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megacity's  
newest  
design hub

# ICON

♦  
Design  
worth  
knowing  
♦

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new strengths and  
global expansions

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what "green"  
really means

**Daide Groppi**  
wants you  
to dine like  
Caravaggio

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## DAVIDE GROPPI

The lighting designer's  
restaurants are about darkness  
as much as illumination

BY DAVID MICHON

**I**t's an artistic style that dates from the 17th century, but for lighting designer Davide Groppi, tenebrism is utterly modern. The effect, which dramatically contrasts light and shadow, is one often used by Groppi – for instance in such celebrated restaurants as Le Calandre and Osteria Francescana (both in the north-east of Groppi's native Italy).

Blame it on a return to city-centre living (often contributing to a diminution of space to entertain in private homes), or simply Groppi's nationality, but the restaurant for him represents the most important place where we socialise today. It is a place for a tête-à-tête, to share some closeness with friends or family – but in a public place, with the atmosphere of hubbub and the clattering of silverware.

For La Calandre, the restaurant of famed chef Massimiliano Alajmo, inspiration was drawn from the pioneer of tenebrism, Caravaggio, and his early Supper at Emmaus – a dinner of two disciples and Jesus – in which only the table top and the faces around it are illuminated.

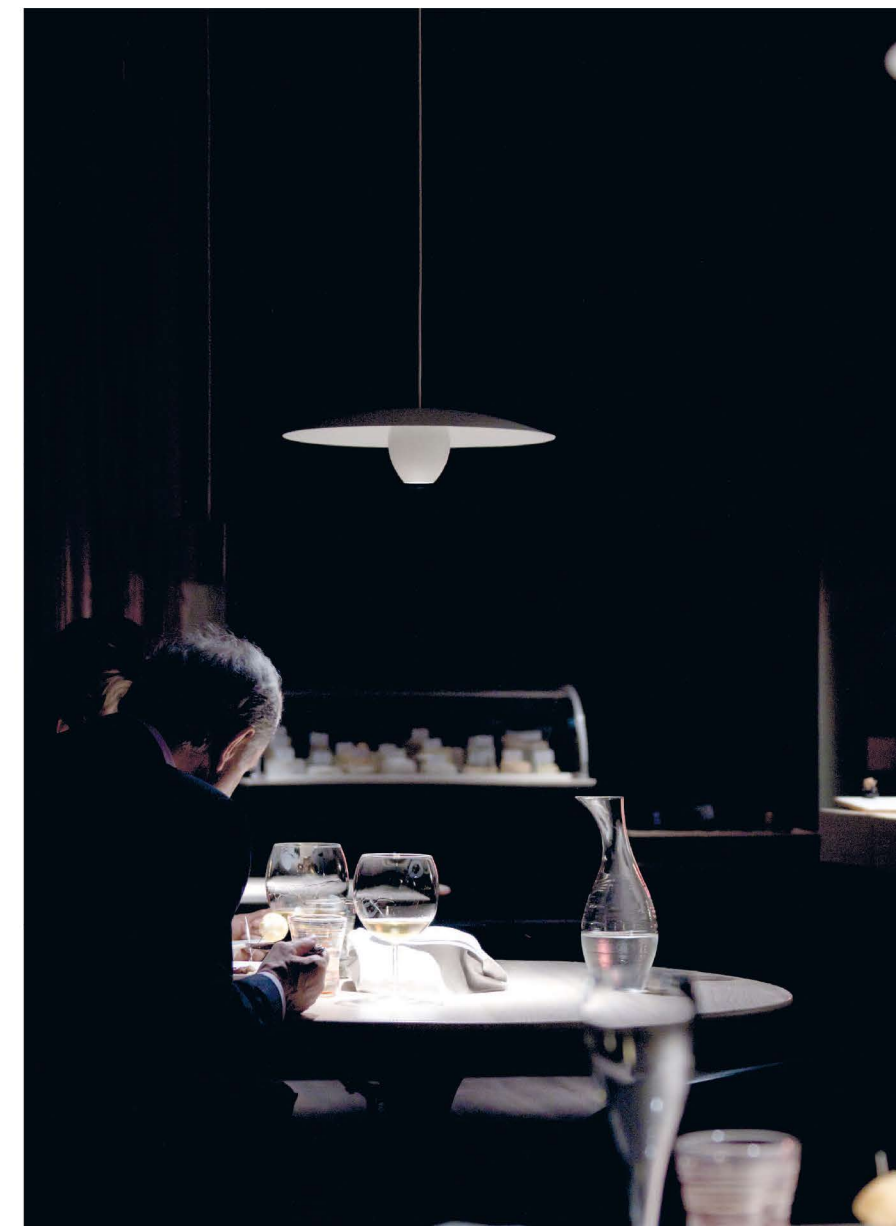
"The darkness," says Groppi, "is just as important as the light ... The idea is to have the light mainly on the table. When that happens, you feel unique in the restaurant. You don't care about the other people – you're focused on your company and what you're eating."

Light, for Groppi, is an "ingredient" – it helps to create the atmosphere that in turn influences your overall experience, including the taste of your food. Groppi said to Alajmo about La Calandre: "You need to work from the dining room, not only from the kitchen."

It has been said: "What begins in the work of Caravaggio is, quite simply, modern painting." What begins with Groppi might, in essence, be a return to the restaurant lighting of the early 17th century – but it's most welcome. ♦

FRANCESCO VERRI/ARND BRONKHORST

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ABOVE Ovonel piatto suspension lamp by Davide Groppi at Le Calandre in Rubano, Padua

LEFT Groppi's Ovo suspension lamp, also at Le Calandre