

Stefano Giovannoni

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With the concept of Italian design and innovation being closely linked to one another, one must examine the characteristics that bring this relationship to light. From the start, Italian design has been rooted in the essence of quality - specifically the quality of the process which directly affects the quality of the outcome. This sense of quality is embedded in the characterization of Italian design as the worthiness of design for everything. Stefano Giovannoni exemplifies this mindset to the utmost level from his approach to design to his various works. This paper will discuss how Giovannoni embodies the various characteristics of Italian design, and through this, what could potentially be the approach of Italian design in the future.

Giovannoni is considered to be one of the “giovanni maestri”, or one of the more contemporary Italian designers, though perhaps on the older side of it because of his preference to have his share of acclaim with the “maestri”. Being a native Italian who lives and works in Milan, Giovannoni is in an advantageous situation in that the essence of the quality of Italian design has already been instilled in him, and it is shown in his works time and time again; every curve, shape and form serves as evidence of careful thought being put into each element. As a studied architect, Giovannoni has leaned more towards the industrial design field through his creations of everyday products, and he has excelled at it.

Much of Giovannoni’s success in the design industry lies in his mindset of commercialization in his products - enabling longevity through mass production. Cristina Morozzi, a design seminar professor for the Master in Design program at Domus Academy, states that “Stefano Giovannoni is the only one who speaks willingly of money, one of few through design has made money for himself and the companies for whom he designs.” and that he is overtly “convinced that the best proof of a project’s goodness lies within its commercial success.” (Giovannoni Design, 2008). The fact that Giovannoni explicitly finds importance in commercial success in design is more attuned to the new Italian design because it introduces the internal aspect of communication with people in his designs by instilling the sense of humanization into it.

For a design to be successful commercially, it must reach the hearts of the audience and trigger their internal instincts and emotions. Giovannoni beautifully does this by embodying the “playfulness” factor into his designs, which have served to act as an appeal for his audience. He attunes to the public’s desires by applying a primary formula for Italian de-

sign, “usefulness plus beauty” through making sure that his products are designed with people in mind. From kitchenware to furniture to electronics, his products are designed to be useful yet have a graceful presence through his “form follows fun” module (Neumann, 1999). Giovannoni’s approach to design is through a specialized wisdom in which he plays off emotional codes to appeal to his audience. The “Girotondo” series that he designed for Alessi along with Guido Venturini as part of the King Kong Production studio exemplifies this through its iconic representations of simple characters that anyone could recognize, which are embedded so cleverly into a series of kitchen and dining utensils. It became a huge success, selling over a million pieces.



Girotondo series - King Kong - Alessi

Another factor to design appeal specifically in Italian design is timelessness and attunement to changing times - ensuring that the designs are up-to-date for a long period of time. Giovannoni does this through his long-term vision - he designs not for the present, but for the future, through bringing the future into simple everyday tasks, while at the same time, enabling a strong emotional and sensorial appeal so as to be an object of desire for the public (Designophy, 2004). “Il Telefono Alessi” shows this as Giovannoni revolutionized the iconic representation of the telephone. Whereas there is usually a male iconography of the phone through standing vertically on a horizontal base, Giovannoni turned this one into a unified icon with its interlocking handset and curvy feel. This phone represented the start of a whole new generation of communication devices designed by Alessi (Designboom, 2000-2008). Giovannoni was able to make the future work to better the present. In this sense, Giovannoni is considered to be the “champion of Super & Popular in contemporary design,” as Alessi describes, “with his ability to open new roads in the unresolved dilemma of the relationship between Form and Function.” (Giovannoni Design, 2008).

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Il Telefono Alessi - Stefano Giovannoni - Alessi + Siemens

Giovannoni's approach to design greatly reflects that of the open, tolerant and experimental nature that the new Italian design embodies more and more. It is present in his search for new combinations through his various series of products; it is present in his manifestation of his design inspirations that are of cartoons and science fiction; it is present in the way he brings simple forms to life. He is not afraid to let his inspirations of cartoons, science fiction, and the imagination arena shine through in his works, as many of them employ fictional beings that are designed for real usage. Take "Merdolino" for example - although it looks like a plant, it is in actuality a toilet brush; or his "Oriental" series that look like toy figures but are designed as useful home products. The "Family First" series of furniture he designed for Magis represents his experimentation with different materials and building techniques, as the name of "Chair First" came from it being the first example of a chair made by air moulding in which the emptying of the frame is not just applied to the volumes with a small tubular section, but all throughout the volumes of the chair.



Table First + Chair First - Stefano Giovannoni - Magis

Although Giovannoni no doubt has the ability to experiment designs on his own, it is the companies that he has collaborated with that really provided him with the environment and opportunity to flourish, and this is being noted as one of the emerging qualities of new Italian design. Giovannoni notes the growing importance in the relationship between designer and the company (Designboom, 2000-2008), as both parties benefit from realizing each other and being able to contribute to one another's aspirations, and from the tight collaboration and sharing of knowledge that occurs. When Giovannoni formed King Kong Productions with colleague Guido Venturini, they were able to experiment freely concerning their intentions of avant-garde researches in various areas of design (Gabra-Liddell, 1994) within the Alessi environment. This proved to be beneficial for both Alessi and King Kong as Alessi's motto of fun innovation was in tune with the designers' approach. For Magis, Giovannoni's designs of the "Bombo" and "Family First" were both successful series that resulted out of experimentation of the form of plastics, and Magis supported Giovannoni through being dedicated to working with both well-known and emerging designers, as well as fostering the creative environment.

The creative environment that exists within innovative companies like the above allow for the accommodation of knowledge spillovers, as they attract different kinds of talent that are then able to use these companies as a platform to develop their own signature style. In Giovannoni's case, he was attracted to the city of Milan because of the companies and the environment there that supported his design approach, and the opportunity for the sharing of knowledge. This is exemplified by his many works being showcased in various exhibitions such as Milan's Design Weeks, and his teaching and research position at the Domus Academy there.

Stefano Giovannoni acts as a suitable representation of the characteristics of Italian Design through his collaboration with companies, willingness to share knowledge, and his open and experimental nature of approaching design that he processes and creates with such thought and quality, with such a complex and personal language. His methodology of iconic representation can indeed illustrate the future of Italian design, seeing that designers are increasingly developing their own signature styles, it contributes to Italy being an icon of design in itself.

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