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# The Turkish Perspective

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

An Interview with Erdem Başçı, Governor of the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey



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## *Competing Against the World* IN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

The company that brought many international awards to Turkey is preparing for worldwide sales with the support of the nation and Endeavor Global

BY CAN GÜRSÜ BY ŞEREF YILMAZ

**W**ENOWHAVE products that are being imitated," began Mehmet Büyükeksi, President of the Turkish Exporters Assembly, on the evening that the 2010 Design Turkey Design

Awards met their recipients. He continued, "We broke out of our shell." Present that night was Ilio, one of the companies that played a significant role in Turkey breaking out of its shell in the field of design. "Cube,"

its flatware set consisting of 12 serving dishes that form a rock-like cube when stacked, was deemed worthy of an award for outstanding design at Design Turkey 2010.

A number of consecutive

successes started rolling in; the brand, having successfully reached a certain point already, started reaping the rewards of what it had been sowing for years. Demirden Design/Ilio, named as one of Turkey's most successful entrepreneurs by Endeavor Turkey on January 19, was one of the two Turkish brands selected as Endeavor High-Impact Entrepreneurs—with Çiçeksepeti, an online flower delivery service—out of companies entered from nine countries. Becoming an Endeavor Entrepreneur is of quite some significance for companies, because before receiving this title, they are assessed in terms of both

entrepreneurial spirit and their business models. Role model potential, growth potential, innovation, and the ability to adapt are perhaps the most difficult criteria to pass in order to become an Endeavor Entrepreneur.

But for a brand like Ilio, such things are not so hard. "All of the panelists who joined our selection panel were very valuable people that are experts in their fields. Important evaluations were made and we received great praise; these things made us very happy," says Demir Obuz, one of the founders of Demirden Design, adding that three months ago, Robert Polet, CEO of the Gucci Group, characterized the brand as one of the two finest design groups he has seen on the planet so far. Having had the chance to meet not only with panelists, but also with many high-level executives thanks to Endeavor Global, the company gained the opportunity to work with two important figures within this group as mentors. Polet, now a mentor to Ilio, is working with the company for the brand to advance. With a unique, innovative approach to housewares and tabletop items, the company has a presence in the world's important design stores, such as Gilt Groupe and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The brand, which takes its name from Ilios, the sun deity of Troy (which is now in modern-day Turkey), takes inspiration from nature in creating a brand new



*Interpreting housewares and tabletop items with an innovative approach, the company has a presence in the world's important design stores, such as Gilt Groupe and the Museum of Modern Art in New York*

look for the functional objects in our daily lives. Its flatware and furniture collections incorporate a balance of such sensitivities as functionality, courage, and beauty. Developing products in the fields of tableware, accessories, and furniture, the company managed to collect highly regarded global design awards like the IF Gold, Red Dot, and Design Plus within a short time. The company also bears the pride of being the first company to bring the IF Gold award to Turkey. When they received

the IF Gold award, says Demir Obuz, one of the other award winners was Apple for the iPhone; they competed against such global giants as Volkswagen and Samsung, and also against increasingly more Turkish participants each passing day.

Demirden Design is a family design firm founded by Mehtap, Sema, and Demir Obuz. Mehtap Obuz is a graduate of METU in Industrial Product Design, Sema Obuz of Marmara University in Product Design, and Demir Obuz of Mimar Sinan University in Industrial Design. "The significance of us being siblings is an important factor in our excellent understanding of each other's design language, our supporting each other in this way, and the formation of teamwork within the company," says Demir Obuz.

The company, founded in 1994 with Mehtap and Demir Obuz, entered the world of design with the design of furniture. "We worked on

statuesque, individual objects that we did both the design and production of; and two years later, we added exhibit and stand design to our range of services," says Demir Obuz. Exhibition design is still a field in which they are active. Expanding its product range in time, the company started creating products in all fields of design in which a brand has needs, such as event design, corporate identity design, brand communication strategy, and graphic design.

In 2008, Demirden Design started trying to do something different in the field of product design, seeking to develop products with an innovative and creative side. Ilio was born as a result of this searching. "In September 2008, we launched Ilio and created the Ilio brand." Within its first year, the brand started appearing in many trend-following magazines and blogs, rising to the top of the pack in this field within a short time. Later, its products started being exhibited at Le Bon Marché Paris, New York, San Francisco, and the Museum of Modern Art in Japan.

"As successful as it has been in the international arena, Ilio also has a broad customer base domestically," says Demir Obuz, pointing out that they have worked with many national, corporatized firms for several years. Such sector leaders as Turkcell, Nokia, and Kale are among the customers of the company, which provides services to many companies in various fields. Among Ilio's latest projects is the renewal and transformation of more than 400 of Kale's retail locations



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both domestic and international. In addition, Demirden Design plays an important role in ad campaign design, print advertising design, and television advertisement design with regard to the development of the Karel brand's corporate identity and brand communication strategy. Turkcell, one of the pioneers of the communications sector, has been their customer for six years, says Demir Obuz, adding that they have appeared together at many events domestically and assisted in their exhibitions at the most recent CEBIT fair.

Demirden Design/Ilio is also one of the first companies to gain the privilege to receive the incentive provided to design firms and agencies by the Undersecretariat of the Prime Ministry for Foreign Trade (DTM). The incentive provided by the DTM within a program aiming for Turkish design to be promoted to the world and for it to contribute to export targets by developing design-based value-added products is split into three groups, namely design agencies, design firms, and design associations. State support is given to companies with export-oriented objectives for expenses ranging from their consultancy fees to trade-marking costs, events abroad,

and printed or published documents at rates of up to 50%. Demir Obuz states that Demirden Design/Ilio is taken as a case study in this effort and that the DTM is working to determine what needs design companies have during their development and what the solutions could be, and that they later gained the right to benefit from the incentives program. Within the scope of this program, the international competitive ability of Turkish design companies is being supported too.

As the significance of design in Turkey rises, one also observes a notable increase in the number of schools. Over 15 schools graduate hundreds of students every year. A sizeable increase is expected to follow in the number of design agencies and firms in the coming years. After 2008, international interest in Turkey started rising too, a process in which the successes of such companies as Demirden Design and Ilio in the global arena have naturally played an important role. Demir Obuz emphasizes that many companies from abroad wish to open design bureaus here and that they themselves have received offers,



adding that there is a significant increase in the number of internship applications coming from abroad.

The company now plans to open "Ilio Corners" in multi-story stores over the next few years, after which it will continue these plans with "Iliosshops." Demir Obuz, who says that they were advised to move toward e-trade at the Endeavor panel in London, states that they will solve this issue within a short time too, and will start Internet sales with the likes of Internet giants such as Amazon. Already producing the majority of its products domestically, the company plans to move the entirety of its production to Turkey through cooperation to come from local partner. Within its first year, Ilio gained acceptance or invitations from stores that many companies have not managed to enter at all. Ilio, which is open to offers for partnership, progresses with the strength of its brand toward becoming a world brand.

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**Ilio's products are exhibited at Le Bon Marché Paris, New York, San Francisco, and the Museum of Modern Art in Japan**

