gave DEGW the opportunity to reinvent the factory workplace by expanding the interior space upwards and creating space divisions for the teams with super graphics and signage attached to the conveyor lifting towers and overhead runs. Certainly this was a victory for the blue collar workers but it was also a managerial success, resulting in better collaboration in the assembly process, more effective quality control, a re-skilling of the entire assembly staff, and, as a final bonus, more efficient space use.

Our third IBM Netherlands project was the improvement of working conditions in the heavier, more machine intensive parts of the plant, again stimulated by popular demand. Acoustic conditions were improved and a simple colour coding for each type of process was provided – red for electric, blue for compressed air, orange for heat treatment, etc. We could not, of course stop the workflow so the changes were made piecemeal over weekends to that for a few months the place looked more like a candy store than a machine shop.

This particular series of projects was successful for a number of reasons. Firstly IBM was really serious about improving not just work conditions but work flow. Secondly end user participation was promoted and encouraged. Thirdly the projects became self-sustaining – the two latter projects being, in effect, encores. This is what happens when all interested constituencies become excited and involved. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, the project manager, Ben van Leuven, contributed his own special mixture of Dutch thoroughness and Oriental sensitivity in addressing all unresolved issues.

I am happy to be part of the DEGW family. I began my talk with a reference to the fascist imperatives of my youth in Italy – Believe! Obey! Fight!. What my experience of briefing at DEGW has taught me over the years is exactly the opposite – Question! Imagine! Collaborate!.

3. Life in Calabria



Interviewer: With Calabria enjoying such an enviable life style, it's no surprise that people from all walks of life are moving here. Jennifer Bentley and husband Luigi spent half their lives in the USA and the UK and half in Italy. I went to find out more.

Why have you brought me here, Jenny, to this building?

This is where Luigi and I came. This is the house that he designed. It was a convent, and we used to live downstairs here. And I just think it is the most beautiful spot.

It is, it's stunning. Luigi tell me a bit about the convent project, and how it came about.

The project was that I wanted to come back to my roots, my village. To where I grew up during the holidays in my youth, after living for about 40 years abroad. I was looking for a place that had roots in the past and would allow me to transform it into a house which would be a place to live but would also provide a kind of continuation, because my family is originally from here. We transformed it during three years of suffering to turn it into habitable space!

It surely can't have all been bad!

It was very bad. When we found it, the courtyard was full up to a level of two metres with detritus. Dis-assembled motor cycles and dead cats. The main problem was that because it was a joint venture my other partners insisted on giving the job to the cheapest builder possible, who also turned out to be the most expensive one because we had to do things three or four time again.

Jenny, you obviously lived with Luigi through the pain while he was renovating this building. How is it different now to what it was beforehand?

Well we fitted it out with the most marvellous marble bathroom, and great big living room, kitchens and everything. The whole place has been completely transformed. The courtyard has been transformed as you see. It's just beautiful.

Luigi, as an architect, what sort of buildings really inspire you?

A building that has good bones. Like a lady. If her bones are good she will be beautiful all her life.

Jenny you live here six months of the year. What do you like about the life style?

The weather and the sea. And the pace of life, which is very much slower than in England. Also the eating and the food.

Luigi, as an Italian, how do you find life here different from that back in the UK?

Very relaxing, in a certain way. You can sit in a café. You can walk about and sit in the sun. I am not retired, I am still working, so that can be frustrating. But it is absolutely delightful. It is what I always dreamed of. Which is to do nothing, and sit in a nice climate, and possibly go to the beach if I have the time. The water is usually nice and warm most of the summer. And I think just doing nothing is my ideal. We go and have a coffee in a café, which you can make last all morning. We go and buy the paper. Then have another coffee, or maybe an aperitif, and by that time it's lunchtime. I feel twenty years younger when I am here. It's because of the air.

Jenny, tell me about shopping for food.

I love the fruit and vegetables, which are so fresh. They are mis-shapen, which adds character to it. I love the very spicy sausage. And the Ricotta cheese which they make here. But I do miss the English bacon.

4. Uncle and Niece

Lyndsey Holland, a friend of Luigi Giffone's niece Lizzy Hadfield, writes for her blog Ropes of Holland (www.ropesofholland.com) about a visit with Lizzy to Luigi Giffone in Italy. A widower, Luigi was at the time of the visit 91 years old.

Interviewed in a bustling Italian café, I spoke to Lizzy Hadfield and Luigi Giffone. Uncle to Lizzy, Luigi Giffone is nothing short of an incredible man. Lizzy has told me so many stories of Luigi, he's even got a biography out (but sadly for this single-lingual girl, it's in Italian).

Let's begin with Lizzy (right) as after all she's my connection to the wonderful Luigi. Lizzy was born in Leeds, to proud parents Clive and Anne. She grew up in the same house for 17 years, in rural Yorkshire. The kind of rural that doesn't even offer you a corner shop within walking distance. Lizzy spent the entirety of her educational years in private education. She fondly remembers how much she enjoyed school, but also realises how much of a strange bubble that cast over her life as she was growing up, and how that bubble is only popped once you leave to go to college or university. It's then she began to realise just how much privilege she had, and was surrounded by. Lizzy (now this doesn't shock me, knowing her now) was very studious, never had a detention and made some great friends.



From school Lizzy went off to do an art foundation year at Leeds College of Art, which she tells me was where she met some of her now, closest friends. Lizzy describes how much of a learning curve it was to be around new peers who all had the same ideals and came from a much different background. Lizzy did not enjoy the course at this time, she was craving the academic learning's that she had previously loved- to the point where she recollects having to write only one essay throughout the entire course, and that it was her favorite part of the year!

This makes me laugh because I would have done anything to get out of writing at uni. This love of something more challenging prompted Lizzy to return to something a little more academic, and she got on to a degree course in History of Art at Leeds University.

She rewinds here to tell me that at the age of 17, in the last year of secondary school, her dad Clive died. Lizzy recalls that this huge loss led her to be reliant on her mum, Anne, and she feels that it slowed down what might have been 'the usual' pathway of moving out to go to university, so she stayed at

home with her mum. Lizzy had every intention of moving out, maybe even going away to Manchester University to study, where her then boyfriend was studying too. It just didn't feel right for Lizzy at the time and of course, every single one of us manages grief in a different way.

Lizzy lived at home with her mum during the course of her first year on the History of Art Degree, and come second year, Lizzy was able to buy a house, which she then shared with her friends as basically, her student house. She feels that it was a mistake to do this, as usually, when students move out into rented accommodation it's a bit of a carefree thing, everyone is relaxed and doesn't really have too much responsibility because that's what a landlord/lady is for.

It seemed that Lizzy had made an already daunting task of leaving home, more daunting by living with friends in the house she owned, thus creating a feeling of huge responsibility for her. Lizzy had a bad experience with this overall as the two friends she was living with really did not get on, and there was pressure from one of the girls on Lizzy to sort their grievances out, often. This is where Lizzy explains that she is still really close with one of the girls, but the other turned out to be the most toxic relationship she would ever experience and it made moving out fairly miserable, and Lizzy ended up spending most weekends back at home with her mum.

University was a really fun time for Lizzy, but again she remained as studious as ever, not really partying or drinking, but hitting the books instead, as that's what made her happiest. With this in mind, she doesn't really feel she experienced university fully, aside from in a learning capacity. She hastens to add that it was at this time she started her blog, 'Shot From the Street' so she doesn't regret the way she experienced university because it allowed her the focus she needed to get her blog off the ground.

I mentioned Lizzy's then boyfriend earlier; the two of them got together when they were 18. Living apart whilst at respective universities in Leeds and Manchester. Once Lizzy graduated, and once they had been in a relationship for 4 years, Lizzy took another big leap and moved to Manchester to live with him whilst he finished his 7 year long architecture degree. This would be the first time that Lizzy would really enjoy living away from home. She loved living with him and loved living in Manchester which owed to the strong and happy place in her relationship she was in with her boyfriend at the time.

Manchester was home to Lizzy for 18 months, when the time came for herself and her boyfriend to part ways, after realising they had grown apart and were on different career, and well, life pathways. I'll say here that this is where my life in particular became infinitely better because Lizzy moved to London, right round the corner from where I live!

Shot From the Street was growing in such a wonderful way that Lizzy felt that the next logical career progression would be to move to London, even though she wasn't entirely thrilled about the idea to begin with. Thankfully it was the best decision because she was able to be close to best friends and cultivate new and meaningful friendships. Lizzy moved into a 1 bedroom flat in Notting Hill on her own, which was again, very daunting for a Yorkshire lass who had to be coaxed gently out of the North!

There was an incredibly overwhelming time here, with Lizzy feeling as though so much was changing and all at once. The jolt out of her comfort zone taught her so much and for her career, really propelled her forwards. Especially as she was working more than ever as a distraction to make sure she was busy and happy living alone. Lizzy has recently signed to agency Next Model Management under their talent division and things are going incredibly well, and for me, as a proud pal, I love watching her flourish.

Let's chat to the wonderful Luigi. Luigi is 91 years old. He is Italian; born and bred out of Tropea, but if you think for a second he has spent most of his life in Italy, you'd be misguided. Luigi is a world-renowned architect, and he has worked all around the world. His company was called DEGW, it was London based, and they revolutionised office planning around the world. Luigi also worked for Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago. Which is something of a huge deal.

Outside of his accomplished work, his personal projects demonstrated his passion for unique buildings and spaces where he used his skills as a space planner to transform historic buildings such as convents, and even boats! More on that later....

I asked Luigi to kind of take it from the top, and start with what school life was like for him, so we can get a feel of where his interests came from.

Luigi starts by telling me that secondary school was a good time for him. It was the first year he would be spending in Rome, which he explains was exciting because he was able to explore a new town, go to a good school and experience what it was like to be part of a non-religious and very liberal society. When I ask Luigi about his friends during this time, he explains that he had a very interesting group.

One of his friends was (now concentrate hard on this one...) the son of the doctor of the Pope Pyrus the 12th. This friend was raised with two sisters, and Luigi exclaims that he was "almost a sissy" because of such a female influence at home. There was one occasion Luigi recalls when his friend was sent off to high school with a hairpin in his hair! And he comments that his friend was very shy so this made it all the funnier.

He fast-forwards to a school reunion where the two friends met again, some 30 years later. It was supposed to be a 'boys' thing, and Luigi remembers his

friend giving him a nudge to look in the direction of the Brazilian woman sat at another table close by, and he explained to Luigi that it was his wife, who had allowed him to meet with the boys but would not let him out of her sight!

Another friend Luigi recalls, was very independent, and actually ended up being head of the air force for Batista the Dictator Banana rep! A real motley crew of friends, he says.

Luigi's desire to create started from a young age. Even though he wanted to be an architect all along, he was actually an engineer first, but always remembers feeling unclear about the route to become an architect, and engineering felt like a short cut to him.

To add another string to his bow, Luigi was always so curious of medicine too. The link between the human body and engineering was close for him as he likened the way in which they operated to one another. That being said, it didn't last long, his curiosity for medicine. He registered to study medicine at the University of Rome, and switched to engineering, straight after the first anatomy lesson!

The study of architecture was 5 years long, studying at Rome uni. Luigi completed some exams and got credits from engineering, but never actually finished the degree as he was offered to go to America for 3 months, but instead of 3 months he stayed for 3 years, and continued studies of architecture there. This would be his first job as an architect in America.

We move on to talk about relationships in Luigi's life and he jumps straight to the exciting kind. Romantic!

He says, "for me, they were all romantic!" Luigi found that America at the time was a very liberal country, especially since Luigi was arriving from a very Catholic Rome. He recalls, in America in the 50's, if you approached a girl on the first night she would always say "no!" and Luigi would always ask "why not?" in his very persuasive and cheeky Italian accent.

This new lifestyle was a discovery, and so very different from Italy. The girls were wearing corsets at this time, and Luigi tells me that you could never see a nice pair of bosoms! Luigi, sounds gutted, at this point.

Luigi tells me about how he had very good friends, particularly throughout his working life. His boss in particular gave him the task of running a whole branch of the company which showed a lot of trust and meant that Luigi was really at the top of his game, and when the company got into trouble, his boss approached him and advised him to look elsewhere for a job, to make sure he would not be out of work. True pals.

Luigi jumps back into talking about love, and not just love, but the love of his life, Jenny who was Lizzy's aunty. They met when Luigi was 50 and Jenny

28, in 1975 in Iran whilst Luigi was working and Jenny had just ended a 10-year relationship. Jenny was heartbroken and was there to get over said heartbreak by becoming an au pair for a family out there. Luigi explains how he had to chase Jenny for 5 years until she gave in on playing hard to get- at that time she was highly engaged with a local boy, and Luigi with a Scottish girl who came over to Iran to visit him.

He goes on to say that for those 5 years, they were both, situated. Then when the revolution in Iran came, Jenny left first to head to London with the local boy Luigi speaks of, and then Luigi left - to follow Jenny, naturally. Luigi left later than Jenny, and ended up rather fleeing than leaving, and in the rush to leave to safety; he lost his possessions and a sizable amount of money. Luigi tracked Jenny down in London through a mutual friend. He says, at first when he found her, she still wouldn't have anything to do with him. The chase continued.

One day, Jenny arrived at Luigi's doorstep with a suitcase. It transpired that her bath had overflowed, gone through the ceiling and her landlord wouldn't fix it! Luigi and Jenny lived together for about a year as brother and sister. They even went on holiday to Tunisia, and Jenny would push Luigi towards other women. Then finally in 1980, they became a couple. By that time Luigi had already bought his 'big boat' (which makes me wonder how small his small boat was!) to work his architect magic on, only to find out Jenny was afraid of the sea! The boat was on stilts and even Jenny's elderly father came up high to see it and Jenny would not set foot near it even then.



Luigi and Jenny.

Luigi tells me that the years he spent with Jenny were the best of his life. That it was really a union made in heaven. Luigi says he was usually gallivanting, and then he met Jenny – all of his other relationships were superficial so not difficult in any way. It was so different with Jenny - if he had an eye for someone else, it was only an eye and nothing else. At the same time, the worst

part of his life was when he lost her and he still misses her so much. He tells me that he often has dreams that she left him because he was too old, and he was 90 in the dream! “She left me!” he says.

I ask Luigi to tell me about his memories of Lizzy growing up.

Luigi explains that most of his memories are fixed in photographs, like when Lizzy would come to the convent (a big convent that he bought, did up and lived in, in Tropea with Jenny later in life) and play with all the soap bottles. Collecting them and putting them back, again and again. And sitting on the steps of the restaurant they would always go to, having a chat with some other children at the age of 2, looking like life was really difficult for her!

Lizzy’s memories of Luigi are of being in Tropea, Italy. Lizzy was much closer to Jenny than Luigi growing up, and Luigi almost seemed so much older to her than Jenny and she remembers that she struggled to place him in her family. So many of her memories that are attached to him are based around all of his houses; the design, especially the secret doors, as all houses would have a room hidden behind a bookcase or a mirror. Lizzy also remembers a sculpture that has been in every house Luigi has lived in that terrified her and always will- the dead head of Saint David. She can place it in every house it’s been to.



I chat to Luigi about what he feels younger people bring to his life. He says they keep him alive, because he has to compete to keep pace with them and it forces him to ask his body to stay young. He has a friend who is 40 years old, a headmistress and she suggested instead of keeping Luigi’s country house empty, why didn’t they invite people to stay in-between Luigi living there when it’s too hot in Tropea and when it’s empty.

Every day 10 to 15 people would be around for lunch, of all different ages. Luigi speaks fondly of this and enjoyed the constant bustling and company of younger people. Luigi talks about the way in which Lizzy brings to him her likeness of Jenny, and how she reminds him of Jenny so much. They have so very much in common, Lizzy and Luigi, the way their minds work in a creative and thoughtful way, the studies they undertook and the way they both love to build beautiful things, whether that's a converted convent or a brand.

Luigi gives me some pearls of wisdom for the younger generation. "Always be curious, never take anything for granted, always query why is it done this way and not that way? Like why should glasses only be on your ear and on your nose, not hanging from your head. He even once designed a pair of glasses that were featured in Milan Fashion Week because of his natural ability to challenge what 'normal' is!

And a final note, "To always persevere, don't give it up, keep fighting until you manage to get it - like I did with Jenny!".
