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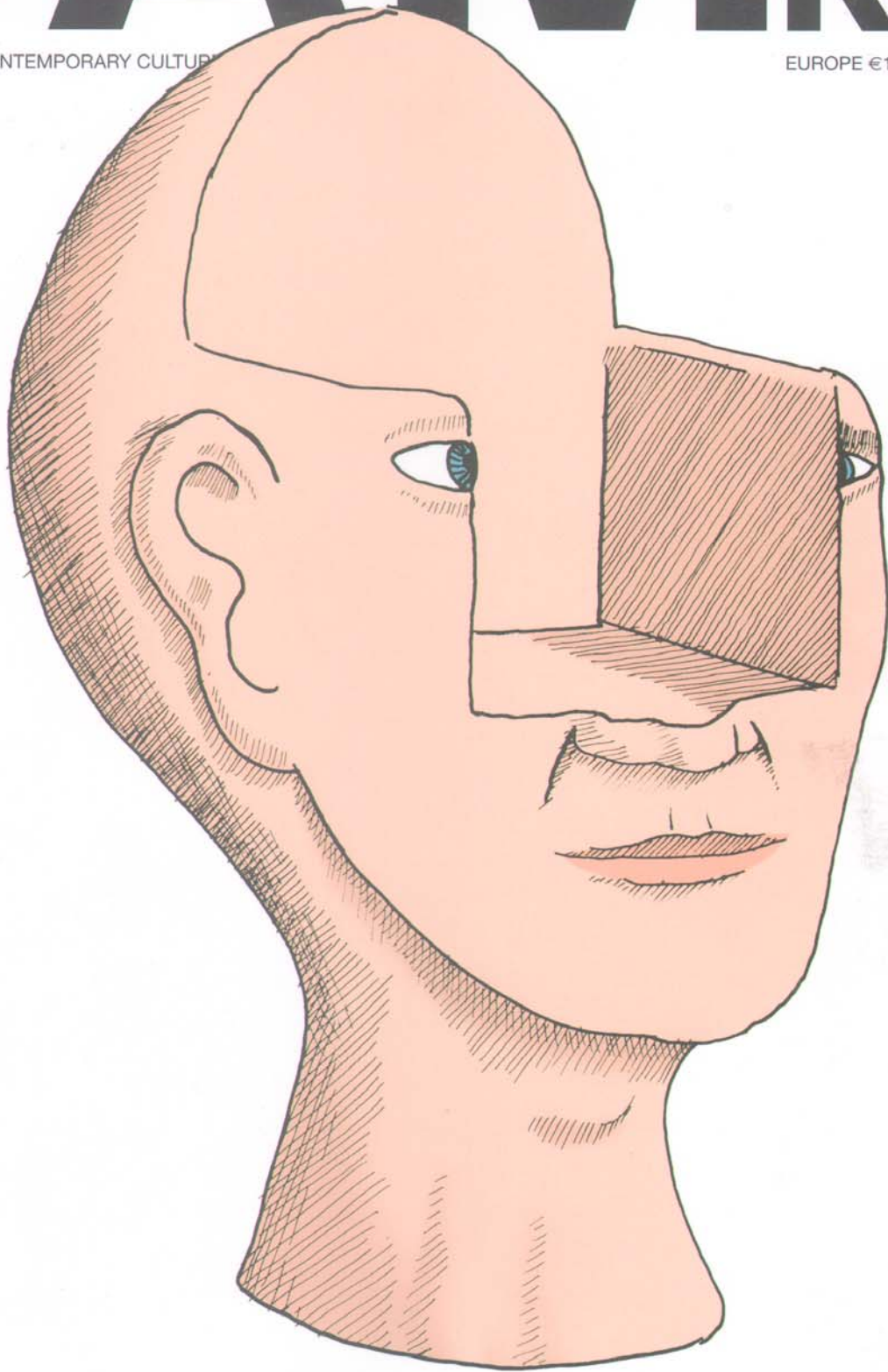


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N°10

A MAGAZINE ON CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

EUROPE €12, UK £8.5 APRIL / MAY



David Byrne - **Italian Design** - **BarberOsgerby** - **cloud**
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BIMONTHLY - APRIL / MAY 2008 - OFFICE OF DEPOSAL 9000 GHEENT - P505314

Quo Vadis

WHITHER FURNISHING DESIGN MADE IN ITALY?

With Milan's Salone Internazionale del Mobile upon us, it's always a good time to take the pulse of Italian design. What that actually means these days is open to debate and interpretation – you don't have to have espresso running through your veins to get it. Talk of globalisation aside, this idiosyncratic country still produces the benchmark design event and is more than just the spiritual home of many established and emerging designers. DAMN* pinned down some of the leading members of the country's design community and asked for their diagnosis.

Text by Virginio Briatore

Italy is a surprising country. It always seems on the point of foundering and then you see it sailing off majestically towards the horizon. Not everyone knows that 72.5 per cent of Italians own the home they live in, (compare that with Belgium & the UK's figure hovering just above 70 per cent and Germany's a shade below 40) and that in the period 2005-2007 (without counting service flats, hotels, spas etc.) some 360,000 new tourist rooms were added, located both in cities of art under the Bed & Breakfast system and in villages and the countryside as agriturismo (farm holidays). Italy's transport system is close to collapse, the public administration is poor, the Mezzogiorno is the poorest and most complicated region of old Europe. Yet when you think of an elegant and contemporary way of life, informal but elegant, and the furnishings that go with fine living, it's always Italy that comes to mind. Some European countries, where the public sector supports creativity, are asking where the Italian designers have gone. But does it still make sense to ask a question like this? To try and understand the complexity, contradictions, the wonders and the apocalypse of Italian furnishing design, DAMN* asked seven 'cavaliers' of Italian design three simple questions.

1. How do you rate Italian design today, up or down?

2. Why are there ever fewer Italian designers in the recent history of Italian furniture?

3. Do you feel that in future Italy will manage to maintain a leading position in the furnishing sector? And why?



Massimo Morozzi - designer, architect, art director of Edra

1. If design means projects we've been dead for a while! The Italian project went out at least 10 years back. If you mean the design system, it's doing fine, in fact it's very strong. If you think of the other fairs – Paris, Cologne – they're minor league, while the Salone is the big time.

2. The home system is a phenomenon that Italians are designing less and less, but I feel this is a big step forward. A lot of countries still have a problem with 'national design', we don't. Starck is a part of Italian design; he's an important ingredient. All the 'foreigners' who work here bring new energies.

The new Italian designers, those who've studied design, are going through a transitional phase; they excel only in small objects. We've seen the end of that way of designing the home that was significantly created by architects, or rather by architects, as Vico Magistretti said, who came from the classical licei [schools] and had training in the humanities behind them.

3. Italy's success is based on a special approach to production (and communication) which is fortunately not reproducible. There is no such thing as a Gucci or Ferragamo production facility and there's no point in building factories and filling them with the same machinery... To produce that kind of quality it takes the province of Arezzo; knowledge of working with leather and metals that's been present in the territory for hundreds of years.



Marco Serralunga - representing the fifth generation at the head of Serralunga

1. Black or white? I'd say the truth is found in endless shades of greys. Of course there are large numbers of firms that are flourishing, active and 'unassailable'. Like life, the history of Italian design is not a point but a path, and some stretches are uphill, gruelling. Our strength is to be found in a background no one else has.

2. The fifty-year-olds, from Cibic to Lissoni, are incomparable; they're outstanding. The younger designers want to hog the limelight; they want instant success. They lack the technical groundwork and the humility to work with businesses. Antonio Citterio worked with firms for 20 years before emerging as a great designer. They need to overhaul their values: less communication, a fuller study of the materials and a closer rapport with businesses. I enjoy measuring myself with other cultures. I make vases and I always wonder how this ancient object is conceived in different places around the world.

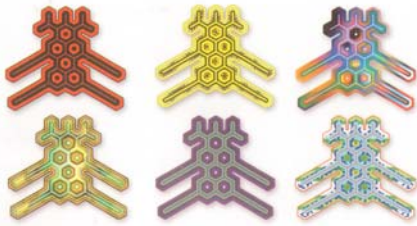
3. I'm afraid new firms or old will start producing abroad. It would be a problem because then we'd lose our home-grown skills. Our strong point is the extended network of craftsmen and small manufacturers. The sole risk is we'll kill them off by relocating production.

Edra: Gran Khan, (top) from the palace of the Grand Vicer, Edra continued its journey onto the vast steppes. Francesco Barberis' modular sofa – a hollow frame filled with large soft cushions – now becomes Gran Khan, a chaise longue reminiscent of the primitive couches that furnished Mongolian tents.

Edra: Ombelica (bottom) is a special version of Shenandoah. Its unique fabric cover designed by Francesco Bertoldi harks back to 19th century Orientalist painting – especially Eugène Delacroix – with overtones of Mallarmé-inspired collage. It is a design that speaks of Arabian Night carpets.

Serralunga: Lady Mary, lamp designed by Marc Sadler (2007). The lamps Lady Jane and Lady Mary feature characteristic engraved lacquer, a process invented and registered by Serralunga, which is reflected in the rest of the series of outdoor lamps and light pots.

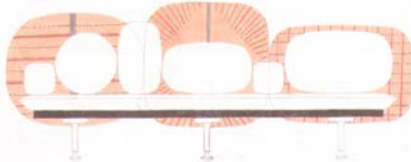
design



Patrizia Moroso - art director of Moroso

- 1. I get the feeling something good is coming. I feel new woods growing.
- 2. It's not a question of innate ability but of social, educational and political issues. Certainly, when I see the energy and the cultural fundamentals of countries in Eastern Europe and compare them with the pretensions of our milkshops, I give a cheer for the girls of the East. Luckily there are also young Italian designers who go and study in London, and there are new schools, as in Venice-Treviso, which are beginning to turn out some interesting designers. We need schools where the teachers have fire in their bellies, people they'll learn from through passion and emulation. Critics and theorists are not enough - we need artists.

3. Italian design, like fashion, sometimes seems to vanish... But then you discover it works silently and is present in many parts of the world.



Gregorio Spini - founder of Kundalini

- 1. Italian design is doing fine, because the public for it has grown and its brand value is rising. In lighting there have been various 'magic moments', furniture ran aground among the shoals but now it has been floated off again and the general scene is healthy.
- 2. What's the point talking about frontiers? You have to go looking for innovation wherever it's to be found and those who have the energy will get ahead. We have Italian friends who are 40-years-old and they still live with their parents....

3. Despite the swamps of Rho Fiera, with a single highway exit and hopeless traffic, Milan remains a beacon in the furnishing system. Italy's strong point is the network. Today I can still attempt any experiment thanks to the courageous subcontractors who are always ready to dialogue with someone who has new ideas.

Moroso: Nanook, (above) by Philippe Bestenbender (2008) is a chair prototype that, like animal skins, goes from 2-D to 3-D.

Moroso: Principessa, (middle) design Dashi Leven (2008). A day bed consisting of many thin mattress layers, the top one displaying a graphic composition of objects becoming of a modern process, using silver and gold jacquard weaves.

Moroso: Fjordrelax, (facing page, middle left) by Patricia Urquiola with textile design by Michael Lin (photo by Massimo Sestini)

Little Albert, (facing page, bottom right) by Ron Arad, armchair made by self-coloured polyethylene rotationally moulded.

Kundalini: Abyss Spot, (facing page, top left) is a modular structure with polycarbonate segments lit by a high voltage LED strip that hides an oval or chrome sphere with an integrated fluorescent spot. Design: Oskar+Dechmann, 2008

Kundalini: E-burn, (facing page, bottom left) is a sculptural bench entirely handmade in lacquered fibreglass that represents today's state of the art of 3D modelling. Design: Brude heit, 2007





Francesco Binfaré - designer, art director at Cassina from 1969 to 1990

1. In a way we're going steadily downhill. Forty years ago, when it began, there were only a few of us and there was a lot to be done, things were in ferment, businesses were reconverting, they tried to experiment with new forms of production and expression. This called for creative action with a strong ideological, conceptual content. The idea was to create an 'avant-garde movement' around design, just as had happened in art. Today, businesses seem more oriented to marketing. What counts is what sells, what's in fashion. There's less culture and more style. Today designers are neither more nor less than stylists. They no longer work on the process but only on the definition of the aesthetic.

2. I don't know, and I'm not sure it's really true.

3. Italy was and will always be the centre of furnishing design. Simply because Italy has the firms, the most important ones, the ones all designers around the world want to work with, the ones that count and that have created the history of design. Italy will always be a dynamic melting point of businesses and creatives capable of generating culture, conceiving innovation.

Cassina: Modello 422, (above) leather chair designed by Marco Bellini, 2008. Photo: Nicola Zucchi



Carlo Urbinati - architect, founder of Foscarini with Alessandro Vecchiato

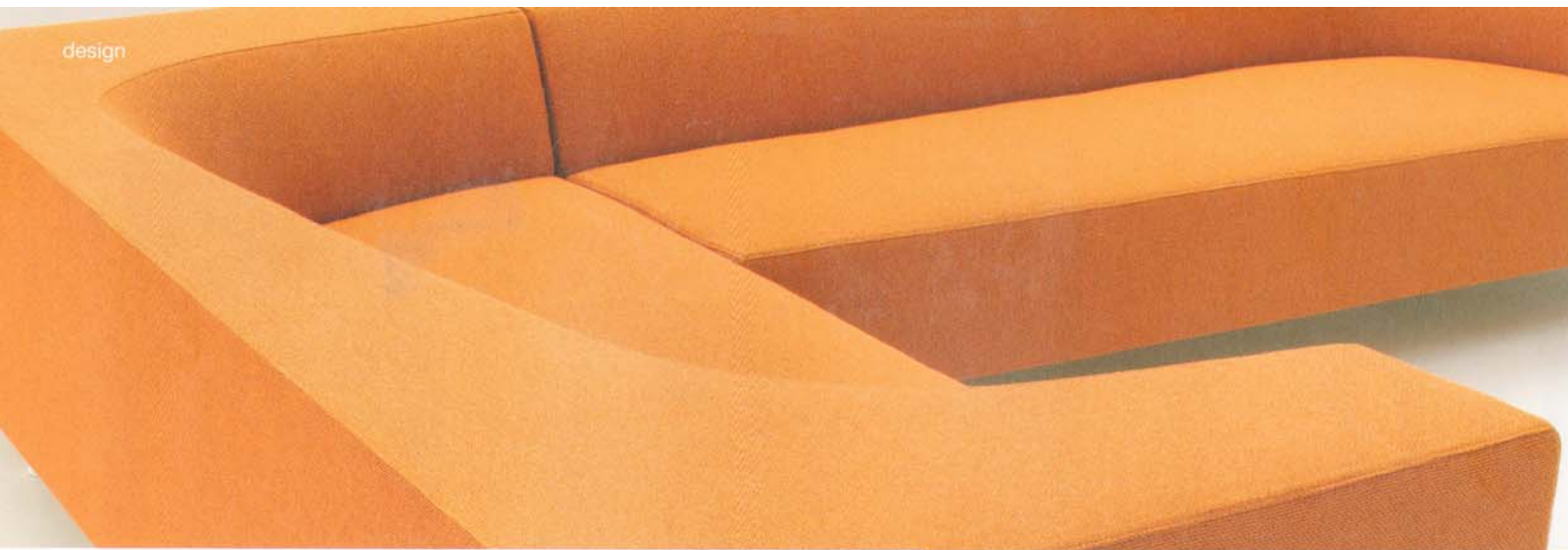
1. Up. Italian design is bound to gain ground for various reasons. Italy is an inexhaustible forcing ground for ideas, trends and developments and everyone who works in the sector meets here. Italian design is a system, a philosophy, a series of actions that involve a large number of people and it exists only in Italy.

2. With globalisation in full flow, I don't know how far it makes sense to talk about foreign or Italian designers. Foscarini, for example, never even raises the issue, because if they work in Italy or for Italian businesses, they're all a bit Italian. As far as we're concerned Marc Sadler is Italian. Ingo Maurer is a gift to humanity, not a single country. We never look at passports but the value of a project, its feasibility, its coherence with the brand.

3. My feeling is a lot of firms are working a lot more on the brand that the product and there's less willingness to invest in innovation. This could be a risk because it might lead to a falling off in quality and a series of products without much stuffing, so to speak.

Foscarini: Fibre Evolution Event, (facing page, left) special installation created by Marc Sadler with models from the Foscarini collection. For this project, several objects became part of the contract world, giving form and expression to Foscarini's lamps cultural aptitude to be used in large-scale compositions.

Foscarini: Twigg, (facing page, right) compound material floor lamp on lacquered fibreglass base, designed by Marc Sadler.



MDF: Bora Bora, (top and above left) modular seating system designed by P. Cazzaniga and A. Munteanu derives its shape from nature, specifically from an atoll. Bora Bora is the domestic atoll, as in nature it separates the internal space from the rest, creating an independent area with its own focus

MDF: Baobab, (right) designed by Xavier Lust. Like the tree it gets its inspiration from, Baobab aims to liven up the landscape with its unusual shape. The design is made of Ecotek, a compound of minerals and polyester that is completely recyclable.



Bruno Fattorini - honorary president and art director of MDF

1. We have to distinguish whether Italian design means everything produced by furniture manufacturers or we mean a qualitative and quantitative assessment of Italian designers. In the first case the Italian furnishing industry is clearly the world leader, thanks to its ability to produce innovation and do technological research, which means it can develop complex and difficult projects. In the second case I'd say that the world of ideas is more international and I believe the contribution of Italian designers, some of them especially renowned, is substantial.
2. It's natural for international designers to appear alongside Italians. But I don't feel they're dominant.
3. I believe that Italy, through the abilities of its industry and its production system, will succeed in keeping its current leadership. Its medium-sized and small businesses, typical of the Italian system, are naturally responsive to appraising creativity and they tend to develop it by investing in research. #

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