

# Aldo Cibic

Intellectual and Interaction Designer  
by Jenny Lee



## Abstract

Aldo Cibic's role as a change-agent is a perfect indicator that every designer's responsibility is to ensure the future will have the opportunity to witness the unique innovations that Italian design has to offer. His observations of urban spaces allows him to explore different means of communication through humanistic aspects of design, and incorporating them into his work.

## Identity of an Italian Designer



*Coco Table Lamp, 2000.*



*Porcino Stool, 2001.*

Ever since Italy's identity in industrial products was established in the international market in the 1950's, it could not be argued that they have been in high demand for their quality and aesthetic. This phenomenon has been accredited to agglomeration economies within the unique urban development of metropolitan areas within Italy, particularly cities like Milan. Resources are indeed shared and optimized, but this cannot be restricted to a privilege held by the Italians. In recent years, designers from Spain, Japan, Austria, etc. have begun to innovate in the same urban spaces as well and create similar quality of work (Aldersey-Williams, 1992). Even local designers have chosen to exhibit their works in different parts of the world and choose not to remain in these innovative cities. Aldo Cibic is a prime example of such practices. His studio also consists of professional interior designers, graphic designers, architects, and industrial designers of diverse cultural backgrounds. This development in Milan, where his design firm is based, raises many questions on how the identity of Italian design is being sustained. His contribution

to this, along with observations of urban spaces allows him to explore different means of communication through humanistic aspects of design, and incorporating them into his work.

### Beginnings with Memphis

Originally from Vicenza, Cibic moved to Milan in 1979, where he met Ettore Sottsass and founded Memphis with him not long after. The firm's conception was in fact a response to the uprising of radical Italian designers that was occurring during this time period, particularly the exhibits conducted by Studio Alchymia. Sottsass' collaboration with Cibic and other young designers proved to be more unconventional in use of material, yet optimistic in comparison to the "anti-design" approach, which sought to ask more questions than seek answers. The existence of Memphis itself seemed to intellectually challenge the rising commercialism and relevance of modernism and functionalism through populist forms expressed through fluorescent colours and patterns in their furniture and industrial products.

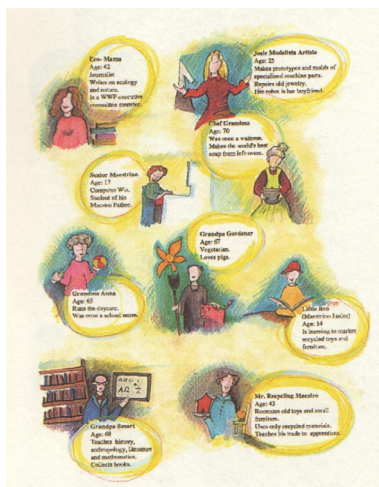
Italian influence spread through the international market as more cross-cultural projects were passed to Memphis. Alberto Alessi makes this comment regarding how Italian design can be defined in a mass cultural setting: "We are right to think of Memphis as Italian, just as the Bauhaus was German. Italian design will continue to exist regardless of Italian designers because of the attitude of Italian industries." (Alessi, 1992) Alessi continued his observation that one characteristic did seem constant among all of the great Italian products: there was a tendency to break the rules. (Alessi, 1992) Even though it is not a tangible component, Memphis clearly displayed such a trait, and Cibic continued this trend as he left the group in 1989. His focus shifted from individual products to lifestyles of the people and forms of enjoyment, as he founded his own design firm with Antonella Spiezio.



## Inventing New Worlds to Generate New Economies

Cibic & Partners was created with the intention of generating harmonious interactions between people and objects, and people and spaces, design that evokes sociability and emotion. This was especially evident in his project in 2006, “Microrealities.” The stories that people carry with them when they enter an urban space can ultimately mould the identity of that space through their actions. An example of this would be a proposal to use shopping centres for other functions of public use, such as spaces for schools, gardens, and offices. Many of Cibic’s work also consisted of interior spaces and architecture in various locations, such as Berlin, London, and Shanghai.

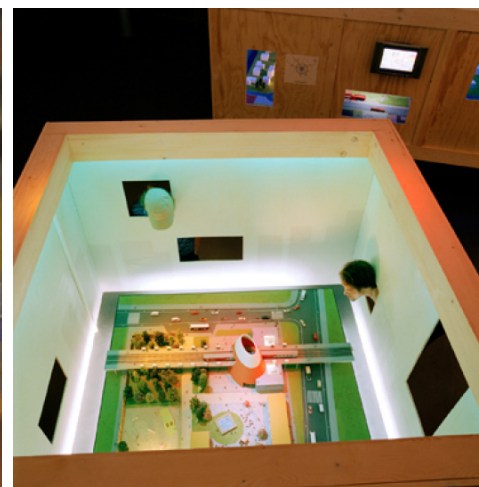
This project was also an extension of “A Family Business,” an older project that examined how interactions within a family can be further integrated into a business. Potentially, the settings within which we would normally restrict for just leisure or work can be interchangeable in order to optimize a family unit’s living space, also known as “hybrid spaces.” This is a prominent aspect of Italian design where family members are rather involved in the business, which also helps maintain the values and principles of the industry itself.



*Family Member Profiles, 1995.*



*A Family Business, 1995.*



*Microrealities, 2006.*

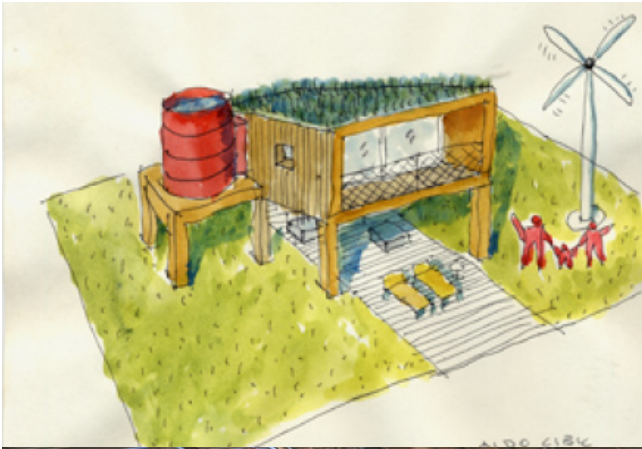
Cibic constantly explores new ways to enhance spaces in which people can co-exist, being aware that it is a primary human need, but can be given different parameters which can lead to new ways of interaction. His project “A Perfect Weekend” shows his experimentation with how people’s social habits and behaviours change within certain contexts. A continuation of “Microrealities,” Cibic creates a story through a series of tents, which encourage people to rediscover basic life values and spend time with other

people. This setting also becomes a symbol of living both economically and ecologically, revealing new possibilities on how consumption of objects can be reduced, as well as allowing people to rediscover certain values and ethics, yet without losing sight of aesthetics and harmony with the space. It poses as a reflection on Cibic's interest in catering to the middle class, which he sees as a dwindling market that is quickly losing its identity and purchasing power. (Cibic, 2006) This concept also coincides with the ideology of Italian designers wanting to use materials efficiently and expend energy responsibly. This may be the reason why in Italy, craft and technological mentalities are able to co-exist without pushing each other into opposing sides, which often occurs in other countries. (Aldersey-Williams, 1992).

One of his biggest ambitions in life is to constantly think of new ideas without resulting in a form of standardization from the industry. By constantly examining everyday life situations, he helps redefine possible opportunities for businesses and micro-economies. For example, in the exhibit "View with a Room," he took the concept of how we perceive a hotel room, and reversed it, such that exclusion becomes immersion, and suddenly it becomes something sustainable that can be seen from the outside. Rather than enveloping a space in walls and technology, that space becomes exposed and new forms of interactions are made possible. As can be seen, Cibic views every project as "a challenge to create a feeling, even a subtle one, that consequently generates identity, vitality and a sense of belonging." (Cibic). Through each piece, he emphasizes that using effective design



*A Perfect Weekend, 2005.*



*A View with a Room, 2007.*

to continuously transform the various aspects of society, the economy, and human behaviour is crucial to generating new interpretations and improvements to what already exists.

## The Future of Italian Design

As an Italian, Aldo Cibic most certainly displays the qualities with which Italian designers are associated. Intellectuals like Cibic will continue to contribute to the identity of Italian design through his sharing of knowledge. His belief in maestri passing on their experiences to the next generation is highly valued, as he often does this himself through teaching at the Domus Academy in Milan, the Architecture Faculty in Venice, the Faculty of Design of Milan Polytechnic, and the Tongji University in Shanghai. Conducting workshops on a regular basis also gives students

opportunities to aid in the development of new innovations for the future. As an explorer, he also highly values taking risks for a passion, as well as acting responsibly for what he has the capability to change. Marco Cavallotti explains that “the idea that the world can be changed through architecture (and design) persists in Italy more strongly than anywhere else.” (Cavallotti, 1992). This is especially true for Cibic’s exhibits and experimental spaces.

It can be observed that his experiences in other countries also contributed to the growth and development of not only his design firm but also to Milan. When asked about his views on Milan as an innovative city, Cibic described that the city itself specializes in drawing young designers to showcase their work there. The innovation itself may or may not actually occur within that city. However, the urban areas are most certainly effective incubators for innovative ideas to grow once they are established. From observations of other maestri giovani around this time period,

most instances indicate they are examples of knowledge spillovers, meaning that they all studied under a maestro who maintained a career during the peak of Italian innovation. The young designers eventually break off to start their own firms or generate their own philosophies and ideas. Many seem to travel to different countries, whether to showcase their designs in various cities or gain inspiration. This action alone grants them new ideas and experiences they take back with them to Italy. As they return, those ideas in turn cultivate and flourish within the booming cities.

Currently, it would seem that Italian designers are still maintaining the essence of Italian design because of the maestri they trained under. However, in cities like Milan, where businesses are beginning to grow too large to keep within the family, the values that would be sustained in small- or medium-sized businesses might start to lose their meaning. (Simmie, 2001) If a generation of designers also chooses not to pass their knowledge down to the next generation, it also would pose as a chance for the identity of Italian design to diminish. Aldo Cibic's role as a change-agent is a perfect indicator that every designer's responsibility is to ensure the future will have the opportunity to witness the unique innovations that Italian design has to offer.

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# James Irvine

Katrina Chua

## ***Introduction***

Milan is an innovative city. It is a magnet for local and international talent who, as knowledge workers, agglomerate within the design center thus constantly developing ideas that produce innovation (Taylor & Chiang, 2008). Milan is able to support and attract creativity because of the quality of life it represents; its core composed of world-renowned design companies from architecture, industrial design, fashion, technology and more. The various exhibition halls and events allow Milan's finest to showcase their craft and ideas serving as a medium for international discussion and for attracting more talent into the scene.

One of the main driving forces of Milan's progression is that of globalization. As a design capital, there is a constant need for new ideas from the outside; companies have been taking advantage of external influx of talent by commissioning them to create products that would still be consistent with what is established as Italian Design.

But what is it really? Italian designers have always thought highly of the combination of aesthetics and functionality in their lifestyle. Quality is another factor that sets Italy as a whole apart from other design centers of the world since the whole process of conceptualization to manufacturing is closely monitored. This practice has been in play throughout local Italian industries within traditional family owned businesses.

With the rapid advancement of Milan, other changes have occurred in regards to the relationship of designers and the industry. Because of globalization, the country once critical to any sort of change has opened up to the world market. In doing so, it has sacrificed the Italian tradition of "keeping it in the family", something that has defined Italian Design in the past. But as a design center, this change was inevitable. What Milan was able to gain were new perspectives with outsourcing becoming necessary in its development of innovation. How Milan is able to retain foreign talent is through the concept of spillovers, an occurrence within creative centers wherein knowledge workers in companies would branch off to create something of their own within the agglomeration (Taylor & Chiang, 2008).

## ***James Irvine: Understanding within Italian Design Context***

As a knowledge worker, James Irvine was exposed to that transition from being an outsider to being a key player in Italian Design. Originally from London, Irvine studied furniture and indus-



trial design at the Kingston Polytechnic Design School and then at the Royal Collage of Art. He immediately traveled to Milan in 1984 after earning an internship in Olivetti, a company operating in the information and communication technology sector. At that time, the possibility of practicing abroad was considered prestigious because it was uncommon, an extraordinary opportunity. Working as a design consultant, Irvine was able to continue learning while honing his skills in designing industrial products under the guidance of design maestros Ettore Sottsass and Michele de Lucchi. After a one-year stint at Toshiba Tokyo, he returned to Milan and opened his own studio in 1988.

Irvine could have set up his design studio in his hometown or elsewhere in the world at this point in his career. Besides all the contacts he has made, what drew him back to Milan was the Italian's attitude towards design. In his own words, we have now "embraced a service culture in which the 'creative economy' plays an increasingly significant role" (Gibson, 2007) wherein it is integrated into the Italian lifestyle. He mentions that although London has been featuring designers in events the same way as Milan has been doing, their approach to design is different as these events and their featured designers are all a result hype, their products without meaning or functionality and seen as just another passing trend.

While managing his own studio, Irvine continues to collaborate with other design companies in Milan. In 1993 to 1997, he was a partner of Sottsass associatti responsible for the industrial design group with his mentor, Ettore Sottsass. Soon, the design community began to recognize Irvine's value in the industry in Milan and internationally. He has then been able to work with several of the top brands and companies in furniture and industrial design such as B&B Italia, Artemide, Danese, Magis, Foscarini and more, helping to visualize and create a wide range of products from fax machines to light fixtures to buses.

Irvine retains a set of characteristics in all of his work. With anything he creates, he starts with an idea. "I think that a project has to have a good strong idea behind it, it doesn't need to be embellished so much, it just needs to be right." (Designboom, 2003). Second to that is the context in which he is designing for may it be the company he is working for, pricing of the end product or end user, elements that would reflect in his design decisions. Simplicity is key to design in his eyes as he mentions that products should "just be enough to do the job and not too much to confuse" by serving its main purpose and doing it well. It is important for him that his products are functional, to be used by people specifically those living in the urban environment.

As a project for Foscarini, Irvine successfully incorporates his key design attributes into an elegant floor lamp. The form of the lamp combines a long glass stem with chrome-plated aluminum exuding an illusion of lightness to the product. It features a pair of joints allowing the light to be rotated and oriented creating versatility in its function. Pointed to the ceiling, it creates ambient light with the added touch of being able to dim its brightness; situated above a table, it can serve as needed illumination for a workspace. Through a simple design, Irvine was still able to incorporate something innovative with his thought process targeted towards his goal of designing for urban environments.



*Haloscope for Foscarini 2005*

Irvine's experience that spans for more than two decades has given him a vast amount of knowledge in varying fields interrelated to design. He defines Italian design as a "constant progression either by creating something new or redefining the old" (Italia Design, 2006). The innovation of this new generation of designers is carried out through the use of new technologies and being able to reinterpret classic pieces into the contemporary context. On the other hand, he also sees through the excitement of innovation into the underlying problems in the industry. With all the craze surrounding design events and hot new designers in the field, it is difficult to keep in mind what the real purpose of design is, which is not creating embellishment but instead improve the quality of living. Design is and should be for people. Irvine has always remained humble about his position saying that "design is just a part of a story" (Italia Design, 2006); it's not all about the design, it's about the product as a whole.

When Olivetti decided to create a new line dedicated to the world of consumer products, it commissioned Irvine and Italian design maestro Alberto Meda for the job whose goal was to fill the needs of professionals working in small offices. The two designers were faced with the challenge of designing printers, a competitive market dominated by international brands like Hp, Canon and Epson with Olivetti being the only European brand producing consumer inkjet printers. True to the signature Italian way of production, Irvine and Meda

immersed themselves into the project, being involved in everything from the design strategy, to the product function and interface (in collaboration with IDEO), to the product logo and marketing strategies. The end result was the creation of multi-functional color photo printers with a sleeker look and feel while keeping the same form that we are all familiar with. These printers come in a range of variations to better fit into the individual needs of users. The innovative features include an LCD display, wireless connection through Bluetooth or Wi-Fi, a stand-alone option enabling printing without a computer, and a revolutionary automatic enhancement of images with a touch of a button. These Olivetti printers prove that there is always a space for design to intervene even with existing products and push boundaries using the available resources.



*SIMPLE\_WAY for Olivetti 2006*



*Olivetti at Smau Milano*

As an intellectual, he also points out the lack of serious discussion on the impact of design on society. Sustainability is another issue that Irvine is concerned about. He believes in the longevity of his products, having its function and form last through the ages since he believes that “products which age well, you tend to keep them” (Italia Design, 2006). In today’s world of excessive consumerism, it is easy and fairly cheap to manufacture products, objects that with expiry dates, things that serve no purpose or benefit to anyone. As a designer, he recognizes the importance of his role to create an impact on society through thoughtful designs and minute details with the goal of improving people’s lifestyle. He doesn’t suggest consumerism as negative, but expresses the need for people to keep a sense of social responsibility.

For the furniture company Magis, Irvine created the Centomila Family, a line of chairs and tables that is reflective of the sustainable design that he aims to achieve. The chairs coming in a variety of heights and colors are all stackable making them well suited for flexibility of use within the urban space. Accompanied with the chairs are the tables, which match in the different heights and sizes. Irvine chose to use molded polypropylene, a lightweight plastic blend,

for the body of the chairs and table surfaces allowing him to create the desired form but still have the durability and cost effectiveness for mass production. The tables are also made to be light yet durable with the use of medium-density fibers. The whole look is pulled together with aluminum legs and matte plastic finish illuminating elegance and simplicity, traits indicative of a product made in Italy.



*Centomila Family for Magis 1999-2002*

When asked by the Italia 2006 group on his thoughts regarding innovation, Irvine's response is somewhat bleak stating the improbability of truly innovative designs to occur at this time due to industry restrictions of marketing and product planning. With most of the companies today selling market shares, it is difficult for them to take risks since they now have to please shareholders. Family-owned businesses continue to thrive with their ability to take that extra step and create breakthroughs in design while not having to worry about pleasing "the man". One his rationale for creating his own studio was for this very reason.

These factors that influence Irvine's designs and his ideals on his position as a designer are those that make him fit in so well amongst the movers and shakers in Milan's design industry. His approach to moving design forward is by having a grasp on the current context and being able to design within the contemporary setting. With this shared appreciation and value for design, he continues to be someone to look out for in regards to innovation as part of the new generation of the Giovanni Maestri of Italian Design.

This new generation now has the role of keeping a balance between maintaining the Italian quality in the fast-paces realm of design. Understanding the context in which products are made into is an important factor in achieving this goal, something that Irvine is a prime example of. With the new generation increasingly becoming non-Italian, Italian Design as we know it will continue to change, with its new definition dependent on the innovation that occur within the design capital that is Milan.

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# *Understanding within the Italian Design Context*

# *Matali Crasset*

Derek Pante

## **The Impact of External Knowledge Workers on Italian Design: Matali Crasset**

### **Introduction**

Innovation is fueled by ideas. These ideas are designed: they are conceived, processed, and brought to life by knowledge workers who work in conjunction with established companies who then manufacture and release the manifested idea to the public, allowing for public discourse. Through this open dialogue of the processed idea, new ideas and knowledge can be formed, which can then lead to more innovation. In order for this innovation process to occur, though, several elements must be in place. From the information model “Talent & Innovative Cities,” (2007) we know the elements that make up this system include (but are not limited to): talent, companies, agglomerations, open environments, and spillovers. In Milan, for instance, there are a number of design companies that are producing innovative works. Milan, being an exhibition city, also provides the necessary environment for creative workers to display their work and establish relationships through agglomerations. Spillovers occur when talent break away from larger companies to establish their own studios. These are important in the sharing of knowledge. All these elements work together in a complex system to produce innovation.

Characteristics of Italian design are apparent within innovative cities like Milan. These characteristics include being multidisciplinary, being an intellectual, the presence of family-owned businesses, and the idea of slowness (ItaliaDesign, 2005). Being multidisciplinary, having the ability to move from one type of project to another, has been a characteristic of Italian design since the days of the old masters (who, more often than not, started off as architects but moved towards other fields out of necessity). Being an intellectual means being able to critically analyze design in relation to culture, in order to advance concepts about design. Family-operated companies offer a sense of quality and lineage, but are an inherently closed system – ideals pass from generation to generation, instead of being exposed to the new. Slowness allows for quality by not focusing on manufacturing, but on ensuring high standards in craftsmanship.

With the influx of new designers entering Italy over the past two decades, this notion of Italian design has been both supported and challenged, creating an updated system that is not only outputting new innovative ideas coming from Italy (but from outside workers), but also changing the relationships of designers to industry as well. Companies actively seek out these external designers in order to foster innovation, thus sustaining the city as an innovative center.

## External Knowledge Workers: Matali Crasset



*Matali Crasset*

Matali Crasset, for example, is a French industrial designer who runs her own studio, Matali Crasset Productions, in Paris, France, but is constantly sought after by Italian companies because of her unique design approach.

Crasset began her career in 1991, working under Italian designer Denis Santachiara in Milan. It was under the tutelage of Santachiara that she learned the poetic potential that could be found within new technologies (Godineau, 2008). She then worked for French designer Philippe Starck at Thomson Multimedia, where she learned how to manage multiple large, complex projects at the same time (DesignBoom, 2002). Both of these influences had a profound effect on Crasset, as she was able to combine the artistic, experimental nature of Santachiara with the pragmatic qualities of a large company like Thomson Multimedia. Crasset acknowledged the importance of being multidisciplinary when she said, “A designer can be ‘multiple’, and this is inevitably reflected in his projects. Before, there were boxes in which we were neatly arranged. Today, we fit in all the boxes... In the past, people were specialized in one subject, today we want to be present in a whole range of sectors.” (Cassagnau & Pillet, 1999, p.71).



During the period between her time at Thomson and the opening of her studio, Crasset began to define and develop her approach to design. She starts by defining a purpose: “There must be a purpose- if there isn’t a purpose or something interesting to bring into every day life, I won’t work on it” (France24, 2008). She then takes an everyday scenario, such as sleeping, and reconfigures it in order to encourage people to reconsider their living surroundings (Design Hub, 2006).



*When Jim Came to Paris (1998)*

A good example of one of her earlier projects that defines her approach is her work “When Jim Came to Paris” (Quand Jim monte à Paris). “When Jim Came to Paris” is a combination bed-lamp-clock comprised of a foam mattress, a night light, and an alarm clock, that can roll up into a neat vertical column for easy storage (Katakouzinis, 2006, p.6). It takes the common scenario of having an unexpected guest and limited space and works around it by having a multi-functional, space-saving bed design: hospitality, mobility, modularity,

multi-functionality, and reconsidering everyday situations all rolled into one (literally). With this work, she critically analyzes the role of current living spaces (specifically small, cramped spaces) and how people behave within them. She then reconfigures the space by developing an object that not only has multiple uses but also is practical. This way of thinking is in line with the tenets of Italian design, which include sustainability (through multi-functionality) and mobility (essential for tightly packed urban centers).

### Milan Connections: Elmes, Felicerossi, Danese, and others

It was this unique approach of looking at everyday scenarios and reconfiguring them with themes in mind that attracted the attention of Italian design companies such as Felicerossi and Danese, and exhibition shows, such as Elmes's "Open Your Mind" exhibition. In each case, her works were displayed at the Fuori Salone del Mobile events (2004-2006), allowing for maximum exposure to design industry representatives as well as opportunities for Crasset to exchange knowledge with other designers, which is not only an important part of her process, but an essential element of innovation.



*OpenPlatform (2006)*



For the "Open Your Mind" exhibition, Crasset was asked to express, in product form, the themes of "opening" and "closing". Her response was a modular table with a dividing the screen called "OpenPlatform." In the middle of a table is a screen that can be slide along the top, creating either two separate surfaces or a single long one. The screen can also move to the end of the table, extending the surface, as well as act as a vertical shelf with a light on top. Again, she took an everyday scenario (sitting at a table), applied themes

(opening/closing), and developed an object that encourages people to reconsider the way they use tables (as separate halves, as a single whole) through the multi-functional nature of the object. This event took place at the Fuori Salone with seven other designers, allowing for multiple perspectives and takes on the “opening/closing” theme, and giving the designers an opportunity to exchange knowledge and ideas.



*Decompression Space (2005)*



*Evolute (2004)*

For Felicerossi, a Milan design firm, Crasset developed “Decompression Space,” a sectional chair with armrests and clever hollow spaces for the elbows. For this chair, Crasset used rotomoulding (a process normally used for car chassis design), wrapping elastic bands around a metal frame. For Danese, she designed the “Evolute” lamp, a lampshade delivered as a flatpack to be assembled. The object is transformed by folding and generating forms, thus allowing a level of interaction that is not normally seen with stationary objects like lamps. The “Evolute” is made of wood, but shaped to look like a rolled up leaf, both used as a way to bring nature to the home (yet another example of reconsidering living spaces).

Besides these examples, Crasset has also designed a range of other products, services, and spaces in Milan, further cementing her multidisciplinary nature. For instance, she designed an exhibition space for the “Pitti Immagine: New Beats” event in Florence in 2004, creating lycra igloos for the young fashion designers to exhibit their collections; for Artemide, she designed the “Ierace” lamp, a lamp that provides an energy-efficient diffusion of light; and in 2007, Crasset designed a “lovetoy” made of silicon and metal balls, with the aim being reinventing the notion of a sex toy from a tool to an extension of the body. These examples further showcase Crasset’s ability to jump from one discipline (spatial design) to another (product design).

## **Conclusion**

In contemporary Milan, and throughout Italy, there has been a noticeable shift in the notion of Italian design, with the help of new non-Italian designers. Italian design has, in the past, been characterized by a number of elements, including being multidisciplinary, being an intellectual, the presence of family-owned businesses, and the idea of slowness. These elements that make up Italian design have both been supported, and challenged, by the new designers. The multidisciplinary nature of the designers lives on with the new generation, as they are, like the old masters, proficient in multiple disciplines, from product design to interior design. Crasset's work ranges from designing entire exhibition spaces (Pitti Immagine: New Beats) to small radios (for Thomson Multimedia). Matali also displays an intellectual nature through her exploration and questioning of everyday situations, which allow her to design objects that are not only practical and fun, but create discussion and dialogue to further advance the design. The idea of quality through slowness is also still apparent, though nowadays there is much more of a focus on manufacturing, both as a means to obtain revenue and as a vehicle for promotion. What has changed, though, is the idea of a closed, family-only business. With the advent of globalization and the rapid development of telecommunications, along with the need for new ways of thinking in order to keep innovative ideas going, Italian companies (such as the Milan-based Danese and Felicerossi) have opened their doors to external designers like Crasset, allowing for fresh ideas to come into the city. The relationship of designers to industry has changed. Designers have moved away from the notion of working for a single company to opening their own studios so that they can work for, and with, multiple companies. In doing so, they can utilize their knowledge to the fullest extent to develop their ideas. This is the new Italia design- design that is not just limited to internal knowledge workers, but talent from all over the world who bring their knowledge, combine it with local knowledge, and thus produce innovative ideas.

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# Patricia Urquiola

April Pierce

*Italian Design*

Milan is one of Italy's thriving design centers. Designers from all over Europe and the world are coming to work in this city and are, in turn, bringing new innovative ideas to what has come to be known as Italian design. Designers such as Patricia Urquiola are key players in the business that has grown as a designer around this city. She in particular has become one of the most successful designers in Milan today with her unique approaches to classical designs. However, considering that many of the new designers in Milan are not Italian born, are they still part of Italian design?



Patricia Urquiola



Lowland Series

In order to answer this question, one must look at the definition of Italian design. Italian design is made up of several key concepts which include movements towards innovative ideas, taking culture into consideration, building joy of use into products, retaining communication between designers and the design factories, collaborating, the notion of putting the value of the product above the need to meet a bottom line, and constantly striving for the best quality and the sense of timelessness that has become a standard concept within Italian design. The designers in particular display a passion for their own ideas that works well with their individuality and stubbornness. This makes certain that the designers' inter-company work is valuable for both the companies and themselves.

# Patricia Urquiola and Italian Design

All of these things help define what Italian design is. Considering the concepts of what Italian design has been defined as, it is found that



*Fjord Series*



*Antibodi series*



*Patricia Urquiola*

designers like Patricia Urquiola are part of Italian design.

Patricia Urquiola was born in Spain in 1961. She studied architecture in Madrid at Facultad de Arquitectura for several years before moving to Milan to finish off her degree. She graduated from Politecnico di Milano in 1989 and remained there for several years afterwards, working for various companies. While at the Politecnico di Milano, her thesis was supervised by the Maestro Achille Castiglioni and it was he who convinced her to put aside architecture for the time being and focus more on product and furniture design. It was this relationship between her and the Maestro that allowed her to develop the essential and classical style that is pervasive throughout her work. She would later say about her mentor that “After you meet [him], you cannot think of anything except how important it is to design. He shows you that the little things can be just as interesting as architecture.” While she worked on how to make her designs something to be desired, she also began working with people such as Vico Magistretti, the people from de Padova and Lissoni Associati in order to further develop her business

# Patricia Urquiola and Italian Design

sense. This would serve her well when, in 2001, she opened her own design studio in Milan.

Many of these factors in her life have led her to be what one would call an Italian designer. Maestri from the past have been interdisciplinary and, as such, have brought knowledge and ideals from one medium to the next. This has made their work even better and Urquiola is the same. She studied architecture like many of the Maestri before her then began working in the product design industry. This was, as she states, mostly due to the influence of Castiglioni, however and it works to her advantage.

As well, it should be noted that many of the designers before her had studied architecture, but, due to the time period not many buildings were being built. Many architects from Italy were traveling abroad in order to seek out contracts to build. But those who did not leave the country in search of architectural work remained in Italy. There, many designers turned to industrial and product design in order to use their abilities. Times have changed once more, and more things are being built. As such, designers such as Urquiola have been working in furniture design but are being given the opportunities now to do building designs not only in Italy, but around the world.

Over the years she has maintained excellent relationships with the companies in and around Milan. These relationships were the ones that allowed her to further her own creative possibilities. People such as Patrizia Moroso from Moroso had taken their chances with her and given her considerable freedom with which to create what she wished with the help of the company. In this particular instance, she ended up creating two of her signature pieces for them: the Fjord and Bloom series.



# Patricia Urquiola and Italian Design

These two sets of furniture both hold certain value with the concept that all the pieces she creates should be functional and timeless. This does not mean, however, that the idea of timelessness is restricted to a more tame style of design. Urquiola does have a great deal of respect for those avant-garde designers that are pushing the limits of what is considered design. These pieces that are pushing the boundaries are what is making Italian design so fascinating and has made it so all these years. But her concerns lie where the aesthetic and narrative aspects of the products become more important and completely overshadow the actual functionality of the product. “A personal style should be a good mix of form and material use, none of which dominates the other. If you make things trendy, but not useful, you are not being a designer.” (Urquiola, 2007)



*Patricia Urquiola and Patrizia Moroso*

This concern with having the pieces she creates being suitable for usage with her clients is an aspect of Italian design. It's her concern for the culture into which many of her products go into that ensures that they will be useful to the users. If products are not created with concern to the environment into which they are intended to go, the reaction towards them may not be what was expected. The products

# Patricia Urquiola and Italian Design

will not be able to attain the interest of the clients and may not even be suitable functionally for who will be using them. The curator at MOMA was quoted saying, “Patricia is able to create things that are completely innovative, yet perfectly attuned to people’s homes.” With many of her designs, Urquiola has strived to make pieces that fit into people’s lives. Though products must be designed for people with the idea that they will be attractive must be taken into consideration in relation to the idea of trends as well.



*Fjord Series*

Her opinion on concern with products being “trendy” is a very real concern. If a product is only meant to be “fashionable” at the time of release, it means that, six months later, the product may not have the same potency that it had at its unveiling. This is something Urquiola strives to go beyond. It’s the idea of timelessness that is important. Each of her pieces must be of such a design that they will not go “out of style” as the years pass. Even these innovative pieces that reflect so much of her personality and individuality will endure the test of time because they were not created with the idea that they would be consumed immediately and then forgotten. By keeping the design classical, clean and bearing in mind the essential qualities her product must have, she is creating pieces with classical forms, and instead

# Patricia Urquiola and Italian Design

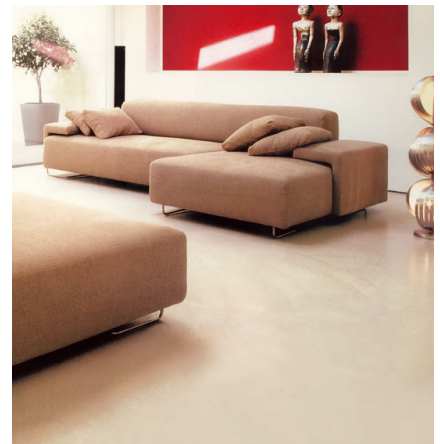
uses the “skins” of the products to express her more flamboyant and individual designs side.

Take for example the Ffjord series chair. In this example, she has created a comfortable design that conforms to the body and seems to anticipate the movements of the user. At the same time she is using the stitching on the actual seat to make the look of it different and emphasize its contemporary design. (architonic.com, 2008) Through pieces such as this, that is are unique but not trendy, she is making an impact on the culture around her and providing a challenge to her clients that will stand through time.

It is also because of the high quality that the products she creates are able to stand through time. This is something that has become synonymous with Italian design; the idea is that the products created will endure and are meant to be used and will last. The products made can be passed down through the family and will not only still be attractive, but will be functional as well.



*Lowland Series*



The idea of being innovative is a very important aspect of Italia design as well which Urquiola has displayed through several of her pieces. As was mentioned, she uses a more classical style with innovative skins and textures to give her piece individuality as well as moving them

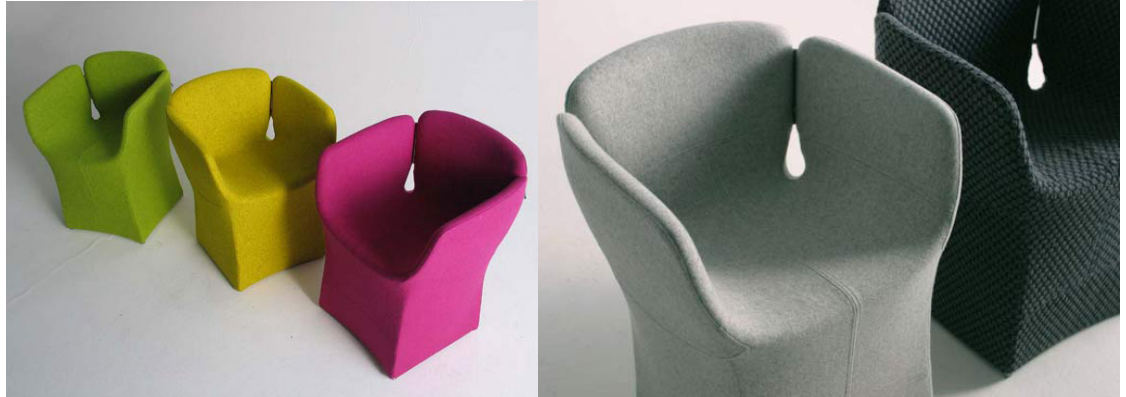
forward. At the same time, however, she is pushing the limits, creating pieces that challenge the users and educate them, thereby creating a more innovative environment for future works. Take, for example, her Llowland series of furniture. These pieces “may be defined as a geoform, it recalls the large stepping stones of a river joint together by an imaginative path that takes you safely to the other side.” (architonic.com, 2008) This is a fascinating piece as it is meant to allow the users to change it according to their wishes. Each piece of the sofa can be moved to create a different composition according to the preference of the client. This piece challenges the user to create something different and gives them credit, saying they can do it. This is part of what makes this particular piece so innovative: it gives people a chance to interact with it in a new way and allows them to make it their own.



Lowseat Series

Another concept that has been integrated with the Lowland series is the sheer joy of use that is present within its design. Each person that interacts with it can decide how they want to use it and can make it their own. This causes them to have an emotional attachment to the interaction involved with the product. This makes the product so much more valuable as the user feels that the product is more theirs than any product that just sits quietly and has only one specific way of interacting with it. It is not only creating usage that is fascinating, but discovering

it is also equally as attractive. Such as with the Lowseat series in which one becomes curious about how they would sit on it and how comfortable it would be. This is the similar case with the Antibodi series where the materials covering the functional sitting side are arranged in a quilt like flower pattern. The interaction with these pieces really communicates the idea of joy of use. They also create an emotional tie to the product which leaves a lasting impression.



Bloomy Series

Through all these designs, it has been important to recognize one more concept in Italian design and that is the designer's passion for their own ideas. It was said in the paper *Players of Italian Design* that bridges in Italy were all different because each engineer who designed a bridge believed that their design was the best design and therefore built it their own way. This confidence in their own ideas is really what stimulates the innovative side of design in Italy. With Patricia Urquiola, all of her ideas come from her own experience. Her individuality can be seen in each piece such as in the Bloomy series for Moroso. These pieces symbolize the stages of the life of a flower with its gently curving form and solid design. With her designs, she brings a classic and feminine look to many of her products.

With these designs as well, the series has been allowed to develop over time allowing the designer to iterate over the pieces. The Bloomy series,

for example, began in 2004 with its armchairs. The next year after its release though, Moroso announced that there was a sofa to be made as well by Urquiola. The designs continue to be iterated over within the context of the development of the culture.

Another concept that has been integrated with the Lowland series is the sheer joy of use that is present within its design. Each person that interacts with it can decide how they want to use it and can make it their own. This causes them to have an emotional attachment to the interaction involved with the product. This makes the product so much more valuable as the user feels that the product is more theirs than any product that just sits quietly and has only one specific way of interacting with it.

Overall, Patricia Urquiola has become what is known as an Italian designer. Born in Spain and graduated from Politecnico di Milano, she has brought her innovative ideas and personal touch to the world of furniture and product design. These concepts that are associated with Italian design are what make many designers, including Urquiola unique and successful. Italian designers' ability to be innovative and bring their own ideas to the table while learning from the companies they work for make their roles in the design industry that much more important. Designers like Urquiola will go from company to company, exploring the possibilities within that company. We can also look forward to the change that culture will bring with respect to the products they will create in the future. From this, we can expect to see more timeless creations and iterations of said creations appear from the Italian designers today.

As for Patricia Urquiola in particular, her design firm continues to pick up contracts not only in the furniture design field but in architecture and

# ***Patricia Urquiola and Italian Design***

many other product fields as well. Her newest pieces include work for B&B's new outdoor collection such as the Canasta series. One should look forward to seeing her next move within Italian design.

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# Stefano Giovannoni

Azmina Karimi

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).



*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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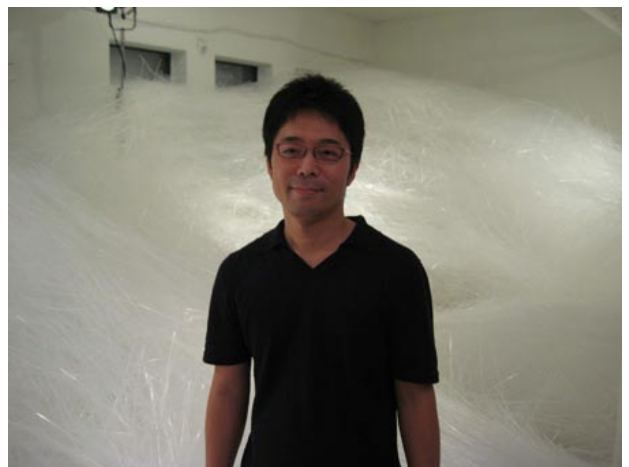
# *Tokujin Yoshioka* New Design Process

Yosuke Shinto

## **Introduction to *New Design***

The movement of Milan is leaning towards an Innovative city that is slowly changing their way of how they operate in comparison to the past. The idea of how discourse is design and the ideas are developing into the Italian design. Italian designers in particular are slowly shifting their relationship with other designers and not just towards their families; they are beginning to move towards globalization. Italy is slowly moving away from a closed system and accepting new ideas from designers around the world. By accepting designers around the world, more creative workers are agglomerating with other great designer. With the increase of creative workers clustering into one, new innovative ideas are slowly developing and new knowledge is being shared among the rest. Companies are slowly accepting new designers to join their facility, as well as the companies going out to collaborate with designer around the world. Knowledge spillovers are breaking off to start their own studios and new breeds of designers are experimenting with new ideas that have never been tested before. As the Italian designers are moving towards an open system of accepting new ideas from designers around the world they are slowly breaking away from the traditions in keeping their companies family related. This shift of agglomeration is changing Italy's identity dramatically and these new generation of designers are shaping Italy to what it will be in the future.

Tokujin Yoshioka is a designer that revolves around designing 'things for everybody' and bringing back the rebirth in material design. Yoshioka designs something that addresses the understanding of the balance, movement, and the sensibility of the human body. Born in the Saga region of Japan in 1967, he graduated from Kuwasawa Design School and studied under Shiro Kuramata, one of Japan's most important designers known for his use of industrial materials in creating architectural interiors and furniture (Niimi, 2006). Tokujin Yoshioka is a designer that visualizes materials as a kind of fluidity where he expresses the materials own integrity. He avoids the modern concept of designing and goes beyond borders based on his interpretations. He uses terms such as: Thinness, transparency, and material integrity as a reference to the mainstream Modernist design traditions (Niimi, 2006). Yoshioka's work focuses on

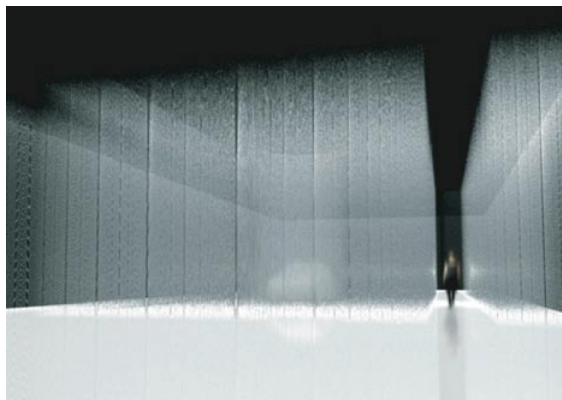


*Yoshioka Tokujin*

# Tokujiin Yoshioka + New Design

bringing everyday materials in a combination with the environment, where he can express his work in its most simple form. His work practices in bringing sensation to the materials that are being used in both his products as well as his installations. Yoshioka's approach to design is to create an impact on the new generation of designers similar to how the great Maestri has made their impact on Italy. As an intellectual, Miyake is seen as an icon towards Yoshioka in reference to the post-war of international fashion and to the design culture. Taking Miyake as a role model he applies concepts on the awareness of understanding what he is forming and how that form takes its shape. Yoshioka explains "the reason why I select materials is not because they are interesting or new, my constant research is how to make the materials even more interesting. This goes for color too and I'm integrating gravity and the surrounding space in my design" (Yoshioka, 2006). Similar to Italian Designers, they look at the specific details in quality that they can apply into the form and how this affects the space that their design is being placed in.→

Yoshioka's perspective is not just only making things for the people and their functionality, but he incorporates beauty that goes beyond what designer has accomplished from the past. Yoshioka states that "there is an important responsibility associated with making anything...if you look back in history people originally made things only for themselves, or for their community – people whose feelings they could understand intimately. I think we're heading back in that direction" (Yoshioka, 2006). From Yoshioka's perspective he begins to develop experimentations on what the future of design could head towards. From the collaboration with Driade in 2002, he began experiments in applications of lightweight materials and incorporating them through his projects. By incorporating these new experiments into his projects, Yoshioka begins to find new pathways and directions towards the Modernist design traditions (Niimi, 2006). Yoshioka experiences with the areas of Thinness, transparency, and material integrity and goes beyond what the other great Maestri's has mastered in the past.



*The Tokujiin Yoshioka x Lexus L-finesse (2006)*

## Design Process: Reflection on Italian Design

Transparency. In a generation that is becoming increasingly homogenous and monotonous Yoshioka's work brings inspiration in uniting art, design, and materialism together. His ability to visualize spaces, objects, and light changes the perspective to how we may experience this new sensation. Many designers and architects share similar interests with materials and innovation through their process of design. What differentiates the artists is the level of appreciation towards the materials and the economy that provides such accessibility to these elements. The Tokujin Yoshioka x Lexus L-finesse – Evolving Fiber Technology is an example of Yoshioka's work in expressing the relationships of how this mass product is made by simple materials (Lexus, 2006). The showcase was held at the Museo della Permanente during the Salone del Mobile di Milano, which the exhibit was constructed by 700 km of transparent fibers (Lexus Space, 2006). Yoshioka created the idea of expressing the concept of 'fiberoptic sensation' where the idea of "exhibition space are made from solid panels and walls...but I wanted to make something more flexible. For the biggest room I wanted to achieve a lens effect using the fibers so your eye is drawn towards the LS..."(Yoshioka, 2006).



*Honey-pop Chair (2006)*



*Tornado - Miami (2007)*



*Pane Chair (2007)*

Materials. Yoshioka's exhibits are not devoted to the products that are present in the show but towards the material being used to create the products or the installation. The term 'Trust' means controlling a process; where at a certain point we have to allow ourselves to let go and allow the process determine its form and not the other way around (Niimi, 2006). Yoshioka implies that "a concept is often inspired simply by the desire to use material in a new way of process" (Yoshioka, 2006). The process should finalize what form it will take and not letting the form shape the process. Yoshioka compares this process towards chairs, where chairs are the closest form of uniting the people to the designer. Taking this concept of uniting the people with the designer, Yoshioka's design, Honey-pop Chair (2001) was developed



through layers of flat pieces of paper honeycomb similar to ones in decorative lanterns. The flat piece is then opened up like an accordion and transformed into a 3-D mold. The form takes place once the body sits on the surface of the mold and eventually the chair takes the beautiful form of the shape of the sitter. In 2002, the project was turned into a whole series where the name Honey-pop changed its name to Tokyo-pop, which was manufactured by the Italian company Driade. In 2006, Tokujiin Yoshioka presented the project at the Salone Internazionale del Mobile in Milan, which he redesigned the concept of the Honey-pop Chair and created a version titled, Pane. Pane is derived from the Italian word “bread” where he used the material of a single round block of fibrous elastomer. The difference between the two was “to create a chair that was made only of fiber...breaking the structure once and then having it memorize the shape through heat. [As a result] I came up with the idea of baking it...” (Tokujiin, 2007). Yoshioka explores the application of materials and representing them through a way of simplicity and beauty.



*Tornado - Miami (2007)*

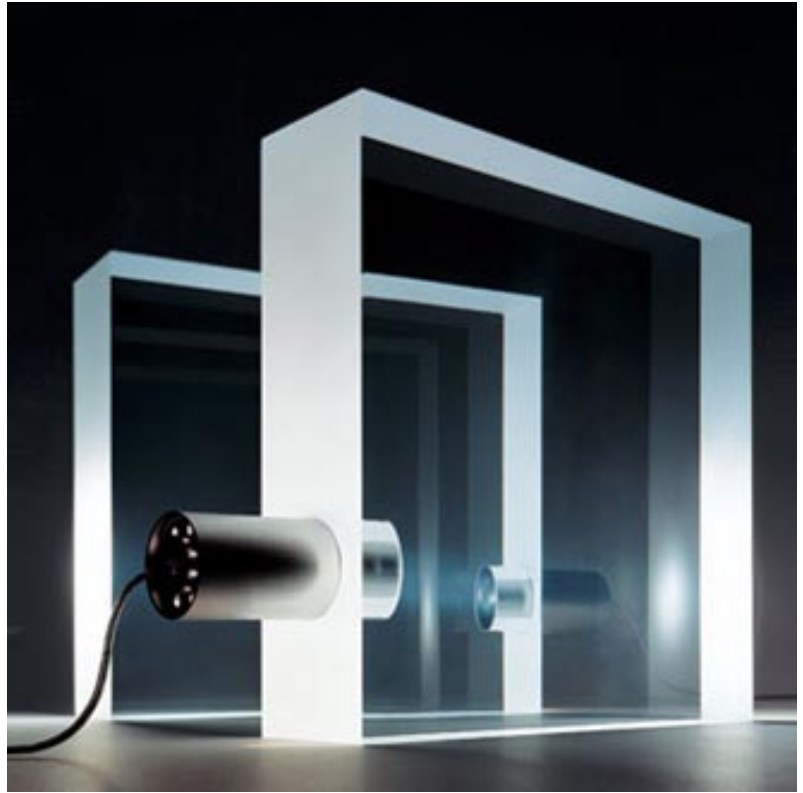
Tokujiin Yoshioka is known to be the best at re-imagining space in relationship to the materials that are used in his installations. At the Moroso showroom in Milan, Yoshioka created the image of entering a space of a cloud-like screen. This is similar to his design installation ‘Tornado’ at Design Miami, which celebrates his accomplishment of gaining the title of Design of the Year Award, the very same title that Marc Newson and Zaha Hadid gained (Corkill, 2007). The showroom was constructed from three million translucent drinking straws and creating the illusion of a ‘Dream-like’ world (AZURE, 2007). Tokujiin’s way of design space is to “enjoy the metamorphosis of an ordinary material into something very surprising. (I want to) create[ing] the feeling of going back to nature [where] some people will be reminded of snow... or ice.

But when they come close to the wall[s], they will realize that it's just made out of [ordinary materials]" (Tokujin, 2006).

Light. The play of light is Yoshioka's way of expressing its beauty not through the object around it but through the idea of being able to physically see and touch the light. Yoshioka's way of designing the representation of light is to not design it by placing it in a

container or what form it took but by being able to express the expression of light itself. Being able to physically see how the light moves through a material, which we can appreciate its form in compression to how light moves through air.

In relationship to the Maestri's from the old generation in Italian Design, they developed designs based on the needs of the people through its simplicity and its functionality. They all have a common relationship in being able to come up with a design that will last for a long period of time. Their methods of slow design are referred to the time it takes to design something, but in that process the results are focused on quality and its usability. As the generation moves on to the new, there are some factors that are lost yet new factors are created. The transformation of moving from the past generation of Italian Design is losing their traditions of keeping their company family related. Thus moving from a closed system to an open system. But by introducing an open system to companies, this has allowed international designers to bring in new innovative ideas. With spillovers coming in from other regions of the world the new generation of agglomeration begins to rise up from the ground, but the identity of the old generation of Italian Designers are being over shadowed at the same time. Through the process of change, new ideas are coming in but the idea of quality is slowly depreciating. The idea of mass production is overpowering good designs and technology is finding its place in innovative



*ToFU (2006)*

process. Where technology is considered a must in some designers. But there are designers like Tokujiin Yoshioka where he states that he fears the lack of 'stuff', "by 'stuff' I mean, very broadly, the physical parts, the 'real-world' materiality – in a growing nonphysical immaterial world" (Yoshioka, 2006). If great design has to incorporate technology to be considered 'good design' then the purpose of design is being lost. We end up just mass marketing the product based on its functionality and not by its quality or for the people like how the Italian Designers developed in the past.

## Conclusion

"Design is really simple. It makes you want to buy. So by doing design I get money but I don't think I'm doing much for the artistic part of me. In my opinion art is more about grabbing someone's heart than design" (Yoshioka, 2006). The direction of where the new generation of designers are moving towards are not just based on their functionality, its simplicity, or designing something for peoples needs; but going beyond that point in designing something that grabs the feeling of the person who uses it. Yoshioka quotes, "by using very ordinary materials, it makes it possible to communicate with people and also to generate an emotional response... people's feelings complete the design. I used to think that [once] you gave a rendering to a company, and when the company builds the product it was finished" (Yoshioka, 2006). Designers in the up coming generation design something that is taken from the old generation and making it better. Being situated in a different world, the Maestri from the past generation design something based on the post-war or to re-create their identity. Designers such as Yoshioka Tokujiin, Marc Newson, Zaha Hadid, and other designers around the world are introducing a new perspective of designing something for the people through elements of awareness and finding new pathways of appreciating good design.

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# Yves Béhar

Robert White



## Abstract

Bridging brands, cultures, and identities, Yves Béhar is quickly becoming a big name for the future of design. His forward thinking and consideration for sustainable, meaningful design that tells a story, rooted in his own design experience and education, has strong links to the “Italian Brand.” A designer of multiple Italian-manufactured products, Béhar is helping to push Italian design innovation into the future, while retaining the strong links to quality, timelessness, and familial relationships that have made Italian design what it is today.

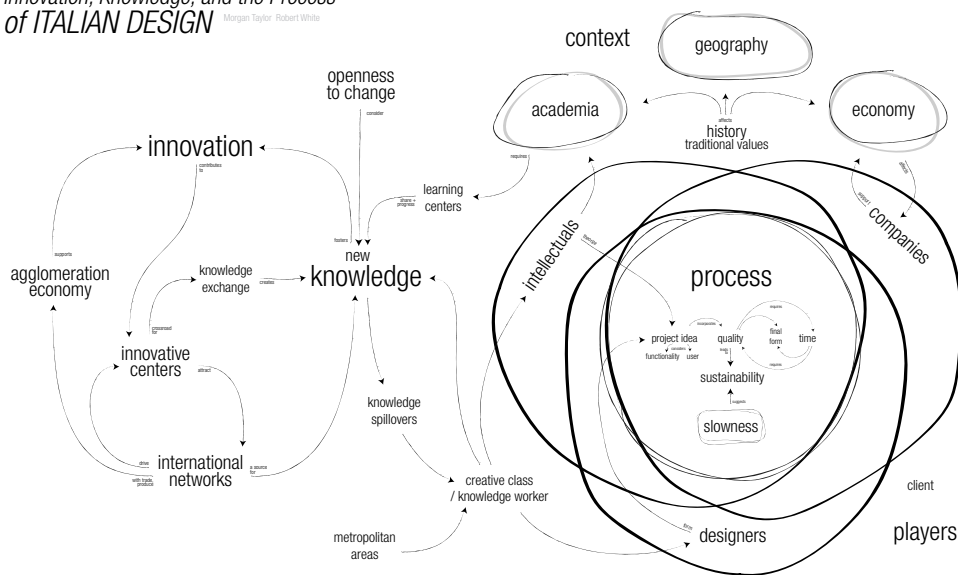
## Yves Behar and the Future of Italian Design

Innovation is a word that is thrown around far too often in consumer culture today: Marketers try to sell with it, businesses strive to achieve it, and customers pretend to understand it. Unfortunately, for the most part, western design culture has neglected the significant improvements true innovation can bring to an individual, an organization, or an economy. As students of design, we are constantly seeking to understand and apply the processes behind innovation in order to achieve a level of forward thinking in every design. James Simmie, in his *Innovative Cities*, defines innovation as, “the commercially successful exploitation of new technologies, ideas or methods through the introduction of new products or processes, or through the improvement of existing ones.” He continues, “Innovation is a result of an interactive learning process that involves often several actors from inside and outside the companies.” (Simmie, 2001). With this definition in mind, we are able to look critically at existing studios and organizations around the world to study the factors that contribute to innovation.

For the past 4 years, a group of students from the School of Interactive Arts and Technology at Simon Fraser University has traveled to Italy, under the direction of Russell Taylor, to study, explore, and define the processes of design that have resulted in the “Italian brand.” In 2007, points from Simmie’s book were included with earlier research, drawing links between agglomeration, knowledge, and innovation in international centers. This model was then combined with knowledge from 2005 and Richard Florida’s *Cities and the Creative Class*, focusing on the context, players, and processes of Italian design. Milan was specifically studied due to its reputation as a hub for design. Questions were raised on whether or not this meant Milan was a true innovative city. Organizations are sharing knowledge, their geographical and time proximity are displaying signs of

an agglomeration economy, and international exhibitions and trade fairs such as the Salone del Mobile are showcasing designers and innovations for the world to see. But with the influx of external designers, where is Milan headed? How does the Italian brand retain meaning when international designers are the ones creating the products? Who are these new design leaders? In order to answer such questions, we must first have a solid understanding of the past.

*Innovation, Knowledge, and the Process of ITALIAN DESIGN*  
Morgan Taylor Robert White

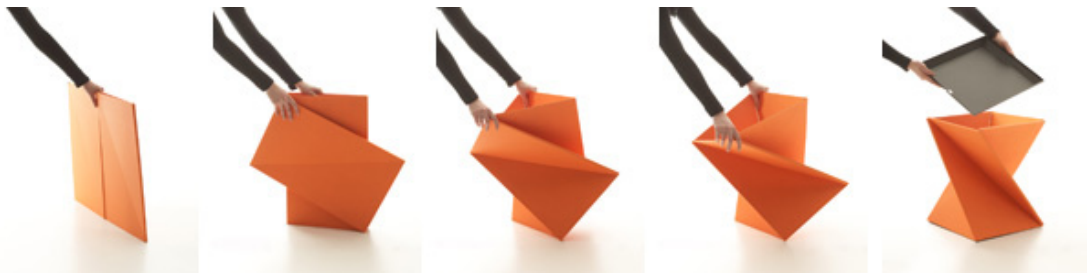


*Innovation, Knowledge, and the Process of Italian Design by Robert White and Morgan Taylor, expressing the close relationship between the context, players, and process, focused on sustainability, and quality, and the role knowledge, agglomeration, and innovation play.*

Milan, as a capital of design, largely attained its status thanks to its geographical location. Located in the northern Lombardy region of Italy, the city has long been a gateway to Europe, linking countries to the east, north, and west, with Italy to the south. Industry’s embracing of mass manufacturing, as a way to quickly provide products after the unification in 1870, provided structure for the Bel Design period around the end of WWII. In response to the depressed economic environment, designers were suddenly required to create products that would be cheap, long lasting and sustainable, yet still aesthetically pleasing. This resulted in some of the country’s most well-known products, such as the Vespa scooter, and the Bialetti Moka Express. At the same time, the 50’s saw similar advances in the fashion industry when attractive prêt-a-porter designs began to bring affordable fashion to the people. From there, the country experienced the Economic Miracle, the Radical Design period of experimentation and “anti-design,” before arriving at a contemporary interpretation on the themes of simplicity, sustainability, and customizability.

During these historic phases, certain designers gained praise and attention for their work. The older ‘Maestri’, such as Enzo Mari and Alessandro Mendini, who were once the leaders of design in Italy, are slowly fading away, creating opportunities for a generation of young, international designers. These ‘Giovanni Maestri’ include great thinkers like Tokujin Yoshioka, James Irvine, and Yves Béhar. They’re being drawn to Italy and Milan, to not only showcase their work, but also to share in the incredible knowledge and creative resources that exist in the city and its surrounding areas: a key contributing factor to innovation. In turn, they bring their own unique philosophies, cultures, and design processes to the Italian way of thinking. They are welcomed into the familial relationships of Italian businesses, and provided with environments and structures to collaborate and inspire. They value the ‘slowness’ of Italian design – dedicating considerable time and attention to every aspect of a project, be it function, material, construction, aesthetics, or usability. And as we move further into the 21st century, they’re incorporating considerations of multi-use, sustainability, and truly customer-centered design.

These design themes are perfectly apparent in the work of Swiss-born, Yves Béhar. His Kada folding system for Danese is a direct result of the merging of two cultures, and two different approaches to design. Released in 2005, the Kada, initially a flat, multi-layered laminate sheet, transforms into a seat, table, or tray, based on the current need of the owner. This ties directly into the Da-

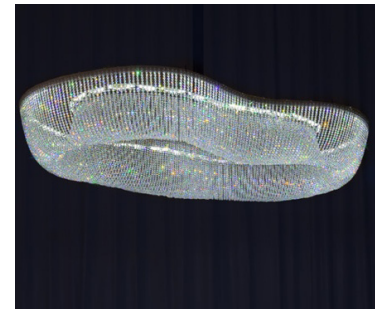


*The Kada Folding System for Danese, made of laminate and neoprene. Acts as a seat, a table, a tray, or a storage container.*

nese design philosophy of multi-use products: allowing people to define their own experience. It is stripped down to the very basics, possessing only the parts it requires to ensure it will still be relevant in decades to come. This is in line with Enzo Mari’s view: “When I make something for Danese I take the view that it has to outlive the current design trend...the idea being that something that is relevant today will be relevant in three hundred years’ time” (Danese, 2007). In further support of this, Carlotta de Bevilacqua stated, during an interview by the group in 2007, “Simplicity is not a starting point, but an achievement.” (Bevilacqua, 2007). Béhar was able to achieve this simplicity while maintaining the idea of a nomadic, multi-functional product that would adapt to the needs

of the user. In this way, it not only ties in to the current progression of design philosophy in Italy, but also into Béhar’s own philosophies of sustainability and design to tell a story, which he developed early on in life.

Born in 1967 to an East German mother and a Turkish father, Béhar, the oldest of three sons, completed a degree in Industrial Design from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, in 1990. His multi-cultural upbringing formed a strong dedication to functional and modernist ideas, with an expressive, poetic touch. He would later find himself working for Lunar Design, and frog design, completing projects for big brands such as Apple, Microsoft, and Hewlett-Packard. Ready to break out on his own, he founded San Francisco-based Fuseproject in 1999, with a design philosophy “rooted in the idea that intelligent and consistent stories can be developed for our clients and their products.” (Fuseproject, 2008). Labeled the ‘Brand Wizard’ (BusinessWeek, 2005), Béhar has excelled in fusing these philosophies with whichever client requests his assistance. Rather than “[suffer] from an almost obligatory style,” (Wired, 2006), Béhar puts his own design, aesthetic, and style to the side to



*From Left to Right: The original Aliph Jawbone ‘Accessory for the Face’, the MINI\_motion watch, and the Swarovski interactive Morpheus chandelier.*

become a chameleon, focusing on communicating the brand content of the client. His designs are not immediately recognizable, because they’re pure expressions of those individual brands. The Kada for Danese is entirely different from the Pavilion PC for HP, which is again altogether different from the MINI Cooper accessory line, the Jawbone Bluetooth headset for Aliph, or the Morpheus chandelier for Swarovski.

It is this adaptability that makes prospective clients take notice. However, just because a client is enthusiastic, it doesn’t mean he’ll accept a job: It takes guts, and the client must be willing to accept change. The client must also treat customers as smart, intelligent people, regardless of the demographic. His Y Water product does just this: it recognizes that children have sophisticated tastes. The product came about in response to the banning of carbonated bev-



erages in certain elementary schools in Southern California (Eastman, 2008). In its absence, water wasn't a great enough alternative, and juice products usually contained a high amount of sugar. His solution was a line of flavoured water, infused with vitamins and minerals, and packaged in new, multi-dimensional, y-shaped bottles that could be combined with other Y Water bottles to build shapes and structures – sustainability and user-defined experience design in practice.



Left: Y Water flavours - nodes can connect with extra attachments.  
Right: Xo One Laptop Per Child \$100 laptop design.

This wasn't the only product he designed for children. In 2006, he joined Nicholas Negroponte and MIT Media Labs, to complete the design for the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) project, which aimed to create a robust, collaborative laptop for \$100 to distribute to developing countries around the world. This



Left: Students at the Khairat school in India work and collaborate with the Xo.  
Right: A student captures a photo of a book using the built-in camera.

would help to educate the young people, providing a strong foundation from which economies could later benefit. Béhar perfected the laptop design, paying close attention to every detail, including material/texture, and the longevity of the device. His dedication to multi-use features, similar to the Kada system, shows in abundance. The Wi-Fi antennas on either side of the screen act first

as latches to keep the computer closed, and segments of the bumper system. Flipped up like doors to reveal USB and audio ports, they are then ready to receive wireless signals. Antennas aside, his self-defined qualities as “futurist, humanist, and naturalist,” (4c, 2007), are most visible in the multiple sources of power the laptop can utilize – In addition to a regular electrical plug, there’s also a solar panel, a standard hand crank, a pull crank, and even a foot pedal system. These solutions were only possible because the laptop is able to run on less than 3W of power (OLPC, 2007): Meaningful technology, sustainable ingenuity, and innovative, practical, usable design.



*The Leaf LED lamp for Herman Miller*

But what does this have to do with Italian design? Everything! The future, and past, as we have seen during the Bel Design period, has been, and will continue to be, about creating meaningful, sustainable products. Italian design is renowned for its timeless quality. Béhar incorporates this into every project he is a part of, and he is an expert in doing so. His award-winning designs, Italian-manufactured or not, are garnering him praise. His award-winning Leaf LED lamp for Herman Miller is perhaps the best example to date. Following the trend of Italian design studios in creating efficient, sustainable, meaningfully tech-infused products, his intuitive Leaf lamp features heat synced LED’s on a pivoting arm to provide ambient light. A simple touch activates the lamp, and a slide of the finger determines the warmth or coolness of light, based on user desire. It could very easily rest among the lamps in Artemide or be at home with Danese. The quality of material and joy of use that are so valued in Italian design, have been embedded into the design of this non-Italian product.

Béhar has participated in true Italian design; learning and understanding the values and processes, and working closely with the agglomerated industry, and has successfully applied those values to new products. In doing so, he is pushing Italian designers to respond with increasingly innovative ideas. He is a member of Florida’s ‘creative class,’ and an international leader, not afraid to take chances for the sake of progress. He believes “design’s purpose is not only to show us the future, but to bring us the future,” (Herman Miller, 2007), and through combining this mentality with long-established Italian qualities and processes, Yves Béhar is doing just that.

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