

ITALIAN FURNITURE DESIGN AFTER 1945

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN
AND THE INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS
OF BİLKENT UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

by

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February 1992

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tarafından başlanmıştır.

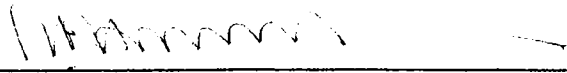
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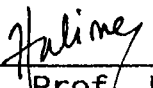
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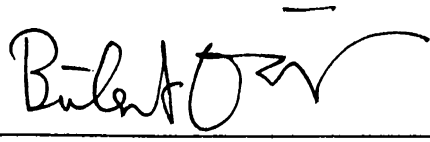
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ABSTRACT

ITALIAN FURNITURE DESIGN AFTER 1945

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M.F.A. in Interior Architecture and Environmental Design

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February, 1992

The aim of this study is to investigate the Italian furniture design from different aspects which has showed an incremental development and has gained an international success after the Second World War. Political, cultural and socio-economic impacts, technological developments and the materials that are used to create innovative designs are discussed in a historical perspective. Various factors that support its success; manufacturing firms, the designers, Milan furniture fairs and Triennials, periodicals and Comosso D'oro awards are analysed. The important design movements and leading designers of Italian furniture design are studied taking into consideration their philosophical and artistic concerns.

Key Words : Italian furniture design, designers, movements

ÖZET

1945 SONRASI İTALYAN MOBİLYA TASARIMI

Sedef AKSOY

İç Mimarlık ve Çevre Tasarımı Bölümü

Yüksek Lisans

Tez Yöneticisi : Doç. Dr. Yıldırım Yavuz

Şubat 1992

Bu çalışmanın amacı İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında giderek artan bir gelişme göstererek uluslararası başarı kazanan İtalyan mobilya tasarımını değişik açılardan incelemektir. Politik, kültürel ve sosyo-ekonomik etkiler, teknolojik gelişmeler, malzemelerin yenilikçi tasarımların yaratımındaki kullanımı tarihsel bir perspektif içinde incelenmiştir. İtalyan mobilya tasarımının başarı kazanmasını destekleyen çeşitli etkenler; üretici firmalar, tasarımcılar, ulusal ve uluslararası Milano mobilya fuarları, süreli yayınlar, Altın Pergel ödülleri araştırılmıştır. Öncü tasarımcılar ve önemli tasarım akımları felsefi ve artistik ilgi alanları göz önüne alınarak incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler:İtalyan Mobilya Tasarımı, tasarımcılar,
akımlar
iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost I would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yıldırım Yavuz for his invaluable supervision, guidance and encouragement during my studies. I would also like to thank Assist. Prof. Mehmet Asatekin for his advice and criticisms in the development of the thesis.

I would like to extend my gratitudes to Feyzan Beler who helped me a lot with her comments throughout the study.

Special thanks to my friend Dr. Tunç Gökçe for his support and friendship during the preparation of the thesis.

Last but not least thanks to my family for their constant support.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Italy, a country which has a rich artistic heritage, has always been a center of inspiration for the great civilisations of Europe and Italians have always played an important role in the design world. Italian furniture design has gained an international success after the Second World War.

During the Second World War, because of fascist censorship, Italy was an unlikely candidate for leadership in many areas and also in the international furniture industry. But, fortunately fascist control in Italy had not been very strong. The war stimulated some technological advances.

After the war, although physically and morally devastated, the situation in Italy didn't seem so unpromising. There was a new democracy emerging from a fascist rule and an optimistic attitude towards the future. Perhaps the most important component of the Italian style was the nation's attitude to liberation. Italians, a naturally free-spirited people embraced liberation with a sense of elation.

The talented designers were ready to respond to the challenge and they attacked design problems without

preconceived ideas, instead relying heavily on their sense of style. There was a combination of a few large scale companies which were ready to adopt the modern requirements and an immense need of penetrating foreign markets.

The combination of all these factors with the contribution of her rich cultural heritage and the support of powerful far-sighted patrons provided Italy an international success in the design world after 1945.

Italian furniture design has displayed a fearless creative drive which stimulated interest and captured imagination in the design world. It has incrementally attained international recognition and great success.

The aim of the thesis is to examine the development and success of Italian furniture design from 1945 onwards considering different points of view. Political, cultural and socio-economic impacts, technological progress and use of new materials are explained in the second chapter. In this chapter appropriate time intervals are chosen in order to evaluate the developments more suitably. Various reasons for the success of Italian furniture design are analysed in the third chapter. The fourth chapter deals with the important design movements and leading designers of Italian furniture which opened new horizons by their philosophical and artistic concerns.

The thesis is developed by a literature survey and supported by the observations from the last Milan Triennial (April,1991). In the conclusion under the light of this research, distinctiveness of Italian furniture design is explained briefly.

2 FURNITURE INDUSTRY AND DESIGN IN ITALY

2.1 POLITICAL CULTURAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Apparently Italian furniture design's development can not be separated from the political, cultural and socio-economic events. These impacts are analysed by time intervals from 1945 onwards.

2.1.1 (1945-1960) Liberation and Industrial Revolution

In the immediate post-war years there began a huge effort to restore Italy to its pre-war status economically, culturally and socially. Italy underwent an industrial revolution within which design played a fundamental part. Those years were characterised by hardship but because of new democracy and hope for the future this was also an exciting period.

After the war, the government policy was the new Italian republic, anti-fascism and the industrial reconstruction which was largely effected by the implementation of the state policy. There was a direct state control over the affairs of private industry, encouragement of a laissez-faire approach towards trading on the international

market and a protectionist attitude towards the home market. These policies were generally followed. But the state also took some direct steps to help industry get back on its feet by granting credits, providing cheap energy and steel etc. Also it helped manufacturing industry to produce competitively priced goods by implementing a low wages policy. Labour was plentiful and so trade unions remained weak. There was an impact of industrial reconstruction but there was also great hardship and massive unemployment.

Up to 1946 the tradition of Italian design had been formed and developed along the lines of culture closely linked to Rationalist architecture. The change in the political picture of the 1940's was reflected in design. Attitudes began to change.

Rationalist approach became combined on an ideological plane with the political anti-Fascist movement of national liberation and with a strong tradition: It was centred especially in Milan, still internationalist and elitist and concerned with the standard elements and prefabrication (Gregotti, 1972).

Interior furnishings approached with philosophy that forced the rationalists' belief in the necessity of mass production and design for the industry. Two exhibitions of the early post-war years demonstrated this Neo-Rationalist approach. The first one was organised by

RIMA (Riunione Italiana Monstre per l'Arredamenta-Italian Exhibition Meeting for Furnishings) in 1946 on the subject of popular furniture. The main production material was timber and the problems of serial production, shortages of raw materials and small living spaces caused the production of stackable folding chairs which meant to meet the requirements of the day. The 8th Triennial which was held in 1947 repeated the same theme. It took the home as a "focus" and proposed a neo-rationalist solution to the problem of post-war housing.

After the war, during the few months of the regime the left-wing parties formed an important element within the coalition government, but in 1947 the Communists and socialists were excluded and the Christian Democrats favoured by the industrialists assumed a more prominent role. With the expulsion of Communists and Socialists from the coalition government in 1947, neo-rationalism gave way to a new anti-rationalist design philosophy. It defined itself as a movement more definitely-bourgeois, rather than specifically working class tendencies (Sparke 1988).

" The catch phrase 'utility plus beauty' came to characterise the Italian design aesthetic of the late 1940's and 1950's" (Sparke, 1988, p.87). This implies that pre-war rationalism was no longer appropriate in the post-war years and domination of architecture should be replaced by the role of fine arts.

With the dismissal of this early post-war emphasis on neo-rationalist themes like prefabrication and standardisation a new concentration began on 'artistic' qualities. Italian design began to adopt very particular visual identity and began to display that its reconstruction could earn it a special place in the world.

During this period Italian culture and economy was dependent on the USA., which provided the necessary funds, 'know-how' and technology to enable the Italian industry to get back on its feet. This was a two way process. While Italy was impressed by all things American, the vogue for 'Italian Style' grew rapidly both in the USA and in the European countries during the 50's. There was a large scale emigration of Italians to other countries and this can be linked to that effect.

The factors which particularly contributed to economic development during the 50's were; cheap manpower, a strong foreign market and a large backlog of unsatisfied demand for the labour goods. Of these, the latter two factors have been directly influenced by a design, capable of imposing a new style not only on behaviour but also on family life and structure (Comminotti, 1972, p.345).

Presence of new factories equipped with modern methods, techniques and materials which were concentrated on modernising their production systems was also another factor for the basis of good design during the 50's.

If we look today at the products of Italian design in the fifties, they never, or almost never, appear to be either truly industrial products or authentic expressions of popular culture. The positive feelings they undoubtedly stimulate are more expressive than a cultural nature (Branzi, 1984, p.41).

2.1.2 (1960-1970) Economic Boom and Contradictions

The 60's were full of excitement and contradictions, both for the Italian people and the Italian design. The decade had begun with an economic boom which greatly improved the average Italian purchasing power and it ended with student protests of 1968 and trade union movements involving various spheres of industrial and economic sectors. These were also the years during which the feminist movement had begun.

During Italy's economic boom, designers did not come up with alternative proposals or suggestions for a different approach to economic development.

Design was seen mainly in its relation to business as a model for differentiating various commodities and lines of products, to increase market penetration to the maximum, to enhance the competitiveness of goods and to encourage the demand for replacing them before they were outworn (Comminotti, 1972, p.346).

At the close of the 50's the consumer's desire and attention was directed to the "new". The novelties which penetrated the Italian market gave the Italian consumer a feeling for American way of life. However this did not

drastically disrupt the customer modes of Italian interior design. Most Italians continued to furnish their homes as they always had.

In the mid 60's, the demand for goods became even more complex due to the economic boom. The consumer now, had more purchasing power and a greater choice. " 'Novelty consumerism' which had been aimed at integrating the individual into urban industrial society gave way to 'status consumerism' in which the individual's social status was highlighted through the choices he made, independent of their novelty" (Raimondi, 1990, p.12). By the end of 60's the aims of the middle classes like possessing fashionable clothing and fine furniture were partly satisfied. But the new political events, the trade union activities and the student protests deeply affected this group.

Italy was traditionally known as a land of poverty. Nevertheless during these years the country was washed by a wave of feminism, radicalism, technology as well as a rebellion against well-being and a glut of consumer goods. These created strange contradictions in the home, in the school and in the country. Different conceptions of life arose and clashed with each other.

The socialising of youth and the feminist ideology shape the behaviours and tastes that emerged during this period. Jeans, snorkel parkas, long hair, encounter

groups, work groups and new forms of socialising all had their counterparts in living and furnishing styles. Various people, who shared their lives without adopting the formal bonds of family relationships or playing the traditional sexual roles brought different uses to spaces which had been designed for a traditional life style. The reflections are seen more in the furnishings than in fixed architecture.

Room partitions were created with movable elements; panel caddies akin to haversacks were hung on the walls along with posters that served more as ideological statements than as decoration; rejected materials such as unused drainage tubes or scaffolding elements were used as shelving; informal seating was cut loose from parlour designs based on symmetry and social difference; artificial material such as oil skin took the place of natural leather upholstery; plastic replaced walnut in furniture (Raimondi, 1990, pp.12-13).

During these years the Italians participated the Paris and Cologne trade fairs while Milan's Salone del Mobile stimulated them into a race for novelty and renewal of models. The Salone was full of elaborate displays that would highlight and enhance company images. Unlike its counterparts abroad Italian furniture design associated with lively showmanship.

One important thing to mention from the 60's is that the furniture industry began to make use of every form of communication media like video films, catalogues and posters to let people know about its products. In this

competition to create new environments, type of behaviour and life-style trends, the emphasis was on the importance of creating a coordinated image on the buyer's choices.

2.1.3 (1970-1980) Socio-Economic Instability

The 70's were economically and culturally years of absolute cloudiness.

Between 1969 and 1971 Italian economy was effected by violent political unrest and strikes and a sharp decline in productivity. It was followed by the oil crises in 1973 which in 1975 caused the strongest economic depression since World War II. These years of economic hardship were also effected by the small rules which were left from the 60's and by a series of weak governments. The high rate of inflation was caused not just because of such reasons as the explosion of petroleum prices. These price increases were already loaded with inflationary prerequisites. Demand was uncertain and erratic, peaking and than dropping off suddenly. Consumers tended to save less and buy more on credit. " The atmosphere of uncertainty and instability undermined faith in socialisation and government intervention in the economy" (Raimondi, 1990, p.106).

In the 70's Italians embraced many of the causes calling

for social change. Political system was impervious to these causes and it only adopted them sometimes with minimal commitment and only for the purpose of party strategy.

In the 70's particular importance was given to women's issues and demands, the family and the relationships within it, decisions to live together, to divorce and other day to day decisions were discussed publicly and they became political issues. " The wish to change society had invaded the personal sphere. People started to examine their own lives, bodies and relationships with others. They began to experience the present, without putting anything off in the hope of a better tomorrow " (Raimondi, 1990, p.106).

During the years 1976-79 there was a gradual abatement of social unrest, a progressive overcoming of the so-called Lead years that had seen the culmination of political terrorism and a strong productive resurgence. This was triggered off by the vitality and capacity for improvisation of the small and medium industries and of the increased activity of the so-called underground economy (a magma formed by small craftsman and workshops that maintained in addition to their official activity one or more "moonlighting" operation). This coincided with a revival of interests in the industrial design. Very little remained of the revolutionary ideas of ten years before (Albera and Monti, 1989, p.37).

In spite of the economic crises, Italian design became international in the 70's and moved also to the markets outside Europe. It continued on the same formula that had worked well in the boom years of 60's. But it contained

neither the energy nor the enthusiasm of that period except for a few examples (Sparke, 1988). Particularly, in the area of home furnishings it continued to create interesting products. Designers offered a new culture of design for the home with a brilliant quality of invention and elegance of aesthetic solutions. This new culture of design remained as the most complete and significant fact of Italian design in 70's (Albera and Monti, 1989). Traditional status materials like leather, wood and marble largely replaced the innovative use of new materials. This introduced a new conservatism into modern Italian furniture design.

One important event that must be mentioned from the 70's is the exhibition entitled "Italy, The New Domestic Landscape" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York which was directed and presented by Emilio Ambasz. The collection of objects and interiors illustrated the remarkable design vitality that has recently emerged in Italy. "Visitors were to realise that design in general and Italian design in particular, meant more than simply creating objects to satisfy functional and emotional needs: The processes and products of design could themselves be used to offer critical commentary upon society" (Ambasz, 1989, p.55).

2.1.4 (1980-1991) Time of Formal Innovations

The situation of the Italy in the 70's was an economic and political crisis and this was felt heavily in the beginning of the 80's. The crisis implied the industrial sector and political tensions ran high. But, there were numerous signs that through its manufacturing ability alone, Italy was still a strong country. This cloudy beginnings of the 80's passed and the overall situation could be considered positive by the end of the decade.

In the 70's inflation had compounded the existing problems but in the 80's technological improvements helped the economy to get back on its feet. Other factors also contributed to this positive economic trend are the general improvement in educational levels, an increase in life expectancy and in geographical mobility and the progressive internationalisation of the nation (Raimondi, 1990).

The furniture sector in the 80's continued to be highly fragmented with a low growth rate. Between 1981 and 1983 structural phenomena for example; inflation, building crisis and the rising cost of labour per product furthered this fragmentation. Lasting changes in consumer tastes and habits caused a drop in demand, with lower profits and reduced investments contributing to a general slowing of the industries growth (Raimondi, 1990, p.218).

In the interior design field there was a formation of a large "new majority" which was characterised by its

cultural approach to consumption. An aesthetic logic that replaced for religion, morality, politics and ideology was the factors that established and motivated this people. The public tended to buy either lower quality products or on the contrary the products of outstanding quality solved as single elements for a personalised touch.

Today the most obvious part of design seems to be characterised by a kind of well-aimed exhibitionism. It is expressed by designers who claimed to be prophets of avant-garde ideas and exploit a glorious tradition at the same time. The furniture industry for the home has lately based its production more on image than on precise marketing strategies. In the 80's Italian designers pursued varied theoretical and political positions.

Italian design has kept its vitality and after a period of deeply felt crises is again consolidating its image as a creative, fanciful, expressive tool able to surprise year after year with formal innovations. It offers unexpected effects in a blend of research, play, advanced technology and ironic adventures and creates objects that are acceptable to the market and at the same time able to provoke debate and stimulate different visions (Albera and Monti, 1989, p.41).

2.2 TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS AND USE OF NEW MATERIALS

2.2.1. (1945-1960) Reconstruction and New Materials

The technology of Second World War merged with needs of people to create a new era in furniture design. In the years following the war, the companies had begun to enlarge the scale of their production, working cooperatively with each other and introducing new materials. But they still remained modest operations.

In 1947 the 90 percent of the Italian firms still employed only five people or fewer. The coexistence of big companies with mechanised production systems and a huge number of small firms that combined some mechanised production with skilled hand labour created a dualism. This dualism characterize the Italian Industry after the war and became defined towards mid 1950's (Sparke, 1988, p.92).

The most significant change in this development of products was the adoption of new materials and new production techniques. It was no longer enough to produce only a fine carefully crafted product. Designers now had to progress, constantly pursuing the latest technology, the newest material. They had to be innovative, original and even futuristic. Italian furniture made of bent and moulded plywood, sheet metal, metal rod, rubber and plastic began to emerge.

The characteristics and uses of these new materials in furniture design can be summarized as;

Wood - Historically wood has been the primary source of construction material for furniture and it also plays a dominant role in contemporary furniture. It can be divided into two main families; softwoods and hardwoods. Softwoods are generally used in building construction or inexpensive furniture while hardwoods are preferred for furniture because of their higher strength and durability.

Lamination - The technique used frequently in post-war furniture was well known as far back as 1856. Furniture maker Henry Belter applied for a patent on a technique he had developed; gluing layers of wood veneer with their grains at right angles each other. This technique is essentially the same as that used in the construction of modern plywood.

Plywood - It consists of layers of wood veneer laminated together with the grain direction running at right angles in each successive layer for balance and strength. Lamination takes place when the layers are glued together under pressure. the resulting plywood is extremely resistant to problems of warping and splitting. The main benefit of lamination is that it enables wood to be worked in many ways impossible with sawed lumber.

Moulded plywood - It was developed during the 2nd World War for the aviation industry. Compared to the ordinary

War for the aviation industry. Compared to the ordinary wood, plywood is an extremely stable material lending itself well to broad, simple surfaces. The invention of moulded plywood and its subsequent use in furniture permitted an entirely new way of looking at furniture design. For the first time, the technology to produce light furniture, both visually light and light in weight was available. The sense of lightness that was equated with post-war design depended largely on the availability of new construction methods and materials.

Metal - Together with moulded plywood, tubular metal became a favourite construction material of post-war designers. Although metal furniture was common in the 19th century, it was rarely found in commercial use until the early twentieth century. The obvious advantages of metal furniture are its inflammability and the ease with which it adopts to industrial production methods. In furniture, metal usually takes the form of tubing, sheets, bars or small structural elements. Furniture frames are connected by cutting metal tubes into sections, bending the cut lengths and assembling them by welding or mechanical connectors. After the piece is welded, it is polished and finished to minimise the joints.

Plastic- The true technological innovation of the 20th century furniture was plastics. As an adjective "plastic" can be variously defined as formative, flexible,

synthetic or capable of continuous and permanent change. Plastics can assume nearly any form. They were born into an industrially advanced technology and seemed the perfect medium for experimentation with new forms. At first, plastics often imitated natural materials—synthetic leather, for upholstery applications, wood grained laminates as surfaces and so on. Plastics made possible structural forms in furniture that previously only been imagined. Without the development of plastics most post-war furniture designs would simply not exist. " But when designers began to think of plastic in a new way, when they began experimenting it without trying to copy any other known material a new era emerged " (Fehrman, 1987).

Foam Moulding - In addition to the use of plastic as a structural material for post war furniture, the process of foam moulding also permitted innovations in upholstery. Urethane, styrene and polypropylene can be processed to form air bubbles, causing the material to become a foam that can be produced in sheets or slabs and than used in variety of ways , most commonly as upholstery cushions or beginning in the 1960's as basic structural unit for furniture.

All these new materials, combined with technological improvements resulted in new designs as will be discussed.

Prior to 1945, Italian design has been closely linked to architecture, it was strongly traditional and centred in Milan. During the years 1945 to 1948 Italian industry went through a difficult period of reconstruction and modernisation but even before 1950 new ideas began to spread (Fehrman, 1987, p.72).

In 1947, the works of Charles Eames was published in Domus and this stimulated younger architects to try out new ideas with new materials. Castiglioni and Vigano tried using bent plywood; Figure 1 shows an example by Vigano. Cristiano and Frattini experimented with sheet metal seats and rubber joints as shown in Figure 2; Chessa and Zanuso worked on small armchairs in metal.

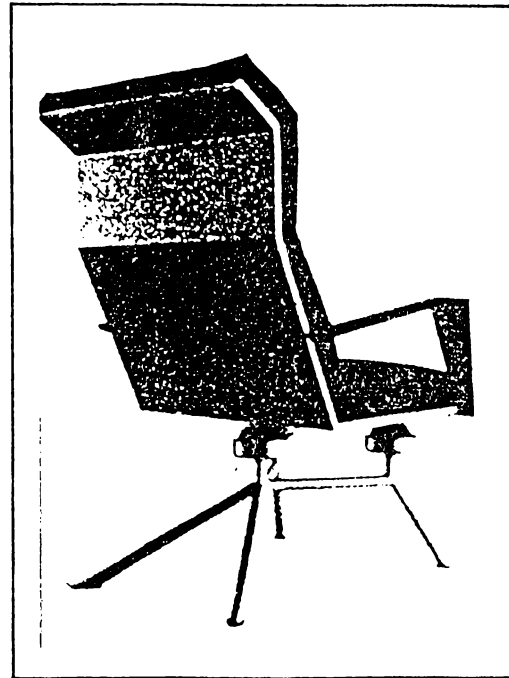
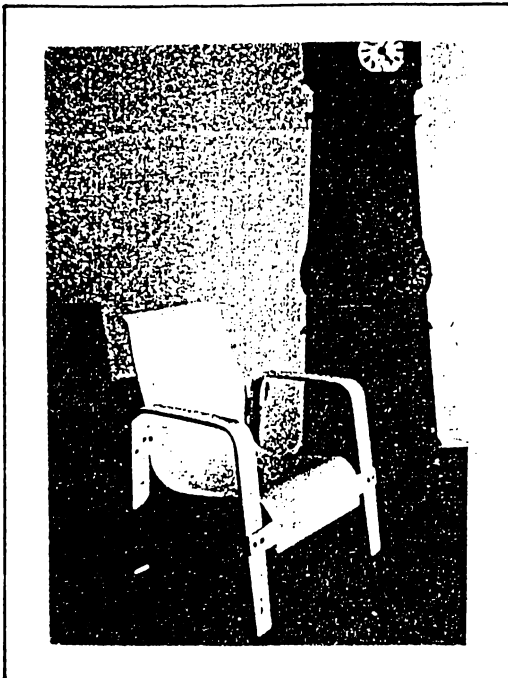


Fig. 1 Bent plywood armchair

Fig. 2 Sheet metal chair

Carlo Mollino and his group in Turin began designing furniture based on complex curves and carved wood and moulded plywood. They were designed to fit around the

curves of human body, the organic forms of the chairs, desks, tables and sofas recalled the twisted branches of trees and deers' antlers. They were the most extreme examples of the expressive Italian furniture style. Figure 3 and 4 are two examples of Mollino's work; an oak wood frame dining table and a solid oak wood chair.

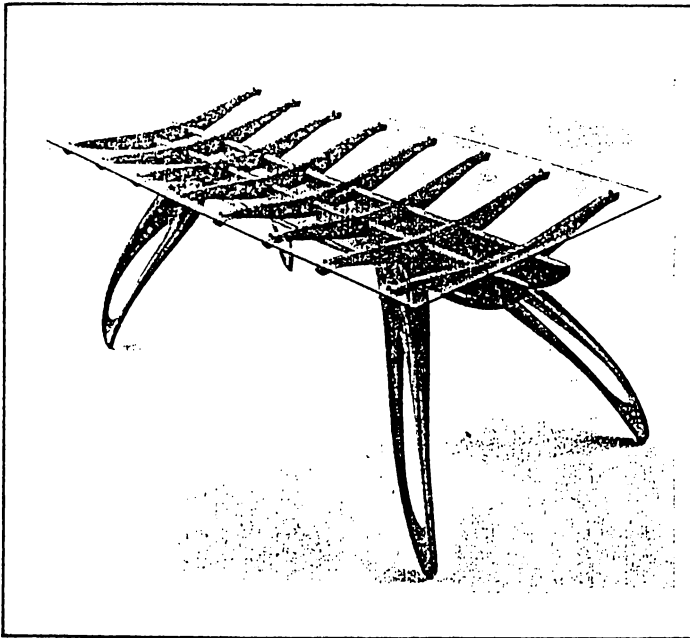


Fig. 3 Oakwood frame dining table

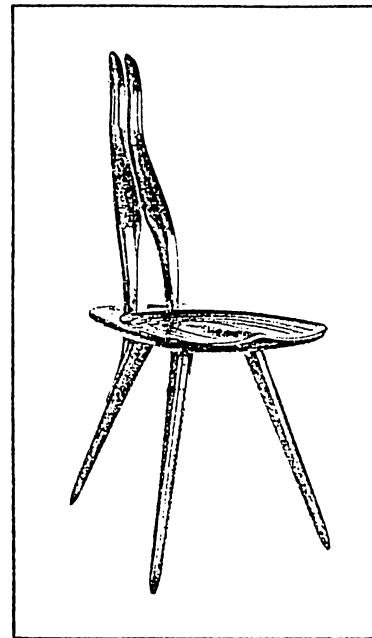


Fig. 4 Solid oak wood chair

In Milan where most modern furniture was produced, such extroversion was less apparent. The "organic" theme was equally popular, influencing the curved forms of foam rubber sofas and chairs and the wooden splayed legs of dining tables, cupboards and coffee tables. Apart from conforming the aesthetic requirements of the day, the forms were the inevitable results of the use of new materials foam rubber and moulded plywood.

materials foam rubber and moulded plywood.

The architect-designer Gio Ponti was the bridge between the pre-war middle class traditionalists culture and the new wave of modernism. His chair Superleggera (superlightweight) in Figure 5, with bent ash wood backrest and wicker seat is in production since 1949. Some of his furniture designs had unexpected shapes (Fehrman,1987, p.73). One of them can be seen in Figure 6, Jack table . A jack-shaped base is used to carry the glass top .

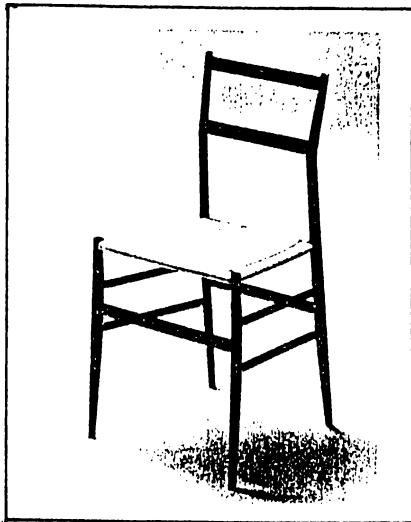


Fig. 5 "Superleggera" chair

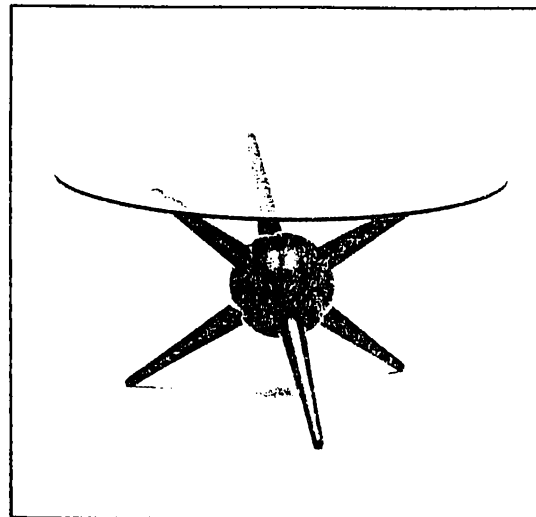


Fig. 6 "Jack" table

The years 1951 to 1954 were critical in the growth of the organisation of Italian design. During this time, new ideas were becoming more accepted and experimental furniture developed. Franco Albini's 'Fiorenza' in Figure 7; is conventional in its collective appearance but well thought-out and inventive in detail. Marco Zanuso, an architect, planner and industrial designer

designed an armchair named 'Lady' Figure 8, in 1951 which had pioneered the innovative use of foam-rubber upholstery and nylon cord. It was inspired by automobile production methods and so encouraged contact between the designer and industrial process.

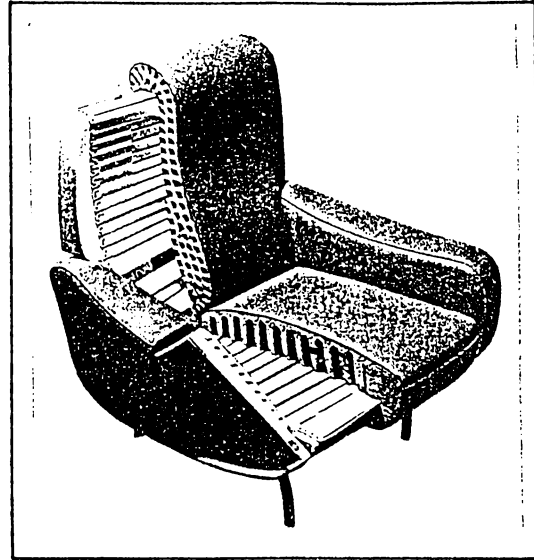


Fig. 7 "Fiorenzia" armchair Fig. 8 "Lady" armchair

Up to mid 1950's, the furniture manufacturers remained relatively small in size although they were geared to modern production methods in the way they tried new materials. Most of them tended to concentrate on a single material or manufacturing process. When other processes are needed they preferred to collaborate with other companies. As a result, the furniture industry based around Milan developed between the large mass production companies and the very small artisanal workshops. Using modern methods, modern machinery, firms produced stylistically advanced, exclusive furniture for

a wealthy, sophisticated, international client. They remained relatively small scale in operations and retained much of their traditional skilled labour. But the quality of their products always remained very high (Sparke, 1988).

After 1955 design in Italy continued to play a strong role within that country's cultural life and its position in the world trade. By the end of the decade the naive exuberance of the early postwar period had been replaced by an increasing sophistication in its manufactured goods (Sparke et al 1987, p.178).

2.2.2 (1960-1970) New Production Methods

Italian furniture design moved in a new direction with the economic surge at the end of fifties. The industry transformed itself with new production methods and conceptually thought-out furniture attempted to seize the expanding market. A new generation of comfort furniture pieces appeared which left earlier post-war standards behind. Plastic took control and became the sign of the decade. The application of coloured ABS plastics, polyethylene nylon, fibreglass and PVC constituted the most important innovations for living space since the "tubular steel revolution" of the twenties. With anything that dealt with technology and design Italy assumed the leading role (Bangert, 1988).

The integration of modern hard plastic technology in

living areas not only drove out wood but also created a new and timely aesthetic. The ambition to find an optimal application of new materials brought about the firms Kartell and Artemide. They had the best designers formulate ideal solutions for stacking plastic chairs. The "designed" and manufactured products in large mechanistic plants now determined the scene.

Some important examples of this period are: Marco Zanuso's Lambda chair in Figure 9; out of sheet metal for Gavina in 1963, which became a model for the following generation of plastic furniture, Vico Magistretti's "Selene" plastic chair in Figure 10 and Gian Carlo Piretti's Plia-folding stacking chair in Figure 11 with aluminium frame, transparent plastic back and seat which was produced in 1969. Ease, flexibility, precision and serial production was the assignment for this design which since its origin has been produced over 3000000 pieces.

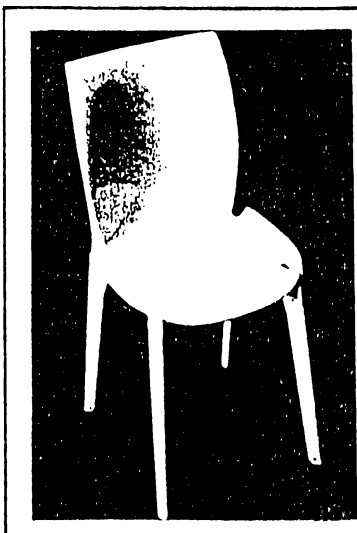


Fig. 9 "Lambda"
chair

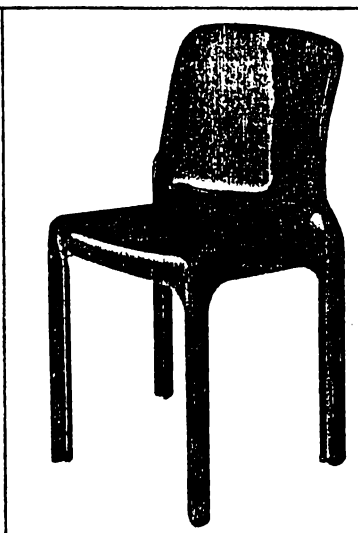


Fig. 10 "Selene"
chair

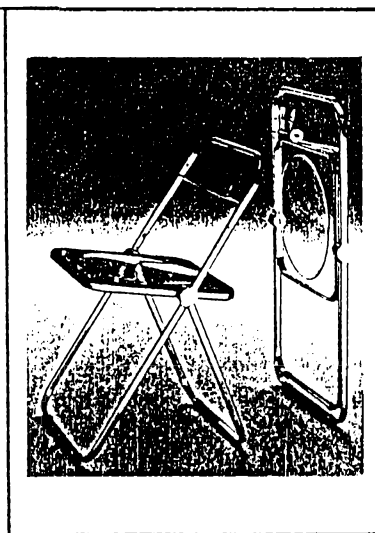


Fig. 11 "Plia"
chair

New product ideas for upholstered furniture and the introduction of plastic in sixties led to the founding of many new companies. C+B was one of these; believed that craftsmanship was no longer an issue. Furniture thus became an industrial product. Italy built up its world status in the sixties furniture industry. Some examples are Cini Boeri's "Serpentone", Figure 12, polyurethane sitting structure. The flexible sitting row represents the attempt to throw prior notions of upholstered furniture overboard. Boeri's "Bobo", Figure 13, is another sitting element solid-polyurethane block covered with elastic fabric; one of the first furniture pieces for sitting, fully manufactured out of foam. Pesce's upholstered furniture program, Figure 14, flexible fabric stretched over polyurethane for C+B is another example. At the showroom, the soft models were compressed to a tenth of their volume and offered vacuum packaged in PVC wrapping. Cesari Leonardi and Franca Stagi's "Dondola" rocking chair in Figure 15 made of hard white plastic, represents the high point of hard plastic design.

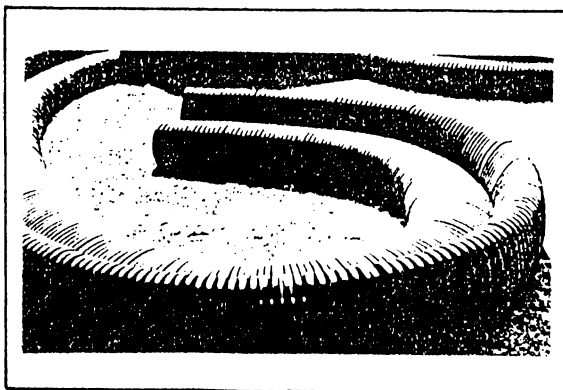


Fig. 12 "Serpantone" sitting structure

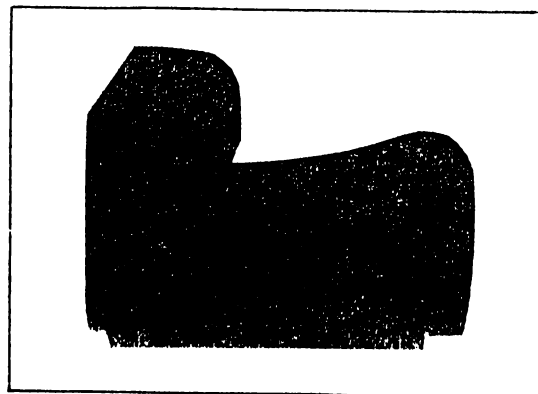


Fig. 13 "Bobo" sitting element

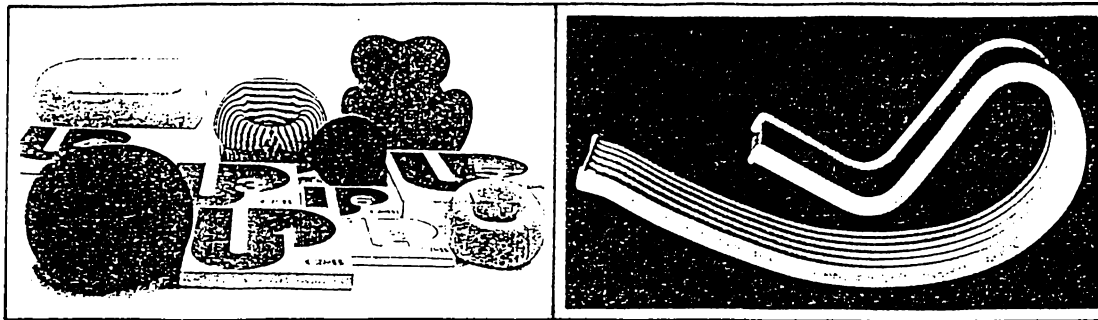


Fig. 14 "Up 1-6" upholstered program

Fig. 15 "Dondola" rocking chair

Much Italian furniture and this is typical for the progress in the sixties, has become idealistic, culturally oriented visions which were previously unimaginable and infeasible. Towards the end of sixties the situation in furniture design became a societal utopia and a fiery display of bold ideas (Bangert, 1988, p.50).

2.2.3 1970-1980 Steady Growth in Industry

At the beginning of 70's the furniture sector in Italy were mainly consisted of small to medium size companies. These were often specialised and technologically adopted. They were flexible and independent.

In 1971 the number of furniture manufacturers with nine or fewer employees represented 88 percent of the sector. Many of them's specialisation were on furniture parts like; drawers in general, frames for the upholstered pieces sector, kitchen units with wooden doors. This gave rise to the intermediate suppliers that was so crucial to the success of Italian furniture industry. The furniture sector's steady growth between 1970-74 was accompanied in

the number of businesses operating in this field. Their products were in evolution to keep abreast of the changing tastes of the consumers (Raimondi, 1988).

In this first half of the 70's, after a decade of steel, glass and plastic, wood took the leadership; It offered a sense of solidity and safety to anxious buyers in an age of socio-economic instability.

During these years many companies turned to the production of modular furniture by serial production. Its parts permitted the furniture to dominate every room in a number of different versions. An example is "Carioca" series in Figure 16 designed by Pamio and Toso for Stilwood in 1971.

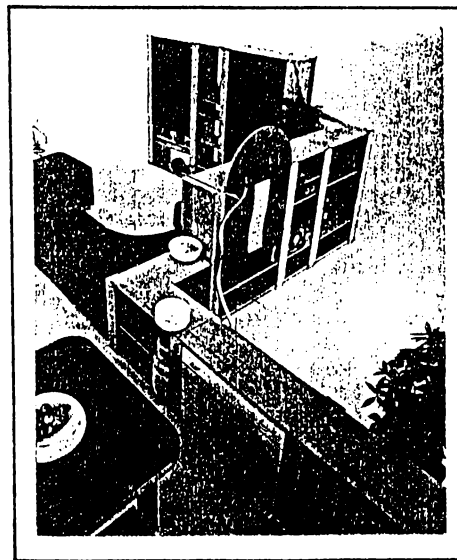


Fig. 16 "Carioca" series

Hit by the world-wide recession, inflation and the high cost of raw materials, Italian furniture had to struggle

to maintain its past reputation in the years following 1975. The most significant development in the industry after 1975 was the huge increase in the number of small firms with fewer than fifty employees, coupled with rapid growth in the industry (Sparke, 1988).

During the second half of the 70's some companies returned to the production of finished pieces of furniture. The designer's focus was on the size and surface finish of the pieces. Figure 17 shows an example; Afra and Tobio Scarpa's "Artona" series for Maxalto in 1975.

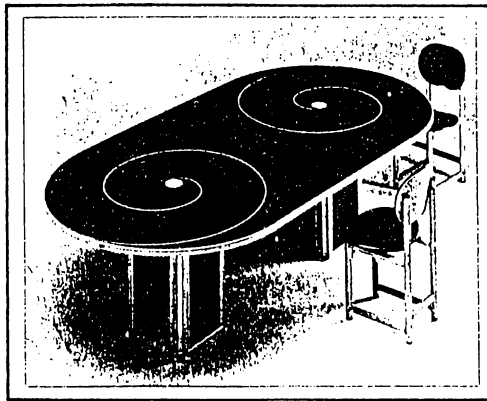


Fig. 17 "Artona" series

The modular concept was also applied to seating arrangements. This contributed to improvements in the polyurethane technology both foamed and block-cut. This led not only to a renewal of the traditional living-room typologies but also to the discovery of unique objects that offered new ways of sitting and acting. Also the upholstery sector went through a phase of great expansion. The production was easy and can be feasible on

a small scale too. But the most popular models were copied endlessly, the market became greatly inflated.

In the second half of the 70's the buying public was divided into cultural compartments. This is demonstrated by two products which reflect two different philosophies and two idioms. The first one is Figure 18, "Maralunga" by Magistretti. Its adjustable head rest renewed the traditional sofa typology. The second one is Figure 19; "AEO" by Archizoom group. It marked a turning point in the design of soft, over-stuffed chair. It was a chair that looked fresh and technologically sound. It also represented the meeting of two industries; Attire and furniture.

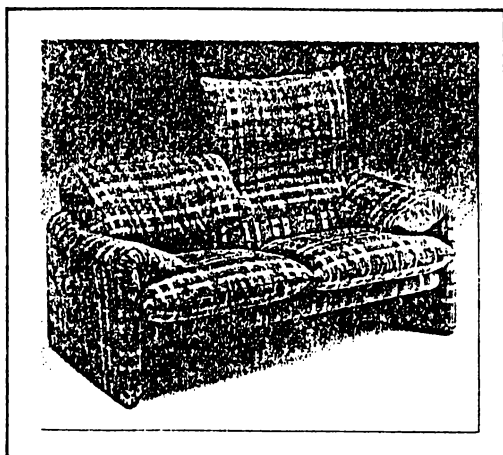


Fig. 18 "Maralunga" sofa

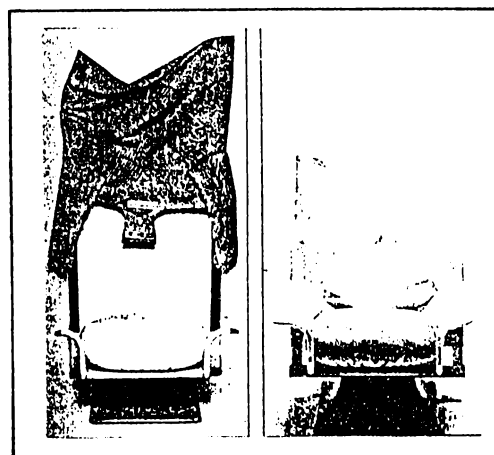


Fig. 19 "AEO" chair

Although tables and armchairs increased in 70's except a few examples there were not any chairs that could represent the era as happened in the 60's.

Towards the end of 70's the Flos company was founded as a manufacturer of a specific product; the bed. It was based on a precise technology; the fully removable, machine-washable overall sleep cover. Figure 20 shows the best-known and most-imitated bed; Magistretti's "Nathalie" in 1979. With the introduction of the textile bed the role of fabrics were improved.

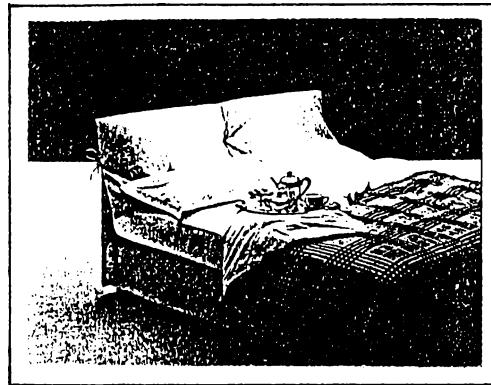


Fig. 20 "Nathalie" bed

In the seventies, the evolution in furniture styles, from period-style to contemporary design reached its peak point and it became possible to speak in terms of a design style (Raimondi, 1988).

2.2.4 (1980-1991) Technological Improvements

In 1980's the independent consumers no longer wanted to be enclosed in a simple geometric shape and form. This comprises a series of fluid majorities, the targets of contemporary furniture design. In this way, the concept

of minority has been scaled down. " This has facilitated the rise of many new products made by companies that stepped into the lime light during these years, adeptly carving out few slices of the market ignored by more traditional companies " (Raimondi, 1990, p.222).

"What made the 80's special was a fun, positive solar optimistic time"(Bellati, 1990, p.17) . Some designers and design groups in Milan came out with alternative, innovative ideas and design concepts that question the cultural and economic status-quo, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The furniture industry outside Milan, offered a series of products that were in general of a high standard, although frequently lacking a comparable innovative charge with the ones that were created in Milan . On one hand, innovation stimulated formal experimentation, on the other hand it was often restricted to styling.

In the field of storage units, the large, specialised companies continued to produce flexible modular systems. These were suitable for all environments and some details were changed to renew the look and to enrich the range of matching pieces. An important example is Figure 21; a system of mobile wall partitions "Celario" by Afra & Tobia Scarpa for Cadel in 1980. The system could also be set up to store the electronic devices.

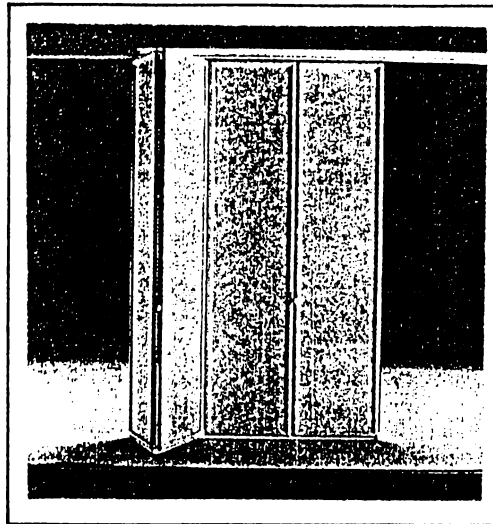


Fig. 21 "Celario" mobile wall partitions

But the important characteristics of the 80's furniture must be sought in individual products not in systems. Objects that can single handed transform an environment most clearly expressed the concept that developed in this period. One example is "Aforismi" in Figure 22; a collection of pieces designed by Antonio Astori in 1984. The interchangeable mouldings create an effect on architectural importance that recalled traditional well-proportioned pieces.

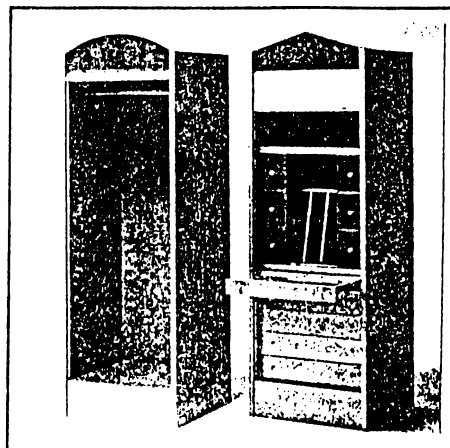


Fig. 22 "Aforismi" interchangeable mouldings

Many armchairs and sofas of the 80's had some extra kinetic devices like movable back and armrests, companion end tables jointed to the main framework. There was a close link between fashion and interior design in the 80's. This led to the development of a series of furniture that could be "dressed" with interchangeable washable sleep covers. Vico Magistretti's "Sinbad" Figure 23; in 1981 has a heavy blanket with trimmed edges, placed over a padded framework is an example.

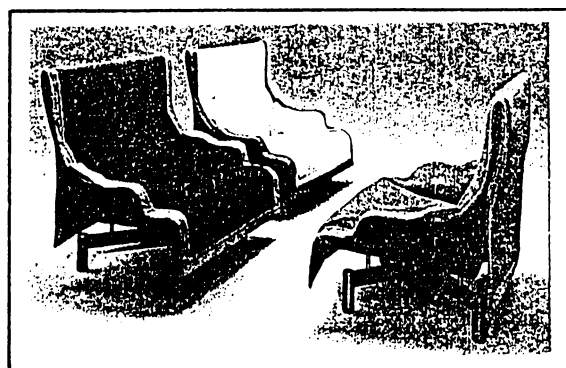


Fig. 23 "Sinbad" dressed furniture

In substance interior design shifted from a monocentric vision to a polycentric one, in which the environment is distinguished not so much by the style of its furnishings as by the style of its inhabitant (Raimondi, 1990, p.232).

In the late 80's one material is highly favoured by some companies was metal. It was lacquered black or silver. Minimal colours were used after the saturation of pastels in the late 70's. Many chairs, tables, cupboard were made in this material. Some examples are "Quinta" chair Figure 24; in tubular steel and perforated sheet metal designed

by Mario Botta in 1985. " Francesca Spanish" chair in tubular steel and rigid polyurethane and " President M" table in Figure 25; steel and aluminium with glassed top by Phillipe Stark for Baleri in 1984.

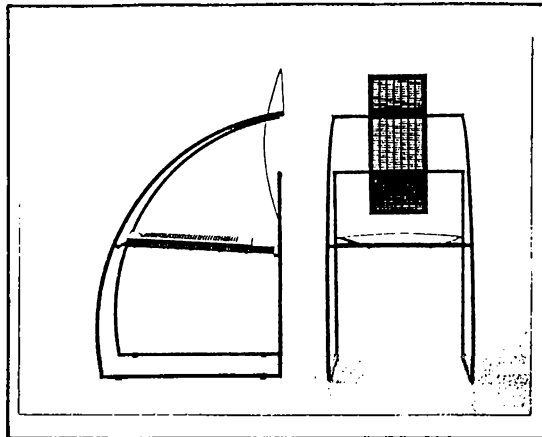


Fig. 24 "Quinta" chair

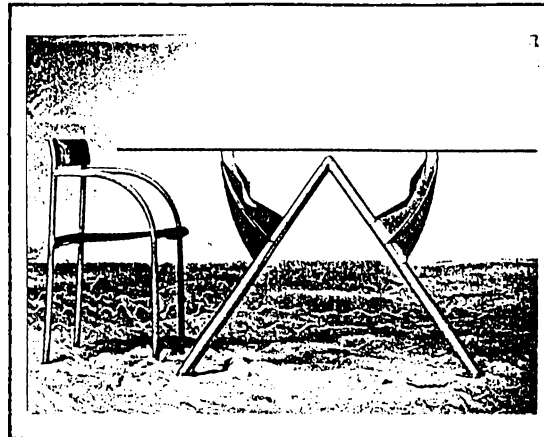


Fig. 25 "Francesca Spanish" chair, "President M" table

People's home activities that had once limited to living room began to spread into the other spaces of the home in the 80's. This stimulated a new look in beds and bedroom furniture in general. Achille Castiglioni and Giancarlo Pozzi's "Itititi" bed in Figure 26; for Interflex in 1986, revolutionised the framework with new materials used in a logical and innovated way.

In the 80's plastics came back in the interior design scene. Sixties had made a boom in naive plastics and some incorrect applications were seen. Seventies neglected the use of plastics. Plastics are materials in constant evolution that offer diverse combination of qualities.

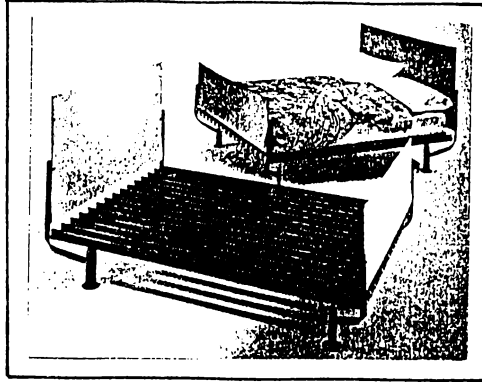


Fig. 26 "Ititi" bed

The most innovative applications can be seen in the field of fiber technology. Carbon fibers offer the most potential combining, as they do mechanical resistance and lightness, meeting many needs in structural applications. Alberto Meda's "Light-Light" chair, Figure 27, for Alias in 1987 is one of the important examples.

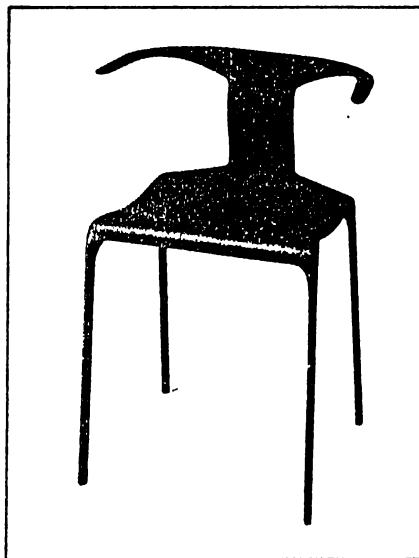


Fig. 27 "Light-Light" chair

Two materials that had found broad application in the 60's came to scene again in the 80's are plastic laminate and polyurethane. Because of its decorative potential plastic laminate enjoyed a second youth in Alchimia's and

Memphis' furniture. Alchimia's and Memphis' examples of furniture will be seen in Chapter 5. Polyurethane in semi-rigid form press-moulded for the desired finish had applications not only as a structural detail but also as a primary component. For the use of plastics Kartell's "4310" tables in Figure 28, is an example ,constructed in various plastics for their responsiveness to specific requirements (table top in polymer, pedestal in ABS, base in reinforced nylon).

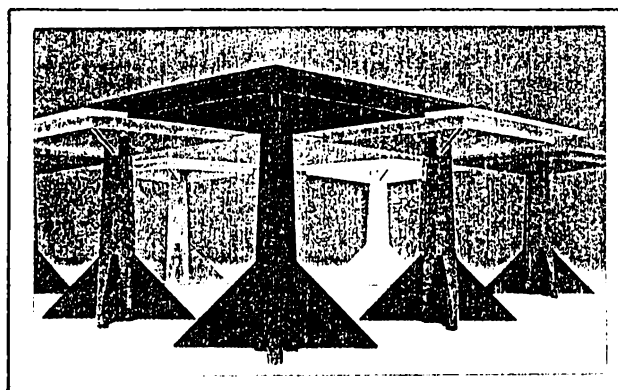


Fig. 28 "4310 tables

3 FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESS OF ITALIAN FURNITURE DESIGN

3.1 MANUFACTURING FIRMS

The strongest force behind the Italian design phenomenon is the manufacturer who during the years of the Italian design expansion after the post-war period, embraced design in his search for a new product image (Sparke 1986, p.181).

In the years following Second World War many companies had began to work with leading architects and designers. They decided to move away from craft-based custom furnishings and to mass produce a limited range of architect-designed furniture pieces.

The companies were established under the pretext of 'idea factories' where designers, technician and artistic craftsmen could realise the furniture's manufacturing and forming processes with prototypes. This led the evolution of new furniture typologies and manufacturing techniques.

Some people are convinced that what has saved Italian design and made it advanced has been the relative smallness of the industries in the sector together with a regional concentration. This encouraged both competition

and interchangeable observation and gave an opportunity for immediate adaptation. These conditions allowed companies to try different paths, to distinguish themselves a dynamic image, to put forward prototypes, to attract attention at trade fairs and exhibitions by presenting prototypes on their stands. These prototypes were perhaps never really to be produced, but served as attractions and ended up giving the company a certain design image (Zorzi, 1986 p.12).

The Italian manufacturers Arflex, Zanotta, Cassina, Kartell, B&B and others all saw design as a fundamental quality of their consumer goods. Their support alone made the publication of so many design magazines possible in Italy and it is them who invested some money in promoting Italian design in the rest of the world. Companies had taken into account that an industrial product goes all over the world, running into a multiplicity of cultures. Because of that decisions have to be faced about the relationships that has to be established and modified between routine and innovation, between originality and rule, between tradition and the future.

One important thing that has to be mentioned is the design strategy of the companies. The choices behind a product or a product strategy are very precise and respond to the needs of the market. As far as the design approach is concerned, the role of the company is to identify potential market needs, to outline the salient

points and to respond to these needs in a concrete manner.

Outline of the scheme of the process is; firstly identification of a need in a market place has to be done, in other words a marketing research, the technology which is best suited for the creation of that product must be successively identified taking into consideration the specific nature of the firm, and the choice of the designer who with his experience also serves as a link in the bond between marketing, firm and design. The integration of these three functions leads to the creation of a quality product. This is a concept of overall quality; it meets the need of the consumer, conforms the manufacturing capabilities of the firm and is the result of the reflections of a designer who has thought about materials form and utilization using his experience (Finizio, 1991 p.72).

3.2 THE ROLE OF THE DESIGNER

After the Second World War furniture design in Italy was quick to develop into a highly sophisticated marketing exercise and Italian architects and designers turned their attention to furniture. Lucie-Smith (1988, p.92) states for the Italian designers that; " They approached all problems of function without preconceived ideas. They

also had a sense of line, colour and luxury which was sometimes lacking among their competitors".

One of the reasons for the success of Italian designers is that most of them have an architectural background. This training is one thing that sets them apart from the others (Aulenti, cited in Sabino and Tondini, 1986). They have a global cultural background and a unique sense of the context of space in which they must operate.

Another approach that sets Italian designers apart is that they treat design as an institutional cultural activity. Design is not just a division of industry, it takes on wider intellectual applications to become a kind of institution with its own history and dignity. Italian design, distinct from art and architecture and music has its own culture but it is not isolated from the general field of visual arts.

Italian designers practised an intellectual approach that unite a humanistic view of culture with science, conceptualising a more, aesthetically, functional product. These products change today's domestic landscape with their formal and symbolic implications (Bellati, 1990, p.15).

Designers were eager and armed as they were with a technical ability of often exceptional quality. So; they took on different types of problems which allowed greater creativity. They tried out new materials which might offer new solutions. They were looking again at the objects of the everyday landscape, with new, fresher

eyes, freed from the customary images (Zorzi, 1986 p.13)

In Italy, most phases of the production process develops with the designer and the relationship between the craftsmen and designer is important. Italian craftsmen re-examines and keeps the techniques alive that were used in the past. They worked with the local designers to create high quality furniture. The small companies and artisans work hard to produce furniture in very small quantities or even single pieces so a wide variety of items produced. This stimulated Italian creativity to advance ahead of others forming an era which blends art and design. Artisans and designers encouraged each other to make things, display them in exhibitions and reach a global audience.

In advanced countries designers have become logical and tend to think that the purpose of design is to logically describe why a design can't be made. Italian designers are also logical but they don't need to give excuses about why they can't create a design. They always create something first and the most important thing for them is the desire to create coming from their nature.

Another important tendency of the designers is that they have never aimed to design for the whole society. Italy is composed of several, independent, self sufficient regions. It's not a homogeneous society. People are proud of their region, love it and live there. People in the

regions of Milan, Rome and Florence feel themselves more Milanese, Roman and Florentine rather than Italian. Although Milan is the industrial center and moving to Milan is advantageous for designers, it is not the only city where every important function is concentrated. In Italy, creative work reflects each region's originality and can't be compared with the work in other regions.

The most important factor for the origin of Italian design is that the Italians can see the origin of beauty everywhere around them. Even the cities themselves have an atmosphere which inspires creative work. Traditional art lives in people's lives today. It gives people fresh joy and creativity. They have a high quality of perfection. Therefore, the designers can establish an identity of beauty they don't have to compete with each other.

Each designer's creativity is mixed with an individualistic sense of value. They don't care about other designer's work; their questions are for themselves, the roots of their original designs. How contemporary sensitivity can be applied to the traditional idea and how vividly they can materialise the sensitivity to the actual design today concerns them. That is the key of their diversified design and individuality (Shimizu, 1991 p.14).

3.3 MILAN FURNITURE FAIRS AND TRIENNIALS

Today, as much as ever in the past, Milan is the single most important forum for new furniture

developments. And participants in this dialogue are not all Italian born. Designers from Japan, Great Britain, The United States, France and increasingly Eastern Europe come to work in Milan, where the emphasis is on an exchange on design sensibilities and where manufacturers are open to novel ideas, no matter how wild or untried the source (Janjigian, 1988, p.35).

Milan's Furniture Fair is a yearly exhibition and one of the most important events for design. Architects and designers prepare all year to present their products. Their aim is to make the covers of Italian design magazines and to accumulate the attention of the foreign press. Their furniture may remain prototypes but more than function and comfort they must surprise with irony and paradox (Bellati, 1990).

The Milan Triennials are (three yearly) exhibitions of design which have been initiated in the 1920's and which were restarted in 1947, turned into a necessary pilgrimage for enthusiastic young designers all over the world. "The ongoing exchange of ideas with progressive architects and designers all over the world who met at the Milan Triennials before and after the war gave Italian design a big impetus" (Mang, 1979, p.161). People visited to see furniture and appliances that were conceived for houses of future. The Triennial's most significant aspect was establishing networks to other countries. Architects both from Italy and other countries meet; they can see the developments and suggestions.

3.4 PERIODICALS

Specialist periodicals also played a crucial role disseminating the concept of design. There is a close connection between art magazine and the development of style in Italy. The important fact for this phenomena is that there are no journalists in Italy who write about design other than architects and designers themselves. They also control the editorial seats.

The important design magazines are:

Domus - A magazine dealing with aspects of architecture, design, interior decoration and art. It was founded in 1928 and was edited until his death by architect-designer Gio Ponti. Ponti created an international microphone for himself. He embodied the typical dual role of architect and designer and become an example for architects who advertised their ideas in specialist journals. For almost fifty years he accompanied architectural and design events and influenced taste. From 1980 onwards Alessandro Mendini guided the magazine, who gave it a new image as a forum for the new international design and for the new cultural- architectural movements.

Casabella - Was founded in the same year as Domus. After the Second World War, under the direction of Ernesto Rogers, it became a point of reference for the new generation of architects. In the years between 1970-76,

it was directed by Alessandro Mendini who used it as an international launching pad for the young avant-garde radical architects. Regular items were written by Branzi, Sottsass and others. After Mendini, Casabella was edited by Maldonado and then by Vittorio Gregotti (Branzi, 1984).

Ottogono - was founded in 1966, is a magazine which treats questions of design and provides information about the newest products.

Casa Vogue - was published in 1968, turning design and life style questions into engaging and prestigious readings. The discussions of design are resolved within the architectural field and this way made interesting to a broad public. With the magazines Interni and Abitare it showed just how sumptuous and progressive modern Italian interior design could be.

Modo - An architectural and design magazine founded in 1977 and directed by Alessandro Mendini. Its editorial policy is to link the problems of planning to those pertaining to anthropology, custom, industrial techniques and craftsmanship. From 1984 onwards it is directed by Andrea Branzi.

3.5. COMPOSSO D'ORO AWARDS

To give incentive to national design's development and to

motivate the designer the design award Golden Compass (Composso D'oro) was donated by the department store La Rinascente in 1954. It's for to recognise the designers and manufacturers in the field of products for widespread consumption who achieved a synthesis of form and function. It is a mark of quality and taste. Still it plays a vital role by bestowing special status on certain objects that it deemed to be exceptional in their design.

From 1959 to 1965, the Composso D'oro was managed by La Rinascente in collaboration with ADI (Association for Industrial Design, founded in Milan in 1956). In 1967, the latter took complete control of the award's management and organisation. In the course of its existence, the Composso D'oro has acquired world-wide prestige, becoming the most sought-after honour in the field of industrial design (Raimondi, 1990, p.43).

4 LEADING DESIGNERS AND IMPORTANT DESIGN MOVEMENTS

In Italy technological advance has never limited the joy that comes from design's philosophical component. Under the leading of important architects and designers many design movements developed after the Second World War which had various philosophical and artistic concerns.

The important architect designers who made an impact after the Second World War during the difficult and exciting period of " Reconstruction " in the 50's and 60's and who materially and spiritually opened the golden era of Italian design are Franco Albini, Carlo Mollino and Gio Ponti.

Franco Albini - After the war the Bauhaus-influenced rational design movement began to stand out in Italy and Franco Albini who can be characterised as a rationalist, was its key figure.

Albini, by bringing material and form into a dialogue tried to show that dramatic and lyric effects can be completed. He carefully organises his constructions as economical as they might appear. In the 50's his designs were realised and offered in America. They resemble Japanese simplicity and display a precision connecting with obsessiveness. Figure 7 in Chapter 2.2.1 is an

example of his work.

In addition to Albini the most important representatives of disciplined but intelligent design were Ignazio Gardella, Vittoriano Vigano and the group of architects BBPR. All of them developed their designs from the integrated disciplines of public planning, environment and architecture. This merging of fields typifies the rational direction of Italian furniture design.

Carlo Mollino "In some respects he can be considered as one of the spiritual fathers of Italian furniture design because he was in the position to intelligently create both practicality and elegance using the only available means" (Bangert, 1988, p.21).

Turinese designer Mollino's organic and erotic designs evolved as a search for natural forms. His furniture marks the high point Italian furniture design in the 40's and 50's. In his organic shapes there are direct allusions to a baroque style whose spherical curvature, calculated perspectives and bombastic force are mirrored. He conceals the rationalistic formulation by clearly displacing extravagant forms so that any impression of rationality would be circumvented. For his examples refer to Figures 3 and 4 in Chapter 2.2.1.

Gio Ponti Gio Ponti who can be characterised as a classical modernist, didn't follow any particular social theory and he gave more modernity and attractiveness to

his elegant style. Far more than the pure satisfaction of the purpose, Ponti believed transforming every object into a stylish object. We can say that he is the moderniser of the traditional values. With his easily understandable, sometimes even superficial modernity, he led the wide acceptance of Italian style in foreign countries. Example of his work are shown in Chapter 2.2.1 in Figures 5 and 6.

By the end of the fifties, Italian objects became isolated exercises in sculptural form, had a slick aesthetic, exclusiveness and luxury. Designers used black leather, chrome and highly finished plastics accompanied by lighting forms which recalled abstract sculpture. Together these elements made up what came to be called "techno-chic" style and by the mid sixties they filled the pages of magazines all over the world.

Techno-chic made no concessions to the past. It stood for an essentially contemporary society dominated by conspicuous consumption and rapidly became the international hallmark of sophistication and affluence. It succeeded in providing an international, wealthy, taste conscious market with the appropriate material symbols with which to create their personalised environments and express exclusive life styles (Sparke et al.,1987,p.178).

Among the main protagonists of this Italian style Vico Magistretti, Marco Zanuso, Castiglioni brothers and Joe Colombo are important to mention.

Vico Magistretti- He had a strong, almost severe

simplicity in his work. He favoured certain primary colours. Many of his designs gave a great consideration to human comfort. His brightly coloured plastic moulded chairs of the early sixties were among the first of their kind. Examples of his work are shown in Figures 10, 18.

Marco Zanuso- All of Zanuso's designs conformed to the principles of form which were inspired by the process of production itself. He displayed a sensitivity to technological developments. Figures 8 and 9 in Chapter 2.2.1 are examples of his designs.

Castiglioni Brothers- Three architect-designers Pier Giacomo, Livio and Achille Castiglioni's main aim was to design functional objects. Their objects expose their own function and do not conceal the truth that lies beneath elegant styling. The "Allunaggio" (moon landing) metal stool in Figure 29; is an eccentric example of their work. Their objects explicitly confront the dialogue between function and form. Their work can be identified as "experimental design".

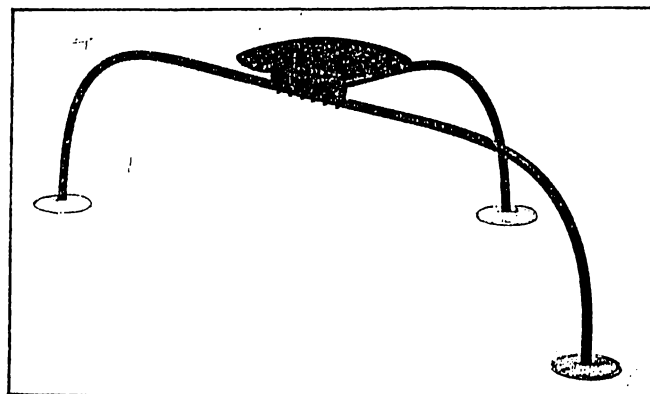


Fig. 29 " Allunaggio" stool

Joe Colombo - Joe Colombo has a special place and must be separated from his contemporaries because of his different suggestions for utopian future. With the discovery of plastics, Joe Colombo exhibited a renewed longing for a futuristic world. His career as a designer is identical with the optimism for the future in Italian design. He transformed each desire of a generation and created a design utopia where objects useful to humans were graced with a new spirit and beauty. His early death left him to become a hero. With exceptional elegance he closed the gap between industrial design and utopic furniture constructions. Most of his furniture designs has never been taken out of production and still available today. The autonomy of which Colombo spoke seems to confirm itself in his designs as a timeless validity (Favata,1988). Figure 30 shows his "Tube" chair.

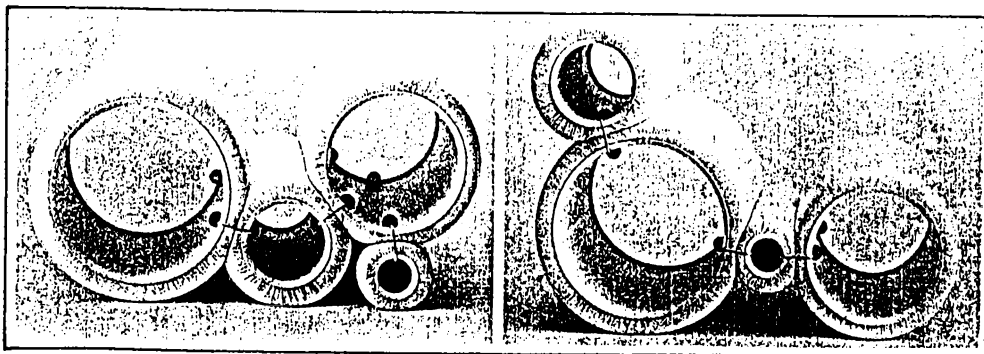


Fig. 30 "Tube" chair

All these products had a visual purity and showed that design in Italy was synonymous with industry and culture. These designs grew increasingly expensive looking and

separated their links with the early years of post-war reconstruction. They were serious looking and elegant but didn't anyway challenge the cultural status quo. The 60's witnessed the birth of an alternative design movement as will be explained after mentioning the influence of Pop-Art on Italian furniture in these years.

Pop Arts Influence - The artistic movement Pop Art had direct influence on Italian furniture design. Streets have similarities to drawings, food to paintings, furniture to sculpture. As Italian factories had acquired a technical know-how over the years, they could immediately appropriate and put into production every stylistic impulse from outside.

Pop Art's influence is seen in the products. "Sacco" is one example designed by Gatti, Paolini and Teodoro is shown in Figure 31. A sack is filled with one-inch diameter polystrol balls and this reduced a piece of furniture for sitting to the simplest denominator. It is still a success and one of Italy's most copied furniture pieces. The baseball-glove-shaped "Joe" sitting furniture piece by Lomazzi, D'urbino and De Pas in Figure 32; is another example of Pop inspiration, the name 'Joe' refers to the baseball hero Joe Di Maggio.

The alternative movement that late sixties witnessed called "Radical Design", "Anti-Design" or "Counter-Design" grew out of the student revolutions and the

crises of the architectural profession. It proposed a more environmental, humanistic design philosophy that embraced the notion of popular taste as a crucial element. Utopian in nature is emphasised and it took its inspirations from fine art movements like Neo-Dada and Surrealism (Sparke, 1986).

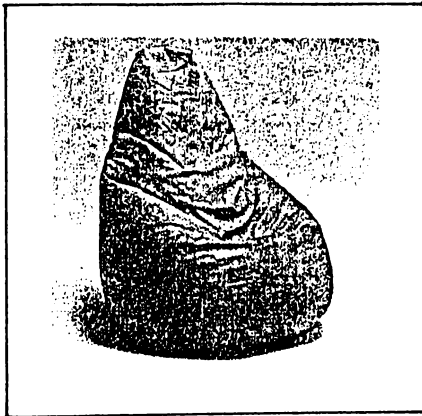


Fig. 31 "Sacco" sitting element

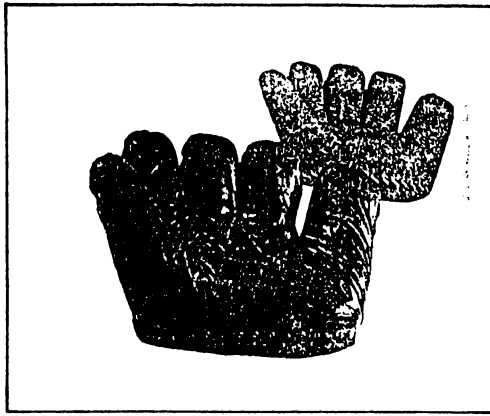


Fig. 32 "Joe" sitting element

The problems tied to the architect-designer came along with the movement and the theoretical works that were produced until the late seventies were concentrated on redefining the role of architecture and design. The projects represented also set out to ridicule the economic and cultural status quo. Radical Italian designers responsibility was to work towards humanitarian rather than economic ends and to use their creative powers to improve the quality of life rather than helping the inescapability of the capital-accumulating process (Bellati, 1990).

The unchallenged father of this movement was the architect-designer Ettore Sottsass, Jr. The projects reflected this radical attitude were firstly seen in the works of Archizoom and Superstudio.

Ettore Sottsass, Jr. - Ettore Sottsass Jr. sought for an alternative aesthetic to rationalism and later for an alternative theory of design that puts man at the centre.

From the early days Sottsass saw the creation of form not in terms of a superficial or stylistic exercise but as a fundamental means of manipulating raw materials in a 'sensorial' way, providing a symbolic link between man and object (Sparke, 1982, p.7).

He was interested in enriching objects rather than making them simpler purer or functional. In his interview with Richard Horn (1988, p.28) Sottsass states that " My way is to conceive objects and environments as instruments of awareness. The idea is to slow down the act of consuming which will then create an awareness of life ".

His interest in areas of design lay outside the Modernism's domain; Eastern and Third World traditions, the Pop style of suburbia and the arts and crafts inspired European decorative designs of the early 20th century.

In his individualistic rejection of the dominant forces in Italian design in the late 50's and early 60's he anticipated the radicalism of late 60's. Sottsass

constellation of interests, already apparent by the mid 60's led the founding of Memphis in 1981. Figure 33 shows the "Mickey Mouse" series in 1971 which was conceived as a dismountable system and suggests a Memphis aesthetic.

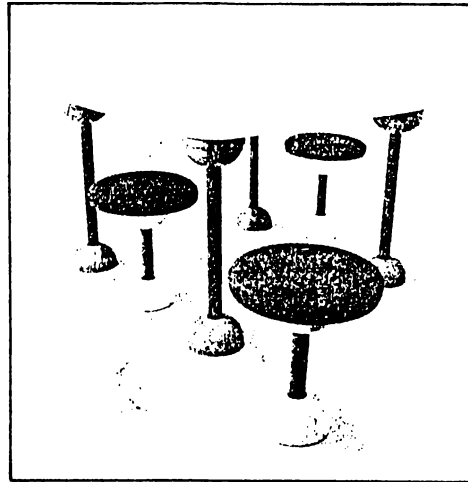


Fig. 33 "Mickey Mouse" series

Archizoom and Superstudio-They produced radical designs for utopian cities and designed ironic pieces. They attempted to break away from a furniture saturated market with their theoretical, critical and radical ideas which can be categorised in the first phase of Italian radical design.

According to the notions of Archizoom design should evoke relational forms in order to liberate itself from conventional traditions. Archizoom refers to the English group Archigram which projected new structures for a high technology future, Archizoom operated with similar architectural manifestoes. They designed a number of visionary environments and some fantasy furniture to move

Italian design away from its preoccupations with consumerism and high style (Sparke, 1986). Mies-lounge chair, giving an ironic message about the standard super chair belongs to one of the important statements of radical design can be seen in Figure 34.

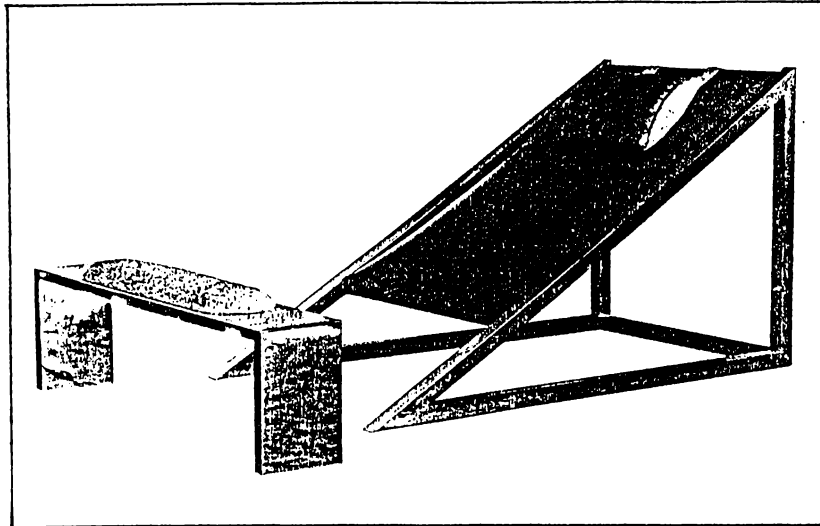


Fig. 34 "Mies-lounge" chair

Superstudio applied ideal design as a tactic to deliver themselves from necessity and therefore to create product design and concrete architecture. They also advanced superstructures and supersystems meant to disrupt previous notions of architectural constructions. Their objects have made design history and exist as concrete objects, unlike their drawings of monstrous cities. Figure 35, Quaderna furniture series is an example of their work; which implying a 3 cm superimposed graphic grid paradigmatically illustrated an applied ideal design.

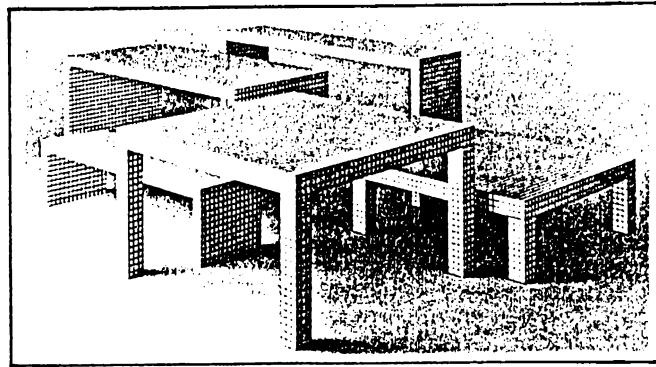


Fig. 35 "Quaderna" series

The radical groups Archizoom and Superstudio and designers like Branzi and Natalini were in Florence in the beginning. Later by the help of the magazine Casabella edited by Mendini, Milan city took up the radical cause of Florentine group. At that time the only two radical architects in Milan were Sottsass and Mendini. This theoretical experimentation produced seminars, exhibitions, one-off pieces, books and magazines. Studio Alchimia, a kind of global workshop, came out of this movement in 1978 as did the Memphis movement (1981-1987). This second phase of Italian radical design which occurred in the late 70's and early 80's succeeded in reaching a wider audience and shaking the international design world into thought (Bellati, 1990).

Alchimia- Founded by Alessandro and Adriana Guerriero is an alternative studio for the projection of new pictorial worlds in the 20th century. Alessandro Mendini led the group, Alchimia redefined both art and functional object by redesigning traditional furniture. Figure 36 shows the redesign of a tubular steel Breuer chair by Alessandro Mendini.

Alchimia's proposed objects are more a philosophy of society than functional objects, quotations from mass culture and design tradition, and a reappraisal of 50's culture in terms of colours, pattern and form (Bangert, 1988, p.61).



Fig. 36 Redesign of "Breur" chair

Their designs were odd and unexpected and owed nothing to modern design. Colours were audacious, materials were surprising. Pieces were handcrafted and produced in very small quantities (Horn,1986 p.17). The group firstly included Mendini, Branzi, Sottsass. After a while Sottsass left the group and became the heart of Memphis.

Memphis - Memphis was more than a style. It launched the message that design is figurative communication, the richness of which could open the road to a broader use of forms, shapes, colours, materials, old and new influences. Under the leadership of Sottsass it included

some international architects and designers as Michael Graves, Arata Isozaki, Javier Mariscal. On the one hand it refers to ancient Egypt, on the other hand it alludes to the home of rock and roll culture.

Its primary aim deals not with the solution of functional and practical problems, but with a new style which as in earlier aesthetic movements can and was encompass everything from a carpet to a teapot (Bangert, 1988 p. 67).

Furniture and object collections of Memphis were consist of primary forms like spheres, primates, cones, cubes, patterns like prefabricated programs and ice-cream colours. They combined in a way that they denied former fundamental statistical laws and traditional hierarchies. This is seen in the materials for example; marble is combined with inexpensive artificial laminate. Colours are radically set of against each other and forms are connected in a way that new and insignificant relationships emerge. Ettore Sottsass' 'Beverly' sideboard in Figure 37 is one of his most radical and interesting pieces, is made of plastic laminate and natural briar. The useless little bulb adds to the carnival air that surround this weird piece (Horn, 1986).

Sottsass in an interview with Richard Horn (1988, p.30) states that; "Almost everybody thought that Memphis was a kind of "Pop " situation. It wasn't at all. In fact it represented a great nostalgia for life, for an aware life".

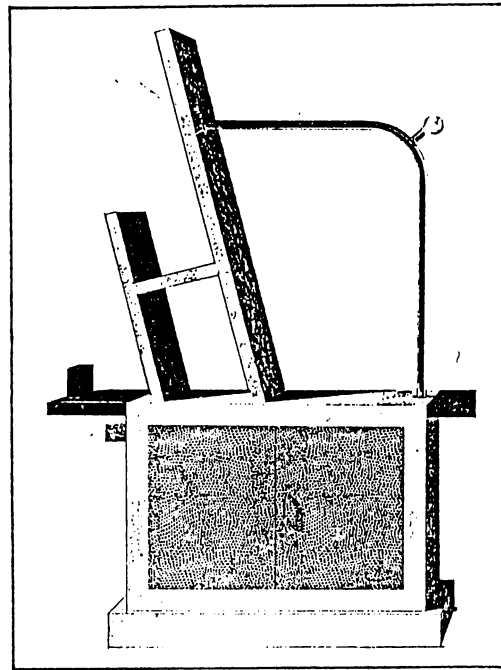


Fig. 37 "Beverly" side board

Italian "Radical Design" succeeded spreading its message widely and in inspiring wide discussion about the cultural implications of contemporary design and the social responsibility of the designer.

Bolidist- Another small movement that was born in 1986. Their dominant motif was speed, as in the speed of progress and technology. Their designs mostly based on streamlined images. They also meant mental and physical mobility. Bolidist's unlike Alchimia and Memphis who create various shapes and joints, emphasised purity and stimulate the movement in their designs. An example is shown in Figure 38; "Disco" metal and leather stool by Massimo Iosa Ghini.

Alchimia, Memphis and Bolidist pieces strove for impact.

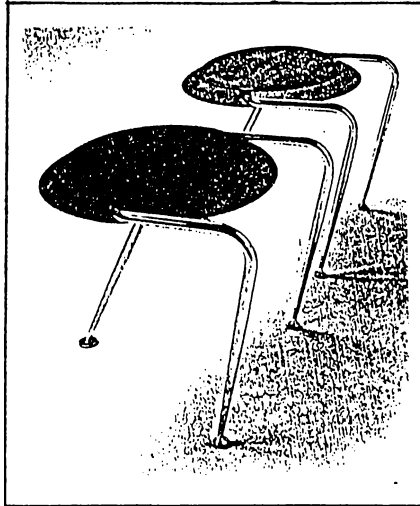


Fig. 38 "Disco" stool

And, after their concept was clearly stated they had conquered the earth with their hastiness and novelty.

The new generation of designers saw the Radical architecture, Alchimia and Memphis as a part of history and they don't live through them. Many new designers began to search for new qualities and ideas and usually these qualities are not technical or functional but take into consideration the element of life style.

5 CONCLUSION

In the years following the Second World War, Italians readily accepted new materials and adopted them to furniture design rapidly. A new concentration began on artistic qualities and one of the important factors that differentiated Italian designers was their stylistic approach. During the economic boom of the 60's new production methods were developed, plastics became the sign of the decade and a new and timely aesthetic emerged. Although the 70's were economically and culturally the years of hardship, the power and brilliance of Italian design became international in these years. In the 80's Italian furniture industry began to create fanciful, unexpected and alternative designs which opened up new horizons in the international design world.

Italian industrialisation, while implementing new systems of mass production, new production of furniture typologies and production techniques, respected craft traditions. The flexibility, the appropriateness of its technologies and the ingenuity of the new product ideas are the strong points of Italian furniture sector which had incrementally showed a brilliant performance. In the furniture sector technology has always been used for its

possibilities whereas fashion is analysed carefully. In Italy on one hand technologically advanced, stylistic pieces of furniture are mass produced, on the other hand, art entered to the design world and this became an important factor which helped Italian furniture to find its particular place within the design world.

A leading role in the evolution of the Italian design have been played by a number of prestigious furniture companies. They were able to offer good design with many designers. These companies tried to provide an exclusive, highly sophisticated image for their goods on the export markets. Italy, is in the first place as an exporter of furniture.

The architect-designers whose names have become synonymous with the concept of modern Italian furniture design and who are perhaps the most significant factor to which Italian design owes its achievement, have had close collaborative relations with the manufacturers. Designers were permitted access to all stages of production. They are used to evolve new forms and help the manufacturers to rationalise their production systems.

Modern Italian design movement originated in and it is still today largely restricted to the wealthy industrial cities of the North, particularly in Milan and Turin. The yearly furniture fairs and the international Triennials of Milan, Comosso D'oro awards and periodicals also

helped to propagate the reputation of both Italian furniture design and designers.

In the 80's Italian designers put forward alternative and innovative designs. Italy still manages to lead the way in the furniture products but now its future is being questioned. Some claim that Italian furniture design has reached its climax and its role will pass to architecture while others believe that it will continue its leading role during the 90's on a new global field.

In recent years an increasing number of Italian furniture which has entered the Turkish market has influenced Turkish designers and manufacturers in a positive way both in conceptual and technological aspects. The Turkish designers and manufacturers had the chance of coming into close contact with Italian furniture, thus they had the opportunity to investigate the newest materials and the most advanced technology. Although design in Turkey, is still copied to a great extent, this situation still led to an improvement. Both designers and manufacturers had invaluable know-how from Italy which could well be used to improve furniture quality in Turkey.

Increasing influence and benefits of Italian furniture design on Turkish designers and manufacturers, considering production systems, new materials, firm-designer relations are worth to be investigated in relation with the historical development in Italy.

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