

HEIDE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Education Resource Kit

Year Levels: 3–10

Exhibition: *Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design*

Dates: 26 October 2024 – 23 March 2025

Heide venue: Main Galleries and Heide Modern

Exhibition Curators: Kendrah Morgan and Laura Lantieri



Caption: Ettore Sottsass for Memphis Milano, *Carlton Room Divider* 1981, wood, thermosetting laminate, metal, plastic, 196 × 189.7 × 40.2 cm (overall), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, purchased with the assistance of the National Gallery Women's Association 1985 © Estate of Ettore Sottsass

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Introduction

Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design showcases some of the most significant achievements in the history of twentieth-century Italian design spanning the sixty-year period from the first Milan Triennale in the 1930s to the Memphis Group of the 1980s.

The exhibition tells the remarkable story of how, through the marriage of Italy's rich craft tradition, technological and industrial advances and a capacity for creativity, experimentation and invention, Italian design became admired throughout the world.

Molto Bello celebrates key proponents in the industry and their enduring contribution to global culture; from the elegant and dynamic early work of architect–designers such as Gio Ponti and Carlo Mollino, through the ingenious and stylish creations of Gae Aulenti, Joe Colombo, and the Castiglioni brothers, to the quirky and provocative Radical Design movement, Memphis Milano, prominent design figures Ettore Sottsass, Nanda Vigo, Gaetano Pesce, and many more.

Held across Heide's Main Galleries and Heide Modern. In the Main Galleries, the exhibition design by Melbourne-based practice Studio Peter King draws inspiration from Italian architecture and classic interior design motifs, guiding the audience through the trajectory of the timeframe. In Heide Modern, furniture from the 1960s and 1970s is arranged in the living spaces, speaking to the function of each room and reflecting the period in which the former residence was built.

Drawn from public and private collections and leading design brands, the objects in the exhibition include vintage and re-editioned classic chairs and furniture, lighting, ceramics and glass, espresso machines, coffee makers, typewriters and examples of landmark transport designs.

Through recognisable and rare pieces, the exhibition explores the breadth of materials and manufacturers, and diverse approaches to form and function adopted by Italian designers in a rapidly

evolving social and industrial landscape. Highlights include Gio Ponti's ground-breaking *Superleggera* chair, a Vespa GS 150, a 1957 Fiat *Nuova 500*, Joe Colombo's futuristic *Elda* chair of 1963, along with a space dedicated to the work of the recently deceased visionary designer Gaetano Pesce, and an array of playful postmodern creations by Ettore Sottsass and the Memphis group.

IMAGE CAPTIONS (L-R): Piero Fornasetti, *Tema e Variazioni n.130*, 1950s, porcelain; Gaetano Pesce for Cassina, *Sunset in New York* sofa, 1980, synthetic materials, wood, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, gift of Cassina, 1985, photograph: Ryan Hernandez; Corradino D'Ascanio for Piaggio, Vespa 150 GS, 1958–61, painted steel and metal frame, rubber, leather, and plastic, 108 x 71.8 x 170.8 cm.

Notes for Teachers



Installation view, Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

This education resource introduces key ideas and design concepts and innovations in twentieth-century Italian design using objects from Heide's exhibition *Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design*. Discussion questions are intended to be used in the museum and continued back in the classroom.

Engaging activities are provided for teachers to encourage students to explore the design process and the role of a designer, including the different factors which influence and inform design choices.

Provided in this resource is curatorial excerpts from the *Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design* catalogue, which has been provided to give students an overview of the exhibition themes.

This resource includes case studies of key objects in the exhibition from different periods, along with questions about significant factors that make Italian design unique.

These questions focus on the following:

1. **Italy's rich artisanal tradition** — Italy has a rich history of art, design, and skilled craftsmanship that dates back centuries, with a cultural emphasis on both aesthetics and quality.
2. **Italy's technological and industrial advances** — Italian manufacturers are known for blending traditional techniques with modern technology. This combination allows them to produce high-quality products that are both innovative and rooted in tradition, enabling new designs to be created and manufactured to a high standard.

3. **The capacity for creativity, experimentation and invention** — Italian design is renowned for its experimental and progressive approach, merging sophisticated craftsmanship and innovation, functionality and stylish elegance.

Italian translations

Heide has collaborated with CO.AS.IT. to provide Italian translations of the case studies and questions for students, to support Italian language students.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify and explain key concepts relevant to twentieth-century Italian design
- Analyse works of design in *Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design*
- Create engaging learning activities for design analysis

About the Exhibition

By Kendrah Morgan and Laura Lantieri, Exhibition Curators



Installation view, Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

The exhibition *Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design* surveys some of the most impressive achievements in Italian design spanning the 60-year period between 1930 and 1990. Including more than 180 objects, with a particular focus on furniture and domestic items, the project explores the creative contributions and personal visions of many leading figures in the discipline.

The pieces have been selected not only for their aesthetic originality and inventive use of materials and technology, but also for how they are illustrative of the wider context in which they were made, and the prevalent design movements that unfolded during the exhibition's timeframe. All of the objects in *Molto Bello* have been sourced entirely from within Australia, where postwar Italian immigration has had a significant cultural impact.

The vitality, inventiveness and diversity of the developments in design in Italy from the 1930s to the 1980s is indisputable; these were decades of unprecedented socio-political and cultural change that witnessed the formation of a unique alliance between design and industry, which was a crucial factor in advancing Italy's reputation for sophisticated, innovative products and gave rise to the unofficial 'Made in Italy' brand.

The birth of Italian design was closely linked to Italy's bid for modernity, which came after a slow start to its industrialisation in the late 1800s. Industrial development began in the north and was accompanied by the establishment of several significant schools of applied arts that ensured the continuation of Italy's strong tradition of skilled craftsmanship while fostering the connection between artistry, technology and industry.

At the same time, a rising middle-class market for consumer goods stimulated the growth of manufacturing, and the many small, family-owned firms afforded opportunities for experimentation and product innovation.

The combination of these factors created the unique conditions for the fusion of Italian craftsmanship with entrepreneurship which, together with the creative contributions of a cluster of ingenious architect–designers, brought about Italy’s design revolution.

The devastating impacts of the First World War paved the way for the fascist rise to power, and Italy looked to industry for opportunities for returning to prosperity. Creative expression was considered an important unifying element in developing new products that would stimulate economic and social growth.

This was reflected in the avant-garde Futurism movement in the early twentieth century, which embraced dynamic, forward-thinking designs and invented new forms that broke away from traditional aesthetics. A more nationally conscious idea of industrial design took hold in Italy in the mid-1920s, filtered through movements such as the Bauhaus in Germany, De Stijl in the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian school of Alvar Aalto.

Early proponents of the new approach included designers Gio Ponti, Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Giuseppe Pagano and Pietro Chiesa working for companies such as Fontana, Olivetti and Columbus. They were interested in developing a style that departed from the artisanal tradition and reflected the characteristics of quality industrial production, rather than offering affordable rational products to the wider public.

1920s and 1930s

INDUSTRY COLLABORATES WITH DESIGNERS

The effectiveness of Italian industry's collaboration with designers is embodied in the evolution of the typewriter manufacturer Olivetti, founded in 1908 by the forward-looking industrialist Camillo Olivetti in the Turin municipality of Ivrea and taken over by his son Adriano in the 1920s.

Modest to begin with, the company flourished after implementing state-of-the-art production methods from the United States and progressive conditions for its workers. Importantly, Olivetti also employed some of the most talented creative minds of the day to design the new 'serious and elegant' machines: several postwar models enjoyed instant success, such as the distinctive all-plastic *Valentine* of 1968, by Ettore Sottsass with Perry King, a symbol of the swinging sixties.

When Italy aligned with Hitler's Germany in 1938 and entered the Second World War in 1940, the resources of manufacturing companies such as Olivetti, Fiat and Piaggio were redirected to the war effort. After the collapse of Fascism, followed by the Allied victory and liberation, the Italian government held a referendum and a democratic Republic was declared on 2 June 1946.



Installation view, Olivetti typewriter display, Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

CASE STUDY: Olivetti *Valentine* typewriter

**Designers: Ettore Sottsass (1917–2007) and Perry King (1938–), Manufacturer: Olivetti
Valentine typewriter, 1968, ABS plastic, metal, rubber, 10 x 34 x 34 cm**

In 1968, designer Ettore Sottsass collaborated with fellow Olivetti consultant Perry King on the 'cult classic', the brightly coloured *Valentine* typewriter that was designed to be portable to respond to the threat of cheaper products from China. When it was launched on Valentine's Day in 1969 it marked a stark contrast with its predecessor, the *TE 300* teleprinter, which prioritised function over aesthetics.

However, many of Sottsass's original design features were rejected, including his suggestion to use Moplen, a cost-effective thermoplastic resin, for the typewriter's body panels. Olivetti insisted instead on using the high quality and innovative new ABS plastic, resulting in a more expensive product.

While its commercial success never met its full potential, the *Valentine* became a symbol of the Pop era that is now sought after by design institutions and recognised for how it revolutionised our aesthetic and emotional relationship with office life.

Questions:

For Primary Schools

1. How do you think the bright red colour of the *Valentine* typewriter shows Italian style?
2. Why do you think Olivetti chose to use new plastic instead of metal for this typewriter?
3. If you were Sottsass, what fun features would you add to make typing more exciting?

For Secondary Schools

1. How did Olivetti's 'serious and elegant' design philosophy reflect Italy's craft tradition?
2. What role did material innovation, such as the use of ABS plastic, play in the *Valentine's* design?
3. What aspects of the *Valentine's* design made it a symbol of the Pop era?

Take the exhibition back into the art room:

Design a computer inspired by Italian traditions!

Macchina da scrivere Olivetti Valentine

Designer: Ettore Sottsass (1917–2007) e Perry King (1938–), Produttore: Olivetti

Macchina da scrivere Valentine, 1968, plastica ABS, metallo, gomma, 10 x 34 x 34 cm

Nel 1968, il designer Ettore Sottsass collaborò con il collega consulente di Olivetti Perry King sulla celebre macchina da scrivere Valentine, caratterizzata da colori vivaci e progettata per essere portatile, in risposta alla minaccia rappresentata da prodotti più economici provenienti dalla Cina. Quando fu lanciata il giorno di San Valentino del 1969, segnò un netto contrasto con il suo predecessore, la telescrivente TE 300, che privilegiava la funzionalità sull'estetica.

Tuttavia, molti degli elementi originali del design di Sottsass furono scartati, compreso il suo suggerimento di utilizzare il Moplen, una resina termoplastica economica, per i pannelli del corpo della macchina.

Olivetti insistette invece per usare la plastica ABS, di alta qualità e innovativa, il che rese il prodotto più costoso.

Anche se dal punto di vista commerciale non raggiunse mai il suo pieno potenziale, la *Valentine* divenne un simbolo dell'era Pop, oggi ricercata dalle istituzioni di design e riconosciuta per aver rivoluzionato il nostro rapporto estetico ed emotivo con l'ambiente d'ufficio.

Domande:

Per le Scuole Primarie

1. Come pensi che il colore rosso brillante della macchina da scrivere *Valentine* rappresenti lo stile italiano?
2. Perché pensi che Olivetti abbia scelto di usare la nuova plastica invece del metallo per questa macchina da scrivere?
3. Se fossi Sottsass, quali caratteristiche divertenti aggiungerei per rendere lo scrivere più entusiasmante?

Per le Scuole Secondarie

1. In che modo la filosofia di design "seria ed elegante" di Olivetti rifletteva la tradizione artigianale italiana?
2. Quale ruolo ha giocato l'innovazione dei materiali, come l'uso della plastica ABS, nel design della *Valentine*?
3. Quali aspetti del design della *Valentine* l'hanno resa un simbolo dell'era Pop?

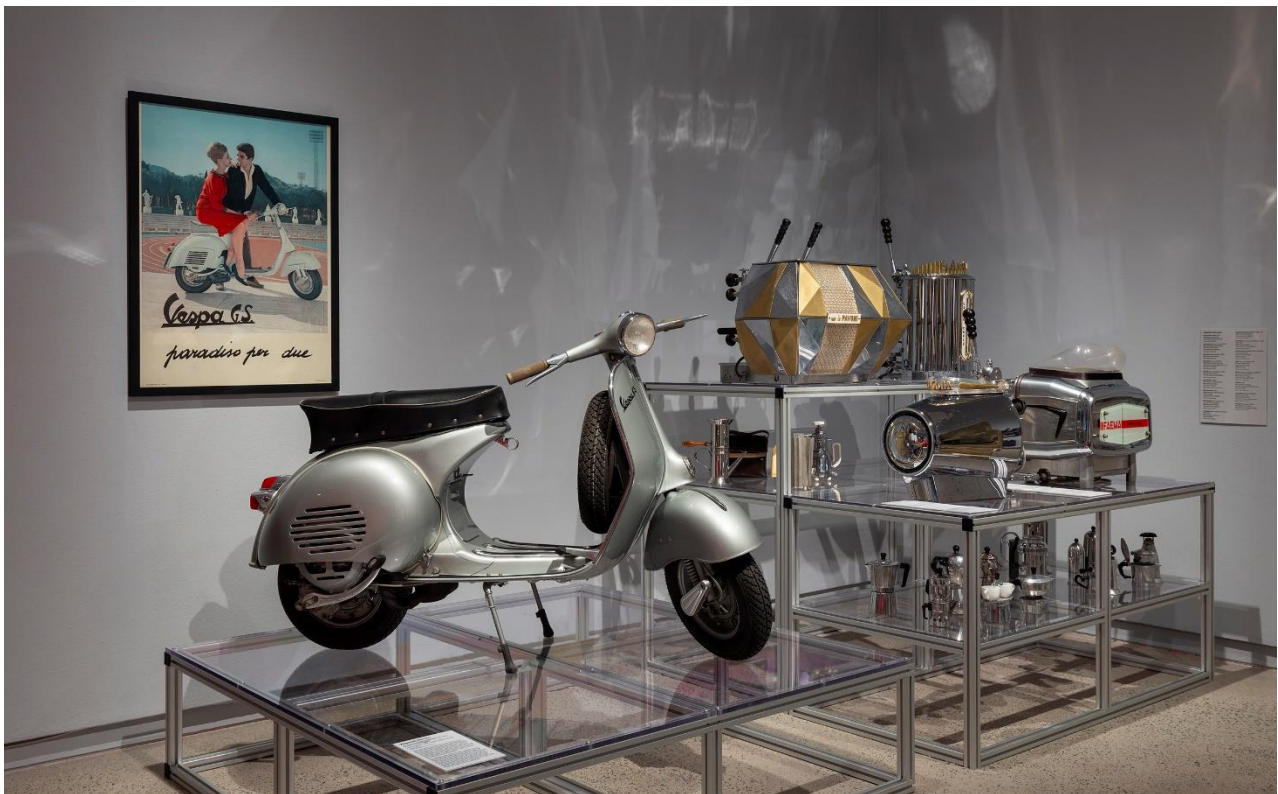
1940s and 1950s

POSTWAR TRANSPORT

Design played a substantial and dynamic role in Italy's remarkable postwar recovery. A potent symbol of this is the Vespa, 1946, designed by the aeronautical engineer Corradino D'Ascanio for Piaggio as a practical yet elegant solution to the nation's severe vehicle shortages and ruined public transportation systems.

Now synonymous with style, freedom and *la dolce vita*, the Vespa was a phenomenal global success and set the tone for the explosion of new creative ideas that helped to lift Italy out of the devastating effects of war.

Underpinning the country's reconstruction efforts was the US-sponsored Marshall Plan, which saw Italy receive one billion dollars in recuperative funding from 1948 and 1951, as well as access to American markets for goods and reliable trading partnerships, sowing the seeds for the 'Economic Miracle' later in the decade.



Installation view, Vespa GS 150 in foreground, Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

CASE STUDY: Vespa 150 GS

Designer / Engineer: Corradino D'Ascanio (1891–1981), Manufacturer: Piaggio

Vespa 150 GS 1958–61, painted steel and metal frame, rubber, leather and plastic, 108 x 71.8 x 170.8 cm

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Italians were faced with the decimation of their road and transportation systems and severe vehicle shortages.

The industrialist Enrico Piaggio, whose family had been in military manufacturing during the war, commissioned Corradino D'Ascanio, a helicopter and propeller engineer, to design a reliable two-wheeled vehicle that could be produced cost effectively and take ordinary Italians where they needed to go.

Piaggio christened the vehicle the Vespa, or wasp in Italian, due to the buzz of the original 98cc engine and its narrow waist from a bird's eye view. The Vespa scooter quickly became a symbol of postwar reconstruction and of the freedom and romance of the Italian lifestyle and its youth culture.

More than 18 million Vespas have been produced across the globe, ensuring the Vespa is one of the most beloved and enduring emblems of Italian design, industry and innovation.

Questions:

For Primary Schools

1. How do you think the Vespa's design makes people feel when they ride it?
2. Corradino D'Ascanio used to design helicopters. What parts of the Vespa might be similar to a helicopter?
3. Imagine you're designing a new vehicle for Melbourne. What would it look like and how would it work?

For Secondary Schools

1. How might the Vespa's design have evolved differently if it had been created in another country? Consider cultural and historical factors.
2. How did D'Ascanio's background in aeronautical engineering influence the Vespa's innovative design?
3. How has the Vespa's design evolved over time while maintaining its iconic status? Consider both aesthetic and technological changes.

Take the exhibition back into the art room:

Design a vehicle that represents freedom, is low cost, and is suitable for a city like Melbourne that is large, with suburbs that are spread out, and has big freeways.

Vespa 150 GS

Designer / Ingegnere: Corradino D'Ascanio (1891–1981), Produttore: Piaggio

Vespa 150 GS 1958–61, telaio in acciaio verniciato e metallo, gomma, pelle e plastica, 108 x 71,8 x 170,8 cm

Nel periodo successivo alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale, gli italiani dovettero affrontare la devastazione delle infrastrutture stradali e dei sistemi di trasporto, nonché una grave carenza di veicoli.

L'industriale Enrico Piaggio, la cui famiglia aveva prodotto forniture militari durante la guerra, incaricò Corradino D'Ascanio, un ingegnere di elicotteri ed eliche, di progettare un veicolo a due ruote affidabile, che potesse essere prodotto in modo economico e che permettesse agli italiani di spostarsi ovunque avessero bisogno.

Piaggio battezzò il veicolo Vespa, per il ronzio del motore originale da 98cc e la sua forma sottile vista dall'alto. La Vespa divenne rapidamente un simbolo della ricostruzione postbellica, della libertà e del romanticismo dello stile di vita italiano e della sua cultura giovanile.

Oltre 18 milioni di Vespe sono state prodotte in tutto il mondo, rendendola uno dei simboli più amati e duraturi del design, dell'industria e dell'innovazione italiana.

Domande:

Per le Scuole Primarie

1. Secondo te, come fa il design della Vespa a far sentire le persone quando la guidano?
2. Corradino D'Ascanio progettava elicotteri. Quali parti della Vespa potrebbero essere simili a un elicottero?
3. Immagina di progettare un nuovo veicolo per Melbourne. Come sarebbe e come funzionerebbe?

Per le Scuole Secondarie

1. In che modo il design della Vespa sarebbe potuto evolvere diversamente se fosse stata creata in un altro paese? Considera fattori culturali e storici.
2. Come è stato influenzato il design innovativo della Vespa dal background di D'Ascanio in ingegneria aeronautica?
3. Come si è evoluto il design della Vespa nel tempo mantenendo il suo status iconico? Considera sia i cambiamenti estetici che tecnologici.

CONNECTION TO CRAFT TRADITIONS

Unlike America and many parts of Europe, where the focus had shifted more to assembly lines and factories, Italian designers in the late 1940s and 1950s remained inspired by the visual arts and strongly connected to craft traditions, which proved fundamental to their success.

This is well-exemplified by Gio Ponti's brilliant reinvention of a nineteenth-century ladder-back chair as the *Superleggera*, 1957 an ultra-lightweight modern masterpiece.



Installation view, *Superleggera* (hanging), *Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design*, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

CASE STUDY: Cassina *Superleggera* chair

Designer: Gio Ponti (1891–1979), Manufacturer: Cassina

***Superleggera* chair, 1957, 82 x 40 x 40 cm, wood and cane**

The *Superleggera* (Super light) is Gio Ponti's most famous piece of furniture design and the result of his ambitious aim to create the lightest chair possible. Widely regarded as the father of modern Italian design, Ponti based his chair design on traditional nineteenth-century ladder-back chairs with woven seats made in an Italian fishing village.

In collaboration with Cassina, a company with an artisan tradition, Ponti released his *Leggera* chair in 1951, but it failed to meet his aspirations. He developed the *Superleggera*, weighing only 1.7 kilograms, by trimming excess mass through tapering the round legs and giving them triangular ends, each with a

maximum diameter of 18 millimetres. The chair quickly became an icon of postwar Italian design, signalling the country's new modernity. Although the production methods have since changed, today the *Superleggera* is celebrated as a modern archetype of the relationship between Italy's strong craft tradition and industry.

Questions:

For Primary Schools

1. How did Gio Ponti use old ideas to make something new? Can you think of other examples where old things inspire new inventions?
2. How do you think making the chair so light changed the way people could use it?
3. The chair has triangular leg ends to make it lighter. Can you think of other shapes that might make things lighter?

For Secondary Schools

1. How might the design process of the *Superleggera* differ from chair designs in countries with less emphasis on craft traditions?
2. What engineering principles did Ponti apply to achieve the chair's remarkable lightness while maintaining its strength and functionality?
3. In what ways did the *Superleggera* chair challenge contemporary notions of furniture design and manufacturing?

Take the exhibition back into the art room:

Design the lightest piece of furniture possible, explaining what materials you would use and why.

Sedia Superleggera Cassina

Designer: Gio Ponti (1891–1979), Produttore: Cassina

Sedia Superleggera, 1957, 82 x 40 x 40 cm, legno e canna

La Superleggera è il mobile più famoso del design di Gio Ponti e il risultato della sua aspirazione ambiziosa di creare la sedia più leggera possibile. Ampiamente considerato il padre del design moderno italiano, Ponti prese come punto di partenza per il design di questa sedia le sedie dell'ottocento con schienale a scala e sedili intrecciati realizzate in un paese di pescatori italiano.

In collaborazione con Cassina, un'azienda con una tradizione artigianale, la sedia Leggera fu lanciata nel 1951, ma non riuscì a soddisfare le aspirazioni di Ponti. Egli sviluppò poi la Superleggera, che pesava solo 1,7 chilogrammi, riducendo il peso in eccesso assottigliando le gambe cilindriche e dando loro estremità triangolari, con un diametro massimo di 18 mm. La sedia divenne rapidamente un'icona del design italiano del dopoguerra, segnalando la nuova modernità del paese. Anche se i metodi di produzione sono cambiati nel tempo, la Superleggera è celebrata oggi come un moderno archetipo della relazione tra la forte tradizione artigianale e l'industria italiana.

Domande:**Per le Scuole Primarie**

1. Come ha fatto Gio Ponti a usare idee vecchie per creare qualcosa di nuovo? Riesci a pensare ad altri esempi in cui cose vecchie ispirano nuove invenzioni?
2. Secondo te, come ha cambiato il modo in cui le persone potevano usare la sedia il fatto di renderla così leggera?
3. La sedia ha estremità delle gambe triangolari per renderla più leggera. Riesci a pensare ad altre forme che potrebbero rendere gli oggetti più leggeri?

Per le Scuole Secondarie

1. In che modo il processo di progettazione della Superleggera potrebbe differire dai design di sedie in paesi con meno enfasi sulle tradizioni artigianali?
2. Quali principi ingegneristici ha applicato Ponti per ottenere la straordinaria leggerezza della sedia mantenendo la sua resistenza e funzionalità?
3. In che modo la sedia Superleggera ha sfidato le concezioni contemporanee del design e della produzione di mobili?

FORNASETTI — DESIGN IS DEMOCRATISED

The Italian design aesthetic of the postwar era came to be characterised by the maxim 'utility plus beauty' and the inventive use of new materials and technologies.

Italy was now thoroughly modern; cities had grown to accommodate workers from rural areas and the nation had transformed from a formerly poor, agricultural one into an industrial power to match Germany. It was an era of high sophistication, clean lines, bold aesthetics, and modern comforts.

The distinctive designs of Piero Fornasetti, whose Milanese atelier, established in the 1950s, translated artworks onto furniture and domestic ware, brought art into ordinary people's lives. Fornasetti's *Tema e Variazioni*, an extensive series of porcelain plates featuring fanciful reimaginings of the opera singer Lina Cavalieri's face, eloquently expressed his philosophy that art and design should be democratised.



Installation view, Fornasetti plates, Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

CASE STUDY: Fornasetti's *Tema e Variazioni*

Designer: Piero Fornasetti (1913–1988), Manufacturer: Atelier Fornasetti

***Tema e Variazioni*, 1950s, porcelain, 26 cm diameter each**

Artist and designer Piero Fornasetti was born in Milan, where he studied fine art, engraving and printing in the 1930s, before establishing a print workshop and collaborating with a range of artists. He was encouraged by the influential designer Gio Ponti to translate his artworks onto furniture and produce creatively decorated domestic objects that would bring art into people's lives.

From the outset Fornasetti intended to mass-produce variations on a theme rather than creating one-off pieces. His iconic *Tema e Variazioni* series of wall-mounted porcelain plates features more than 350 versions of the memorable face of Lina Cavalieri, a famous Italian opera singer.

Fornasetti saw a photograph of Cavalieri in a magazine and from 1953 drew and re-drew her mesmerising gaze. His compositions often fused antique references with motifs from Surrealism and Metaphysical Art as well as personal symbols such as the sun, moon, hot air balloons and playing cards.

Questions:

For Primary Schools

1. If you could design a plate with your face on it, what expression would you choose and why?

2. Fornasetti wanted to bring art into people's homes. How might eating off an art plate be different from eating off a plain plate?
3. Fornasetti used symbols like suns and hot air balloons in his designs. What objects would you use to tell a story on a plate?

For Secondary Schools

1. How does Fornasetti's *Tema e Variazioni* series reflect the tension between traditional craftsmanship and modern mass production in postwar Italian design?
2. How did advancements in printing and manufacturing technologies enable Fornasetti's vision of 'democratising' art? What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of this approach?
3. In what ways does the *Tema e Variazioni* series blur the lines between functional objects and art pieces? How might this reflect changing attitudes towards domestic spaces and objects in mid-twentieth-century Italy?

Take the exhibition back into the art room:

Fornasetti made over 350 versions of Lina Cavalieri's face. Create five different designs on a plate of your own face, with special objects to tell the story of who you are.

Tema e Variazioni

Designer: Piero Fornasetti (1913–1988), Produttore: Atelier Fornasetti

Tema e Variazioni, 1953–, porcellana, 26 cm di diametro ciascuno

L'artista e designer Piero Fornasetti nacque a Milano, dove studiò belle arti, incisione e stampa negli anni trenta, prima di fondare un laboratorio di stampa e di collaborare con una serie di artisti. Fu incoraggiato dal celebre designer Gio Ponti a trasferire le sue opere d'arte su mobili e a produrre oggetti domestici decorati in maniera creativa per portare l'arte nella vita delle persone. Fin dall'inizio, Fornasetti intendeva produrre in massa variazioni su un tema, piuttosto che creare pezzi unici. La sua iconica serie Tema e Variazioni di piatti da parete in porcellana presenta più di 350 versioni del memorabile volto di Lina Cavalieri, una famosa cantante d'opera italiana. Fornasetti vide una sua fotografia in una rivista e, a partire dal 1953, disegnò e ridisegnò il suo sguardo ipnotico. Le sue composizioni spesso fondevano riferimenti antichi con motivi del Surrealismo e dell'Arte Metafisica, oltre a simboli personali come il sole, le mongolfiere e le carte da gioco.

Domande:

Per le Scuole Primarie

1. Se potessi disegnare un piatto con il tuo volto, quale espressione sceglieresti e perché?
2. Fornasetti voleva portare l'arte nelle case delle persone. In che modo mangiare da un piatto che è un'opera d'arte potrebbe essere diverso rispetto a un piatto semplice?
3. Fornasetti usava simboli come soli e mongolfiere nei suoi design. Quali oggetti useresti tu per raccontare una storia su un piatto?

Per le Scuole Secondarie

1. In che modo la serie **Tema e Variazioni** di Fornasetti riflette la tensione tra l'artigianato tradizionale e la produzione di massa moderna nel design italiano del dopoguerra?

2. Come è stato resa possibile la “democratizzazione” dell’arte nella visione di Fornasetti grazie ai progressi ottenuti dalle tecnologie di stampa e di produzione?
3. In che modo la serie **Tema e Variazioni** sfuma i confini tra oggetti funzionali e opere d'arte? Come potrebbe questo riflettere il cambiamento di atteggiamento verso gli spazi e gli oggetti domestici nell'Italia della metà del ventesimo secolo?

1960s

PLASTIC FURNITURE AND KARTELL

For designers and industry alike, a key breakthrough during the 1960s was in the rapidly expanding field of plastics. While the leading manufacturer Kartell, established in 1949, had begun producing small plastic consumer goods from the early 1950s, it wasn't until the beginning of the 1960s that the material was sufficiently developed as a durable and viable product for furniture. The advent of plastics of different chemical compositions (such as ABS and polypropylene in particular) saw a revolution in Italian consumer product design, and by extension, everyday domestic spaces.

These new synthetic materials offered the seductive qualities of smooth shiny surfaces, organic curves, lightness and transparency, as well as opportunities for low-cost mass manufacture. It was now possible to make solid chairs, tables and household objects from one cast in every conceivable colour and form, and simple yet refined designs became increasingly available, effectively bringing art into people's homes and making domestic life stylish. Anna Castelli Ferrieri's modular *Componibili* storage units for Kartell, 1969, are emblematic of plastic's shift in status and demonstrate the same level of craft and sophistication as had come to be expected from Italian design.



Installation view, Kartell *Componibili* storage units (in a room setting), *Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design*, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

CASE STUDY: Kartell *Componibili* storage units

Designer: Anna Castelli Ferrieri (1918–2006), **Manufacturer:** Kartell

***Componibili* storage units, 1967, ABS plastic, 40 x 32 (diam.) cm (2 shelves), 58.5 x 32 (diam.) cm (3 shelves)**

Anna Ferrieri obtained her degree in architecture from the prestigious Politecnico di Milano in 1943, one of only three women in her cohort of nearly 500 students. In the same year she married Giulio Castelli, a chemical engineer.

In 1949 Giulio Castelli founded Kartell, a manufacturing company specialising in plastics and advanced technologies. Kartell's signature style was a combination of Castelli's engineering prowess and Ferrieri's belief that beauty can improve people's way of life and thinking. Plastic became a staple of Kartell's production and allowed for an affordable product with virtually limitless possibilities in terms of silhouette and colour.

Anna Castelli Ferrieri designed the *Componibili* for Kartell during the height of postwar Italian innovation and material experimentation. Made of industrial-grade ABS plastic, using a method of injection moulding, the modular and domestically-scaled storage units can be stacked, swivelled and combined, with the cylindrical form inviting freestanding display and creative customisation.

Questions:

For Primary Schools

1. Look closely at the *Componibili* units. The designer, Anna Castelli Ferrieri, was an architect. How do you think designing buildings might have helped her create furniture?
2. These units are modular, meaning they can be stacked and combined. How might this be useful in different types of homes?
3. These units were designed in the 1960s but are still popular today. What features do you think make them timeless?

For Secondary Schools

1. Analyse the environmental implications of plastic furniture production in the 1960s versus today. How have attitudes changed?
2. How do the *Componibili* units represent a departure from traditional storage furniture, and what societal changes might have inspired this shift?
3. How might the mass production capabilities of plastic furniture have influenced consumer culture in 1960s Italy?

Take the exhibition back to the art room:

Design one new feature for the Componibili units; what would it be and why?

Portaoggetti Componibili Kartell

Designer: Anna Castelli Ferrieri (1918–2006), Produttore: Kartell

Portaoggetti Componibili, 1967, plastica ABS, 40 x 32 (diam.) cm (2 ripiani), 58,5 x 32 (diam.) cm (3 ripiani)

Anna Ferrieri si laureò in architettura presso il prestigioso Politecnico di Milano nel 1943, una di sole tre donne fra quasi 500 studenti. Nello stesso anno sposò Giulio Castelli, un ingegnere chimico.

Nel 1949, Giulio Castelli fondò Kartell, una società di produzione specializzata in plastiche e tecnologie avanzate. Lo stile distintivo di Kartell combinava la competenza ingegneristica di Castelli con la convinzione di Ferrieri che la bellezza potesse migliorare il modo di vivere e di pensare delle persone. La plastica è diventata un punto fermo della produzione Kartell e ha consentito di realizzare prodotti convenienti con possibilità praticamente illimitate in termini di silhouette e colore.

Castelli e Ferrieri progettarono i Componibili per Kartell durante l'apice dell'innovazione italiana e della sperimentazione dei materiali del dopoguerra. Realizzati in plastica ABS di grado industriale, utilizzando un metodo di stampaggio a iniezione, i portaoggetti modulari e di dimensioni domestiche possono essere impilati, ruotati e combinati, sfruttando la forma cilindrica che invita all'esposizione indipendente e alla personalizzazione creativa.

Domande:**Per le Scuole Primarie**

1. Osserva attentamente le unità *Componibili*. La designer, Anna Castelli Ferrieri, era un'architetto. Come pensi che saper disegnare edifici l'abbia potuta aiutare a creare mobili?
2. Queste unità sono modulari, cioè possono essere messe una sopra l'altra e combinate. In che modo questo potrebbe essere utile in diversi tipi di case?
3. Queste unità sono state progettate negli anni '60 ma sono ancora popolari oggi. Quali caratteristiche pensi che le rendano senza tempo?

Per le Scuole Secondarie

1. Analizza le implicazioni ambientali della produzione di mobili in plastica negli anni '60 rispetto a oggi. Come sono cambiate le opinioni al riguardo?
2. In che modo le unità *Componibili* rappresentano un allontanamento dai mobili tradizionali per lo stoccaggio, e quali cambiamenti nella società potrebbero aver ispirato questo cambiamento?
3. In che modo le capacità di produzione di massa dei mobili in plastica potrebbero aver influenzato la cultura del consumo nell'Italia degli anni '60?

LIGHTING AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES: ARCO FLOOR LAMP

In the area of lighting during the 1960s, designers utilised the latest technologies to generate highly sophisticated material outcomes. The *Arco* floor lamp, designed collaboratively by Achille Castiglioni and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni in 1962, and manufactured by Flos, was made from marble, stainless steel and pressed aluminium, and was conceived as a suspended light that did not require a ceiling to hang from it. The unique feature of the marble base is that it has a hole in which a broomstick can be inserted to move the lamp around the room.



Installation view, Arco floor lamp (far right), Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

CASE STUDY: Arco floor lamp

**Designers: Achille Castiglioni (1918–2002) and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni (1913–1968), Manufacturer: Flos
Arco floor lamp, 1962 marble, stainless steel, pressed aluminium, 241 x 220 x 32 cm**

The Arco floor lamp, developed collaboratively by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, is one of the most recognisable and admired design objects of the twentieth century.

Celebrated for solving real-world problems, the Castiglioni brothers intended each of their products to make ordinary people's lives easier or to be an improvement on an existing design. Taking inspiration from the street lights of Paris, they conceived the Arco as a suspended light that did not require a ceiling to hang it from.

Anchored by a base of solid Carrara marble, a stainless steel arm in three curved pieces extends up and out like a telescope to support a light two metres away. The resulting arch or *arco*, is easy to walk under and creates enough space for a dining table and chairs to be positioned directly under the light source.

Questions:

For Primary Schools

1. Why do you think the Arco lamp combines traditional materials like marble with modern ones like stainless steel?

2. The *Arco* lamp weighs about 65 kg (143 pounds) — that's as heavy as a person! Why do you think the designers chose to make it so heavy? How would you move the lamp if it didn't have a special hole in the base?
3. The Castiglioni brothers wanted to solve real-world problems with their designs. What everyday problem would you like to solve with a new design?

For Secondary Schools

1. The *Arco* lamp uses Carrara marble, which has been used in Italian sculpture and architecture for centuries. Discuss why designers used this traditional material in a modern lamp, and the way they manufactured a method of moving the heavy base into their design.
2. The lamp uses different materials for different parts. Why do you think the designers chose marble for the base and aluminium for the shade?
3. The Castiglioni brothers wanted to solve the problem of hanging a ceiling light without a ceiling. What other lighting problems can you think of that need solving in modern houses?

Take the exhibition back to the art room:

The Arco lamp was inspired by street lights. Look around your classroom or home — what every day object could inspire a new kind of lamp?

Lampada da terra Arco

**Designer: Achille Castiglioni (1918–2002) e Pier Giacomo Castiglioni (1913–1968), Produttore: Flos
Lampada da terra Arco, 1962, marmo, acciaio inossidabile, alluminio stampato, 241 x 220 x 32 cm**

La lampada da terra Arco, sviluppata in collaborazione da Achille e Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, è uno degli oggetti di design più riconoscibili e ammirati del ventesimo secolo.

Celebrati per la loro capacità di risolvere problemi pratici, Achille e Pier Giacomo Castiglioni concepirono ogni loro prodotto ai fini di facilitare la vita delle persone o di migliorare un design già esistente. Ispirato ai lampioni di Parigi, la lampada Arco fu concepita come una lampada sospesa che non richiedeva un soffitto da cui pendere.

Ancorata a una base in solido marmo di Carrara, un braccio in acciaio inossidabile in tre pezzi curvi si estende come un telescopio per sostenere una luce a due metri di distanza. Il risultato è un arco sotto cui si può passare facilmente, creando spazio sufficiente per posizionare un tavolo da pranzo e delle sedie sotto la fonte luminosa.

Domande:

Per le Scuole Primarie

1. Perché pensi che la lampada Arco combini materiali tradizionali come il marmo con materiali moderni come l'acciaio inossidabile?
2. La lampada Arco pesa circa 65 kg (143 libbre), cioè tanto quanto una persona! Perché pensi che i designer abbiano scelto di renderla così pesante? Come sposteresti la lampada se non avesse un foro speciale nella base?
3. I fratelli Castiglioni volevano risolvere problemi reali con i loro design. Quale problema quotidiano ti piacerebbe risolvere con un nuovo design?

Per le Scuole Secondarie

1. La lampada Arco utilizza il marmo di Carrara, un materiale usato da secoli nella scultura e nell'architettura italiane. Perché, secondo te, i designer hanno usato questo materiale tradizionale in una lampada moderna e hanno incorporato una soluzione per spostare la pesante base nel loro design?
2. La lampada utilizza materiali diversi per le varie parti. Perché pensi che i designer abbiano scelto il marmo per la base e l'alluminio per il paralume?
3. I fratelli Castiglioni volevano risolvere il problema di appendere una lampada a soffitto senza un soffitto. Quali altri problemi legati all'illuminazione pensi che debbano essere risolti nelle case moderne?

POP ART AND CULTURE: UP5 ARMCHAIR

By the mid-1960s Pop art and culture had firmly infiltrated the Italian psyche and the influence of these movements was reflected in the work of several younger designers. While plastics now signified a luxury design language, for avid innovators such as Gaetano Pesce they offered a means to convey Pop references. The conceptual designer Pesce worked closely with C&B Italia (later B&B Italia) on his ground-breaking *UP* furniture series of 1969, made of inflatable polyurethane upholstered in brightly-coloured elastic fabrics.

His celebrated *UP5* armchair—also known as *La Mamma* (mother) and *La Donna* (woman)—representing a shapely woman in an exaggerated form, is a quintessential example of the convergence of Pop and plastic, as is the final model in the range, *UP7*, both a lounge chair and classically-inspired sculpture of a human foot, scaled up to monumental proportions.



Installation view, UP5 chair with UP6 ottoman, Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

CASE STUDY: UP5 chair with UP6 ottoman

Designer: Gaetano Pesce (1939–2024), Manufacturer: C&B Italia (B&B Italia since 1973)

UP5 chair with UP6 ottoman, 1969, polyurethane foam covered in stretch fabric, armchair 101.6 x 110.5 x 114.3 cm, ottoman 57.2 cm (diam.)

The visionary architect and designer Gaetano Pesce worked across architecture, urban design, industrial design and interiors for more than five decades, and was recognised for his constant pursuit of innovation and imaginative fusion of art, design, and industry.

Among Pesce's most celebrated and characterful designs is the *UP5* of 1969. Affectionately known as *La Mamma* (the mother), the *UP5* is a resplendent, inflatable armchair (hence the name UP) that resembles a curvaceous woman with 'a large maternal lap' connected by a cord to a small round pouf, suggesting the physical bond between a mother and child.

Pesce worked with manufacturer C&B Italia to produce his design, with the original version fabricated in cold-foamed polyurethane, then a new product on the market, and upholstered in elastic fabric. It was then vacuum packed in a PVC envelope and reduced to a tenth of its volume, making its transportation easier and more affordable.

Questions:

For Primary Schools

1. If you were to create a piece of furniture that represents your culture, what materials or fabric designs would you use?
2. How do you think using new materials like stretchy fabric made the *UP5* armchair special?
3. If the *UP5* armchair is inspired by a mother, what other things could furniture be inspired by? Can you think of any unusual ideas?

For Secondary Schools

1. How does the *UP5* armchair reflect Italy's historical emphasis on craftsmanship and aesthetics, particularly in its materials and design choices?
2. What advantages do you see in using modern manufacturing techniques like vacuum packing for furniture design? How might this impact consumers?
3. Why do you think the *UP5* armchair has remained popular and relevant even today? What does this say about the nature of good design?

Poltrona UP5 con pouf UP6 (La Mamma)

Designer: Gaetano Pesce (1939–2024), Produttore: C&B Italia (B&B Italia dal 1973)

Poltrona UP5 con pouf UP6 (La Mamma), 1969, schiuma di poliuretano rivestita in tessuto elasticizzato, Poltrona 101,6 x 110,5 x 114,3 cm, Pouf 57,2 cm (diam.)

L'architetto e designer visionario Gaetano Pesce ha lavorato per più di cinque decenni nei campi dell'architettura, del design urbano, industriale e degli interni, dove è riconosciuto per la sua costante ricerca dell'innovazione e per la fusione fantasiosa di arte, design e industria.

Tra le creazioni più celebri e caratteristiche di Pesce c'è la UP5 del 1969, affettuosamente chiamata La Mamma. È una sontuosa poltrona che ricorda la figura di una donna formosa con "un ampio grembo materno", collegata da un cordone a un piccolo pouf rotondo, suggerendo il legame fisico tra madre e figlio.

Pesce collaborò con il produttore C&B Italia per realizzare il suo design, la cui versione originale era fabbricata in poliuretano schiumato a freddo, allora un prodotto nuovo sul mercato, e rivestita in tessuto elastico. La Mamma era poi confezionata sottovuoto in una busta di PVC e ridotta a un decimo del suo volume, rendendone il trasporto più semplice ed economico.

Take the exhibition back to the art room:

Design your own chair inspired by the UP5, including unique features to express life for young people in Australia right now.

Domande:

Per le Scuole Primarie

1. Se dovessi creare un pezzo di arredamento che rappresenta la tua cultura, quali materiali o motivi di tessuto utilizzeresti?
2. Come pensi che l'uso di nuovi materiali, come il tessuto elastico, abbia reso speciale la poltrona UP5?
3. Se la poltrona UP5 è ispirata a una madre, da cos'altro potrebbe essere ispirato un mobile? Riesci a pensare a idee insolite?

Per le Scuole Secondarie

1. In che modo la poltrona UP5 riflette l'enfasi storica dell'Italia sull'artigianato e l'estetica, in particolare nelle sue scelte di materiali e design?
2. Quali vantaggi vedi nell'utilizzo di tecniche di produzione moderne come il confezionamento sottovuoto per il design di mobili? Che effetto potrebbe avere sui consumatori?
3. Perché pensi che la poltrona UP5 sia rimasta popolare e attuale ancora oggi? Cosa dice questo sulla natura del buon design?

1970s

RADICAL DESIGN

In the mid-1960s Italy's economic boom was subsiding, and by the end of the decade student protests, workers' strikes and heightened political conflict laid the conditions for a more critical and cultural approach to design. The 1968 Milan Triennale was famously occupied by protesters on the day of its opening, and the following year marked the beginning of more than a decade of global crises including worldwide oil shortages and brutal terror attacks.

A growing dissatisfaction emerged among a younger generation of creatives, who were disillusioned by the dominant modernist aesthetic and design's role in (largely bourgeois) mass consumption. This new guard spurred an experimental movement committed to undermining the discipline. Variously known as Radical design, Anti-design, and Counter-design, the faction took an unconventional and irreverent approach that in visual terms drew inspiration from Pop art, Dada and Surrealism.

In the realm of product design the radicals often took ordinary objects from the world and reimagined them as furniture. This is seen in the Pratone (Large Meadow) lounge chair, 1971, by Gruppo Strum, and the Cactus coat stand by Guido Drocco and Franco Mello, 1972, both produced by the avant-garde furnishings brand Gufram. Made of polyurethane, the Pratone and Cactus are organic sculptural forms which deny any immediate sense of utility and—along with many examples of Anti-design—are almost unrecognisable with respect to their traditional use.

Although its advocates had begun with utopian ideals of inciting social change, the movement came to a close by the mid-1970s. Their Pop-inspired objects—originally intended as a form of critique—were in the end consumed as status symbols by a younger generation, suggesting the market's ability to swallow up any attempts at subversion.



Installation view, Pratone (right), Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

Pratone

Designer: Giorgio Ceretti, Pietro Derossi and Riccardo Rosso (1971)

Manufacturer: Guffram

polyurethane foam coated with latex rubber (Guflac) 93 x 125 x 118 cm

Part nature, part Pop art, but mostly pure invention, the Pratone is a ground-breaking and unconventional 'sofa' that has become an icon of the Radical Design movement. Meaning 'big lawn' or 'big meadow', the Pratone is in essence a large patch of flexible grass in which one or more persons can sit, sprawl or lie down.

While the artificial turf appears more like a sculpture than a lounge chair, in reality the polyurethane blades are soft and sturdy, and bend to support the user's body. More than fifty years following its release, the design continues to subvert the traditional boundaries of furniture and orthodox approaches to 'sitting'.

Questions:

For primary schools

1. What do you think would happen to the Pratone's shape if you and a friend both sat on it?
2. Imagine designing a sofa that looked like a hairbrush. What material would you use so that it was soft and comfortable to sit on?
3. If the Pratone is inspired by a piece of grass, what other things in your garden could furniture be inspired by?

For secondary schools

4. How did the Pratone sofa defy expectations of what a traditional piece of furniture should look like?
5. What advantages were there in using polyurethane to create the Pratone, rather than traditional materials such as wood, metal, leather and wool?
6. Why do you think the Pratone remains popular with contemporary audiences?

Take the exhibition back to the art room

Design a piece of furniture that is unrecognisable from its traditional use but is still useful.

Pratone

Progettista: Giorgio Ceretti, Pietro Derossi e Riccardo Rosso (1971)

Produttore: Guffram

poliuretano espanso rivestito in lattice di gomma (Guflac) 93 x 125 x 118 cm

In parte natura, in parte Pop art, ma soprattutto pura invenzione, il Pratone è un 'divano' innovativo e anticonvenzionale che è diventato un'icona del movimento del Design Radicale. Il Pratone è in sostanza una grande macchia di erba flessibile in cui una o più persone possono sedersi, distendersi o sdraiarsi.

Anche se l'erba artificiale sembra più una scultura che una poltrona, i fili d'erba in poliuretano sono in realtà morbidi e robusti, e si piegano per sostenere il corpo dell'utente. A più di cinquant'anni dal lancio, questo design continua a sovvertire i confini tradizionali del mobilio nonché gli approcci ortodossi all'azione del 'sedersi'.

Domande:

Per le Scuole Primarie

1. Cosa pensi succederebbe alla forma del Pratone se tu e un amico vi sedeste sopra?
2. Immagina di progettare un divano che sembri una spazzola per capelli. Quale materiale useresti per renderlo morbido e comodo per sedersi?
3. Se il Pratone è ispirato a un filo d'erba, quali altre cose del tuo giardino potrebbero ispirare il design di un mobile?

Per le Scuole Secondarie

4. In che modo il divano Pratone ha sfidato le aspettative su come dovrebbe essere un oggetto di arredamento tradizionale?
5. Quali vantaggi ci sono stati nell'usare il poliuretano per creare il Pratone, invece di materiali tradizionali come legno, metallo, pelle e lana?
6. Perché pensi che il Pratone rimanga popolare tra il pubblico contemporaneo?

1980s

MEMPHIS MILANO

In the early 1980s, Italy entered a second period of economic growth. One of the most defining events of the decade, and design history more broadly, was the formation of Memphis Milano.

Having played a pivotal role in the Radical movement, the maverick designer Ettore Sottsass collated around thirty kindred architects and designers in his Milan apartment on 11 December 1980 to discuss the future of the discipline. Together they sought to break from the conventions of 'good design' and invent a completely new language; their decidedly postmodern take on furnishings and everyday items incorporated kitsch and ironic shapes with exuberant patterns and unexpected materials, such as plastic laminates, veneering and moulded glass.

The group named themselves Memphis after the Bob Dylan song 'Stuck Inside of Mobile with Memphis Blues', and launched their 1981 debut collection to much acclaim. The exhibition featured 55 objects designed by the founding members and included cabinets, bookcases, tables, beds, lamps and ceramics, with Sottsass's now famous *Carlton* room divider on central display.



Installation view, Carlton room divider (centre), Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design, 2024, photograph: Christian Capurro.

CASE STUDY: *Carlton* room divider

Designer: Ettore Sottsass (1917–2007), Manufacturer: Memphis Milano

***Carlton* room divider, 1981, wood, thermosetting laminate, metal, plastic, 196 × 189.7 × 40.2 cm (overall)**

The *Carlton* room divider was designed from the outset by Ettore Sottsass to be a show-stopping object that would make a strong media impact. The rearrangement and exaggeration of its design elements resulted in a sculptural bookcase that appears full and captivating even without any contents. It embodied the Memphis group's rejection of the established principle 'form should follow function' in favour of the notion that 'form follows fun', and as such was it an instant success.

Sottsass approached furniture design from an architect's perspective. He deliberately chose medium density fibreboard, or MDF, as the most suitable material to fabricate the unique shape of the *Carlton*, and finished it with meticulously applied plastic laminate on all four sides. Elevating cheap materials in this way while embracing Italian artisanship, the Memphis designers were commercially successful for only a few years, and disbanded in 1988.

Questions

For Primary School

1. What patterns or colours from the *Carlton* room divider stand out to you? How do they make you feel?
2. Why do you think Ettore Sottsass chose materials like MDF instead of quality wood or marble, for the *Carlton* room divider?
3. Why do you think the *Carlton* room divider became so popular? What do you think people loved about its unique style?

For Secondary School

1. In what ways does the *Carlton* room divider reflect the values of Italian craftsmanship, even with its unconventional design?
2. How does the use of new manufacturing techniques contribute to both the cost and the accessibility of innovative designs like those from the Memphis Group?
3. The Memphis Group wanted to break away from the idea that furniture must only be practical. What do you think is more important in design: fun or function? Why?

Take the exhibition back to the art room:

Ettore Sottsass chose to use MDF for the Carlton room divider. Design a table using recycled materials from a roadside rubbish collection in a creative way.

Libreria Carlton

Designer: Ettore Sottsass (1917–2007), Produttore: Memphis Milano

Libreria Carlton, 1981, legno, laminato termoidurente, metallo, plastica, 196 x 189,7 x 40,2 cm (complessivi)

La libreria Carlton è stata progettata da Ettore Sottsass fin dall'inizio come un oggetto d'impatto, capace di fare colpo sui media. La riorganizzazione e l'esagerazione dei suoi elementi di design hanno dato vita a una libreria scultorea che appare piena e accattivante anche se è vuota. La libreria Carlton incarna il rifiuto del gruppo Memphis del principio consolidato secondo cui "la forma deve seguire la funzione" a favore del concetto per cui "la forma deve seguire il divertimento", e per questo fu un successo immediato.

Sottsass affrontò il design del mobile dal punto di vista di un architetto. Scelse appositamente il pannello di fibra a media densità (MDF) come il materiale più adatto per realizzare la forma unica della libreria Carlton, e la rifinì con un laminato plastico meticolosamente applicato su tutti e quattro i lati. Elevando così materiali economici e al contempo valorizzando la tradizione artigiana italiana, i designer di Memphis ebbero successo commerciale solo per pochi anni e si sciolsero nel 1986.

Domande:

Per le Scuole Primarie

1. Quali motivi o colori del separatore di ambienti Carlton ti colpiscono di più? Come ti fanno sentire?
2. Perché pensi che Ettore Sottsass abbia scelto materiali come l'MDF invece di legno pregiato o marmo per il separatore Carlton?
3. Perché pensi che il separatore di ambienti Carlton sia diventato così popolare? Cosa pensi che le persone abbiano amato del suo stile unico?

Per le Scuole Secondarie

1. In che modo il separatore di ambienti Carlton riflette i valori dell'artigianato italiano, anche con il suo design non convenzionale?
2. Come contribuiscono le nuove tecniche di produzione sia al costo che all'accessibilità di design innovativi come quelli del gruppo Memphis?
3. Il gruppo Memphis voleva allontanarsi dall'idea che i mobili debbano essere solo pratici. Cosa pensi sia più importante nel design: il divertimento o la funzionalità? Perché?

GLOBALISATION AND THE INTERNET AGE

From the 1980s Italian brands, which by this point had firmly established a reputation for luxurious and superior products, progressively attracted not only Italian designers, but also more international talent than ever before.

The cross-fertilisation of ideas that accompanied globalisation and the internet age have seen Italian design absorb and project a transnational flavour, marking a natural endpoint for the exhibition *Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design*.

TIMELINE - TWENTIETH-CENTURY ITALIAN DESIGN

- **1861 – Unification of Italy**, with the various states and outlying isles brought together to form a kingdom.
- **1906 – Italy's first celluloid plastic is produced** by the Mazzucchelli company.
- **1908 – Italy's first typewriter company Olivetti is established** by Camillo Olivetti in Ivrea, north of Turin.
- **1909 – First Futurist Manifesto is published**, ushering Italy into the twentieth century. Its doctrine of velocity, patriotism, courage, rebellion and violence leads to a radical rejuvenation of culture and the glorification of the machine aesthetic.
- **1911 – National celebration of 50 years of Unification**, with international expositions in Rome, Florence and Turin, the latter focused on industrial progress and manufacturing and marking the release of the *M1*, Olivetti's first typewriter.
- **1911-12 – Italo-Turkish war**, a precursor to the First World War, in which Italy annexes Libya.
- **1915 – The Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe is published**, a manifesto by artists Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero, which re-envisages every aspect of the world, leading to the Futurist conception of *l'opera d'arte totale* (total work of art), later applied to the arena of industrial design.
- **1914-1918 - World War I** significantly impacts technological advances and industrial production. Italy enters the war in 1915, emerging in 1918 with war debt, food shortages and significant inflationary increases.

1920s

- **1921 – Fratelli Alessi Omegna is established**, now known as Alessi, a leading homewares design company still renowned for meticulous crafting and perfect finishing.
- **1922 – The 'March on Rome'**, an organised mass demonstration on 28 October that results in Benito Mussolini's National Fascist Party ascending to power. The rise of Fascism and Mussolini's dictatorship profoundly impact the architectural world, with fascist ideologies influencing the development of a distinct style that encompasses the Novecento movement and the rationalist trend. *Il Novecento* advocates for the great Italian representational art of the past, its classical forms and traditional craftsmanship, whereas the rationalist approach is based on modernist principles of functionalism.
- **1923 – Inaugural Monza Biennale exhibition**, the precursor to the Milan Triennale. Characterised by luxury craftsmanship, this first edition is held at Villa Reale Monza, on the outskirts of Milan, with three subsequent editions in 1925, 1927 and 1930.
Fiat's Lingotto factory opens in Turin, Italy's first reinforced concrete factory, which becomes a symbol of the Italian automotive industry.
- **1925 – Mussolini's totalitarian regime begins**, with the dictator styling himself thereafter as *Il Duce* (the leader).
- **Italian industrialists start to adopt American principles of mass production**, after Adriano Olivetti travels to the USA and applies his findings in the company's operations.
- **1927 – The design company Amadeo Cassina is established**, now known as Cassina, by brothers Cesare and Umberto Cassina in Meda, Brianza. Over the decades it expands its activities from its initial focus on cabinet making to the production of high-end designer furniture.

- **1928 – *Domus* and *La Casa Bella* are established** by Gio Ponti and Guido Marangoni respectively, two prominent architecture and design magazines. Ponti's inaugural article for *Domus* 'La casa all'italiana' sets the scene for a new modern lifestyle.
Turin hosts the major *International Exposition*, celebrating industry, labour and the tenth anniversary of the end of the First World War. Professionals, architects, painters and sculptors portray the rebirth of Italy and the myth of Turin as an industrial city, experimenting with new architectural languages in real, albeit temporary, buildings.
The first exhibition of rationalist architecture is held in Rome, with a number of architects adapting their style to suit the fascist ideology.
- **1929 – *Edilizia Moderna* is established**, the first corporate magazine dedicated to the architecture and furniture of the Pirelli Group.
Onset of the Great Depression, negatively impacting industrial production.

1930s

- **1930 – *La Casa Bella* is renamed *Casabella*** by its new editors Giuseppe Pagano and Edoardo Persico.
Fourth edition of the Monza exhibition, with an increased scope now including architecture, features the revolutionary *Casa Elettrica* (Electric House), a thoroughly modern domestic space designed by Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini and presented by the Edison Company.
1933 – Monza Biennale is relaunched as Milan Triennale (known as the 5th edition), directed by Gio Ponti, with a new permanent venue at Palazzo dell'Arte, Parco Sempione, Milan, designed by Giuseppe Muzio.
The *Moka Express* domestic coffee maker is released, designed by Alfonso Bialetti and becomes an enduring symbol of Italian design and craftsmanship.
- **1934 – The Faculty of Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano is established**, separating architecture as a discipline from engineering.
- **1935 – Italy invades Ethiopia.**
Olivetti's *Studio 42* is released, the first semi-standard typewriter, designed by Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Ottavio Luzzati and Xanti Schawinsky.
- **1936 – 6th Milan Triennale**, directed by Giuseppe Pagano.
- **Italy annexes Ethiopia and proclaims itself an empire**, resulting in economic sanctions imposed by the League of Nations compelling Italy to focus on locally-available resources such as aluminium and commence research in new materials including plastics.
- **1937 – Paris International Expo**, in which Italian design features prominently and gains widespread attention.

1940s

- **1940 – Italy enters the Second World War (1939–45)** and developments in design and architecture come to a standstill as most Italian companies are required to dedicate their efforts to the weapons industry.
7th Milan Triennale, including Pagano's *Exhibition of Mass Production*, the first exhibition dedicated to Italian industrial design.
Nazi occupation of Palazzo dell'Arte, the Triennale headquarters in Milan.

***Lo stile nella casa e nell'arredamento* is established**, a new design magazine founded and edited by Gio Ponti. Giuseppe Pagano replaces Ponti as editor of *Domus*.

Design company Atelier Fornasetti is established in Milan.

- **1943 – Anna Ferrieri (later Castelli Ferrieri) is the first female graduate of the Politecnico di Milano** and begins her career as an architect and industrial designer.

The fall of Italian Fascism, after Italy joins the Allied powers and declares war on its former Axis partner, Germany.

- **1945 – Liberation of Italy from Nazi-Fascism** on 25 April
- **1946 – Piaggio launch the Vespa**, designed by Corradino D'Ascanio, who brings his aeronautic engineering knowledge to the project, creating one of the most successful design objects in Italian history.

Referendum for the Republic of Italy, with women voting for the first time.

- **1947 – Beginning of the Cold War and introduction of the Marshall Plan**, with industrial policies and significant funding from the USA aimed at controlling Communism. Designers are united in the recovery and reconstruction of both the nation and industry. In northern Italy, the industrial centres of the 'Triangle'—Piedmont, Lombardy and Liguria—are the most involved in productive transformation which will come to characterise the economic boom.
- **Innocenti releases the Lambretta**, a scooter competing with Piaggio's Vespa, designed by aeronautical engineers, Cesare Pallavicino and Pier Luigi Torre.
- **1948 – Italy becomes a Republic** and the Italian constitution comes into effect.
- **Italy receives \$594 million in reconstruction funding from the United States**, the largest of several payments under the Marshall Plan that continue until 1953 and total more than one billion dollars.
- **1949 – Kartell is established by Giulio Castelli**, a company at the forefront of new materials and cutting-edge technologies, particularly plastics for furniture and homewares.

1950s

- **1950 – Olivetti's Lettera 22, the first portable typewriter, is released.** Designed by Marcello Nizzoli, it weighs only four kilograms and is an instant success, particularly with journalists.
- **1951 – 9th Milan Triennale**, where the term 'industrial design' is first used in the exhibition, *La forma dell'utile* (Functional Form). At the end of the Triennale the architect-designer Franco Albini proposes to transform the Palazzo dell'Arte into a permanent museum of architecture, decorative and industrial arts, an idea not realised until 2007. Marco Zanuso's *Lady* armchair is awarded the Triennale's gold medal. Made of Pirelli foam rubber and strips of Nastro Cord, it exemplifies the use of new materials and technological innovation in the 1950s and becomes an icon of Italian design.
- **1954 – The Compasso d'Oro design award is inaugurated**, based on the vision of Gio Ponti and sponsored by the department store La Rinascente. It is now the oldest and most prestigious industrial design award in the world. Marcello Nizzoli wins the 1954 prize for the *Lettera 22*.

Italy's first national television broadcast, marking the start of widespread commodity advertising and the dissemination of the Italian national language.

Stile Industria is launched, the first Italian magazine dedicated to industrial design, which runs until 1963.

- **1956 – The Associazione per il Disegno Industriale (ADI) is established** in Gio Ponti's studio by a group of architects and industrialists. ADI is an ongoing association that promotes the development of design.

- **1957 – The *Superleggera* chair is released**, designed by Gio Ponti for Cassina and becomes an iconic piece of Italian design and a symbol of the country's modernity.
- **The Fiat 500 is released**, becoming the first car for many Italian families due to its compact size and affordability. Designed by Dante Giacosa, it wins the Compasso d'Oro in 1959, marking the first time an automotive company receives the award.
- **1958 – Italy enters the height of its boom years, described as the ‘Economic Miracle’**. The northern industrial triangle between Turin, Milan and Genoa drives mass internal migration with as many as 800,000 people moving up from the south in a single year.

1960s

- **1960s – Italy completes its postwar transformation**, evolving from a largely agrarian, relatively poor country, into one of the most economically and socially advanced nations in the world.
- **1960 – Artemide is established** by Ernesto Gismondi and Sergio Mazza, an innovative company in the field of lighting design.
- **1961 – The inaugural Salone Internazionale del Mobile is held in Milan**, an annual trade fair promoting the export of Italian furniture and homewares. It remains a global benchmark event for the furniture and design sector.
- **1962 – Flos is established** by Dino Gavina and becomes one of the most revolutionary Italian lighting brands.
The Arco lamp is released, designed by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni for Flos. A celebrated and enduring design, it is still in production today.
The Doney portable television is released, designed by Marco Zanuso and Richard Sapper. The first fully transistorised television in Europe, the *Doney* marks a shift towards portable electronics and Italy's leading role in household equipment and appliance design.
- **1964 – Kartell's K1340 children's chair is released**, the world's first entirely plastic chair. Designed by Marco Zanuso and Richard Sapper, it wins the Compasso d'Oro and the Medaglia d'Oro at the Milan Triennale, and is acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- **Opening of Milan Metro's Red Line**, with architectural elements and signage designed by architects Franco Albini, Franca Helg and Antonio Piva, with graphic designer Bob Noorda. The design wins the Compasso d'Oro that year.
- **1965 – The Pipistrello lamp is released**, designed by Gae Aulenti and produced by Martinelli Luce for Aulenti's Olivetti showroom in Paris.
- **1967 – The Eclisse lamp is released and wins the the Compasso d'Oro**. Designed in 1965 by Vico Magistretti for Artemide, it exemplifies the space age aesthetic of the 1960s and remains in continuous production.
- **The Universale chair is released**, designed by Joe Colombo for Kartell and made from the all-new product ABS (Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene), representing a major step forward for the evolution of plastics.
- **The Componibili storage units are released**, designed by Anna Castelli Ferrieri for Kartell. The *Componibili* are the first modular interior design object.
- **1968 – Beginning of the 1968 movement or Sessantotto**, where students, intellectuals, workers and ethnic minorities agitate for social and cultural change. Students occupy schools and universities, events that often end in violence.

- **1969 – ‘Hot Autumn’ period of mass strikes begins in northern industrial centres**, with workers occupying factories and threatening capacity for mass production. It leads to the legislation of workers’ rights.

The *Soriana* armchair is released, designed by Afra and Tobia Scarpa for Cassina. A timeless style icon, it wins the *Compasso d’Oro* in 1970.

Beginning of the ‘Years of Lead’, a period of more than a decade of global crises and heightened political conflict and violence by left and right wing extremist groups, including large scale terror attacks in banks, on trains and in public places with hundreds of casualties and fatalities. It signals the end of the Economic Miracle and brings into question the consumerism of the 1960s.

1970s

- **1970 – The *Ultrafragola* mirror is released**, designed by Ettore Sottsass for Poltronova, and shown at *Eurodomus 3*, a series of exhibitions on modern home design hosted by *Domus* in Milan. An emblem of the Radical or anti-design movement, it went against mainstream design in its rejection of pure functionalism and overt references to feminine sensuality.
- **The *Joe* lounge chair is released**, designed by Jonathan De Pas, Donato D’Urbino, and Paolo Lomazzi for Poltronova. The chair playfully overcomes the rigid rules of Rationalism and embraces pop culture.
- **1971 – The *Compasso d’Oro* award is suspended until 1979.**
- **1972 – Opening of *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape***, an exhibition of 1960s and 1970s Italian design, curated by Emilio Ambasz at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The landmark exhibition consolidates Italy’s global reputation as a design leader.
- **1972 – The *Cactus* coat stand is released**, designed by Guido Drocco and Franco Mello for Gufram. The organic design made of flexible polyurethane challenges the practical rigidity of furniture at the time.
- **1973 – Beginning of worldwide oil crisis**, triggered by the decision of OPEC countries to increase prices. Italy is affected by petrol rationing and austerity measures.
- **1973 – The *Scianga* coat stand is released**, designed by Jonathan De Pas, Donato D’Urbino and Paolo Lomazzi for Zanotta. Inspired by the game of ‘Shanghai’ or ‘pick up sticks’, the form combines simplicity and originality with elegance and practicality. It wins the 1979 *Compasso d’Oro*.
- **1975 – Family law reforms give equal rights for married couples**, a milestone for women’s rights and freedoms in Italian society.
- **1977 – Italy’s inflation rate reaches 21.8 per cent.**
- **1978 – Divorce is legalised.**
- **Former Prime Minister Aldo Moro is kidnapped and assassinated** by the extreme left terrorist group the Red Brigades, a watershed moment in the history of the Italian Republic that signals the end of armed struggle as a mass movement.
- **1979 – Beginning of a second oil crisis** brought about by the Iranian revolution.
- **The *Compasso d’Oro* is re-established** with Carla Venosta becoming the first woman to win the prize for industrial design for a computerised electro-medical machine.

1980s

- **1980 – Italy enters a second economic boom**, due to the prevalence of small scale and family-based industries, which are much less affected than larger companies by the oil crisis and able to continue operating profitably.
Officina Alessi is established, an experimental and innovative branch of Alessi that finds widespread success from the 1980s onwards.
The *Tavolo con Ruote* is released, designed by Gae Aulenti for FontanaArte. A coffee table inspired by an industrial trolley, it echoes the spirit of the famous ‘readymade’ invented by avant-garde artist Marcel Duchamp.
Memphis Milano is launched, comprising a group of international architects and designers led by Ettore Sottsass. They design provocative, kitsch and ironic postmodern furniture, lighting, fabrics, carpets, ceramics, glass and metal objects, and are active as a group until 1988. The *Carlton* room divider by Ettore Sottsass becomes a Memphis icon.
- **1981-2 – The Propaganda Due ‘P2’ scandal erupts**, uncovering the broad influence of a criminal organisation with Masonic connections in many aspects of Italian society, including banks, newspapers and acts of far-right terrorism.
- **1984 – The Pratt chair series is released**, designed by Gaetano Pesce, who is known for his conceptual approach. The nine experimental chairs are created for the Pratt Institute in New York, and formed by hand-injecting urethane resin into a mould.
- **1985 – The concept of ‘Made in Italy’ gains traction**, as a label to describe the high quality and unmistakable style of Italian consumer products. Key Italian industries are condensed to the centre of the peninsula and ‘Made in Italy’ becomes the driving factor of Italian economic development.
- **1987 – The *Ghost* armchair is released**, designed by Cini Boeri for Fiam. A completely transparent armchair made of curved glass, it is a brilliant synthesis of technological experimentation and formal research.
- **Cara McCarty is the first woman juror for the Compasso d’Oro**, one of only 20 women to do so to date.
- **1988 – Official end of the ‘Years of Lead’**, seeing a disbanding of most militant and terrorist groups and an increase in political stability.
- **1992 – The Kickback City scandal erupts**, whereby bribes between politicians and private enterprise bring about the end of the old political party system and pave the way for the Second Republic and the rise of new political parties such as Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia.

GLOSSARY

Key terms relating to modern Italian Design:

1. **Unification of Italy (1861)** – The process that brought together the various states of the Italian peninsula and outlying isles to form the Kingdom of Italy.
2. **Olivetti** – an Italian manufacturing company established in 1908, known for its typewriters and later its electronic products.
3. **Futurism** – An early twentieth-century art movement that glorified modernity, speed, and industrialisation.
4. **Novecento style** – A return to classical Italian forms and craftsmanship during Mussolini's fascist regime.
5. **Rationalism** – An architectural and design movement focused on functionality and modernist principles.
6. **Fratelli Alessi** – Renowned Italian homewares company, founded in 1921, known for combining functionality with aesthetic appeal.
7. **Fiat Lingotto Factory** – Opened in 1923 and a symbol of the Italian automotive industry.
8. **Milan Triennale** – Italy's most important international design and architecture exhibition, first held in 1933.
9. **Moka Express** – A coffee maker designed by Alfonso Bialetti in 1933, an iconic object of Italian design.
10. **Studio 42** – Olivetti's first semi-standard typewriter, designed in 1935.
11. **Autarchia** – Benito Mussolini's policy of economic self-sufficiency, which led to Italian design innovation using local materials.
12. **Vespa (1946)** – A motor scooter designed by Corradino D'Ascanio, an icon of Italian postwar design.
13. **Innocenti Lambretta (1947)** – Another popular Italian scooter, competing with the Vespa.
14. **Marshall Plan** – US funding initiative providing economic aid to Italy post-WWII, fostering design and industrial recovery.
15. **Kartell** – A pioneering Italian company founded in 1949 that specialised in plastic furniture and homewares.
16. **Lettera 22** – A famous lightweight portable typewriter by Olivetti, designed by Marcello Nizzoli in 1950.
17. **Superleggera chair (1957)** – Designed by Gio Ponti, an iconic example of modern Italian furniture inspired by the artisanal tradition.
18. **Fiat Nuova 500** – A compact car released in 1957, the first designed specifically for working class families and a symbol of Italy's postwar economic boom.
19. **Economic Miracle** – Italy's post-WWII economic boom, particularly from the late 1950s to the early 1960s.
20. **Flos** – Italian lighting company, known for innovative designs, established in 1962.
21. **Arco Lamp (1961)** – A classic Italian standing lamp design by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni for Flos.

22. **Eclisse Lamp** – Designed by Vico Magistretti in 1965 for Artemide, exemplifying the space age aesthetic.
23. **Universale Chair (1967)** – The world's first entirely plastic chair, designed by Joe Colombo for Kartell.
24. **Componibili** – Modular storage units designed by Anna Castelli Ferrieri for Kartell in 1967.
25. **Sessantotto** – The student and worker protests of 1968, marking significant social and cultural changes in Italy.
26. **Memphis Group** – A provocative postmodern design collective founded by Ettore Sottsass in 1980.
27. **Ettore Sottsass** – An Influential Italian designer, leader of the Memphis Group.
28. **Carlton room divider** – An iconic Memphis design by Ettore Sottsass (1981).
29. **Cassina** – A leading Italian furniture company, known for collaborations with renowned designers.
30. **Alessi** – Iconic Italian design company, famous for creating playful yet functional homewares.
31. **Bialetti** – Italian brand known for its Moka Express coffee maker, a symbol of Italian coffee culture.
32. **Domus** – A prominent Italian design and architecture magazine, founded by Gio Ponti in 1928.