

DESIGN IDENTITY

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1986



THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

DESIGN IDENTITY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

AND

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF DESIGN

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

BY

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APRIL 1986

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I would like to thank the staff of Inside
for the literature they provided.

I would also like to thank Liz for her
perseverance.

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INTRODUCTION
&
JAPANESE DESIGN

Introduction

When looking at past cultures we have two main reference points in defining our culture in our mind. The first reference point is through their writer and verbally passed down myths, customs, and literature. The second is through their objects. In our minds we

"If industrial Designers or Architects had a definite, fixed identity, they would be dead, just as classical and eclectic designers are. It is because they search for an identity every day, starting every day from zero, that they are alive. With their contradictions and doubts, they face the reality of our time more rationally and coherently than those who still follow enlightenment myths or insist on romantic styling". '

' Professor Bruno Zevi (p)

Introduction

When looking at past cultures we have two main reference points in defining any given culture in our mind. The first reference point is through their written and verbally passed works in law, custom, and literature. The second is through their objects. In our minds we form an image of that culture, we give it an identity. Those cultures survive to us today because those reference points are strong and individual and preserved in various museums.

Looking back at our society today will future generations class our present civilisation as purely western or will individual cultural reference points be strong enough to define us as Irish, Swiss, French, Italian, cultures?

Our products as the second reference point in defining a culture will play a large part in giving us an identity. They are a reflection of our values and the Object d'Art of tomorrow. Do objects designed in Italy or France say something specifically about those cultures, as individual as an Etruscan terra cotta statue when compared with a Ming vase?

Ireland is a country which has forged a strong identity in literature, but the second visual reference point has only recently begun to take the lime light.

Is there a relationship between Irish design and Irish Society, a relationship that reflects the individual characteristics of being Irish?

Our Industrial Designers are now faced with the task of designing products for the Irish. Do those products reflect our individual Irish characteristics? Or are designers looking for that identity at all?

Many predict that we are all plodding down the same road to an "all new western product" a shared identity for "western civilisation" in which Ireland is merely a regional name.

1 ii Design Abroad

Before looking at design in Ireland, its past, the view of some of our product designers and its possible development. It is first necessary to look at some countries who have evolved design, notably product design, to an advanced state. These countries have evolved a design approach each with their own deviations. Their approach or identity is sometimes used as the larger sphere of national identity. The objects being an embodiment of national attitude or rather an expression of values.

As such what can aspiring Irish designers learn from our more developed neighbours in the field of product design?

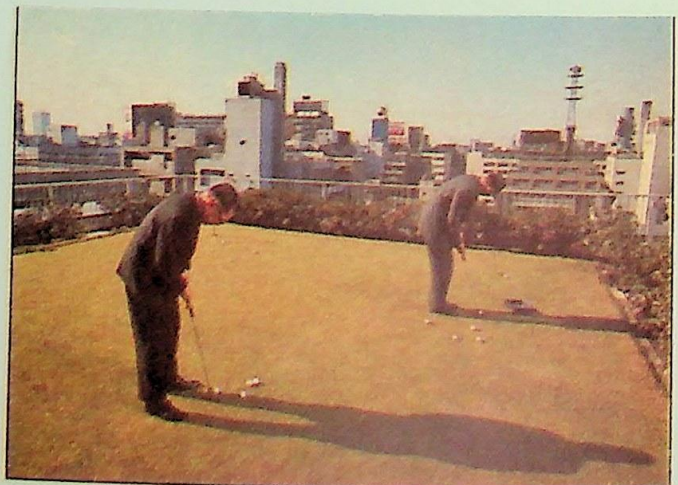
What are their characteristics and to what extent do social, geographical and historical factors define a cultural design identity. Finally is there any point in seeking an Irish design identity?

1 iii The Characteristics of an Identity - JAPAN

"Japanese arts and crafts, even cheap goods on sale in ordinary shops were given their special character by perfection of workmanship, variety of form, novelty of design, beauty and grace". '

In the 1860's Japan opened its doors gradually to the west. Revealed to Sir Rutherford's eyes was a culture with an uninterrupted tradition stretching back a 1,000 years, which, unlike Europe had never been colonised.

' Sir Rutherford Alcock 1862 (b)



His observations, 124 years ago, are particularly poignant when set against modern stereo types of Japanese design.

Often we hear that the Japanese, are still imitating and enhancing the work of Europeans and Americans. That, "their creative energies go into the refinement of their borrowings".¹

What Alcock found and what is closer to the reality of today is not quite so superficial.

"Perhaps it is not too farfetched to see in the Yatate (ink and brush in a portable case) the same principles which inspires the design of a radio, calculator and clock, as a single unit which fits easily into a pocket".²

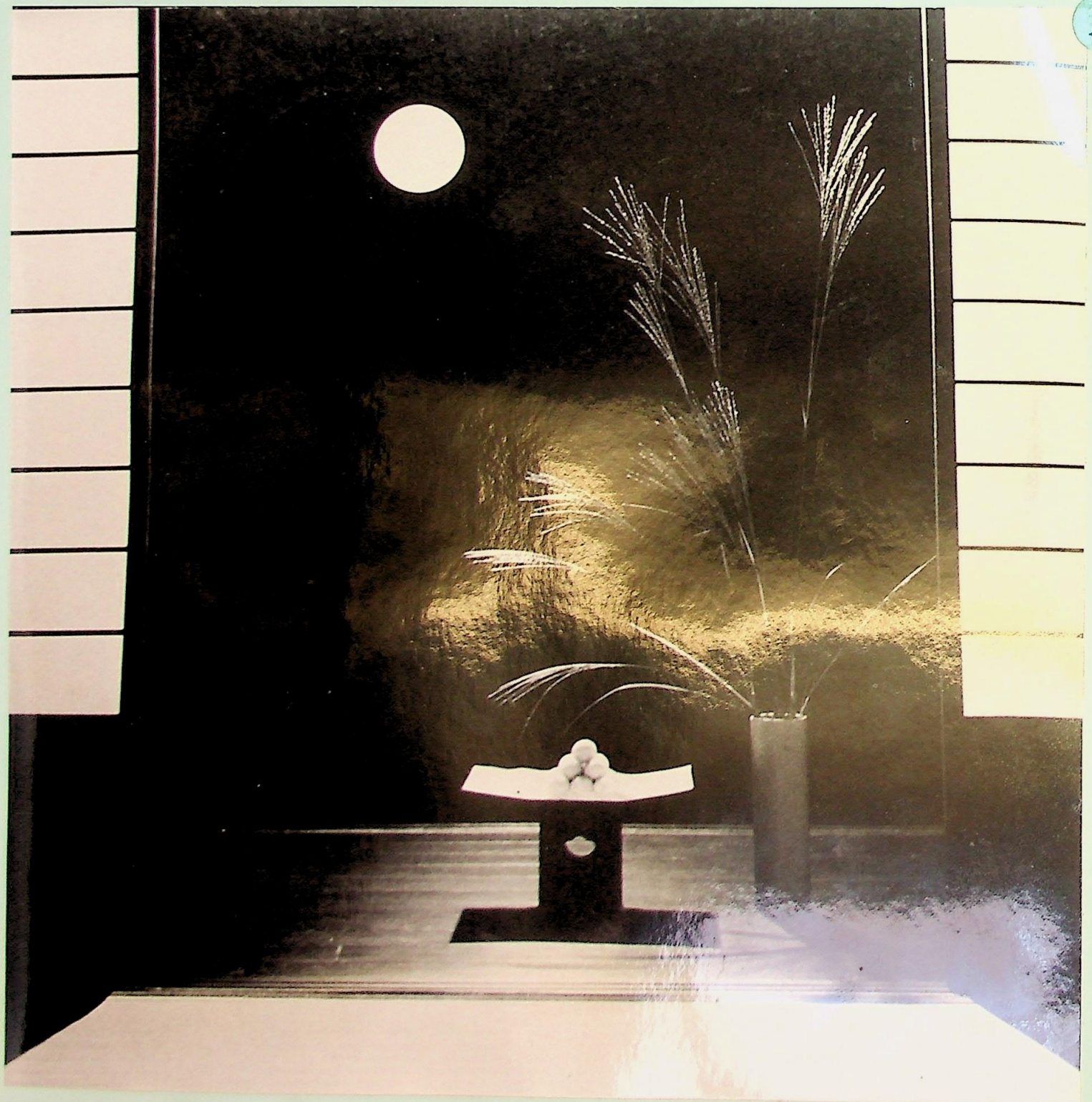
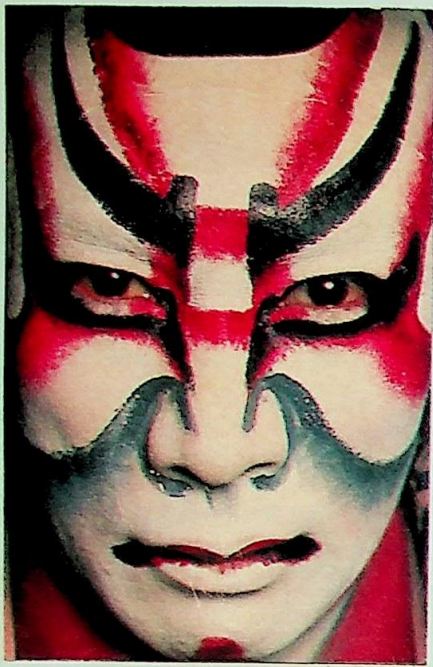
Many aspects of Modern Japanese Design spring from the traditional and the vernacular, they include:-

- ideas of Modularity
- Beauty and Perfection
- Beauty in the Art of performing something in a confined space
- Decorative exploitation of Materials
- Balance and Beauty based upon inner meaning.

In Traditional Architecture and interior decoration, the function of a room can be changed by the insertion, or

¹ Stephen Bayley (t)

² Masuru Katzumic (b)



moving of sliding screens. This romance with adaptability is very old, it would seem. In Japanese toy cars you can change your model Porsche into a robot and back!

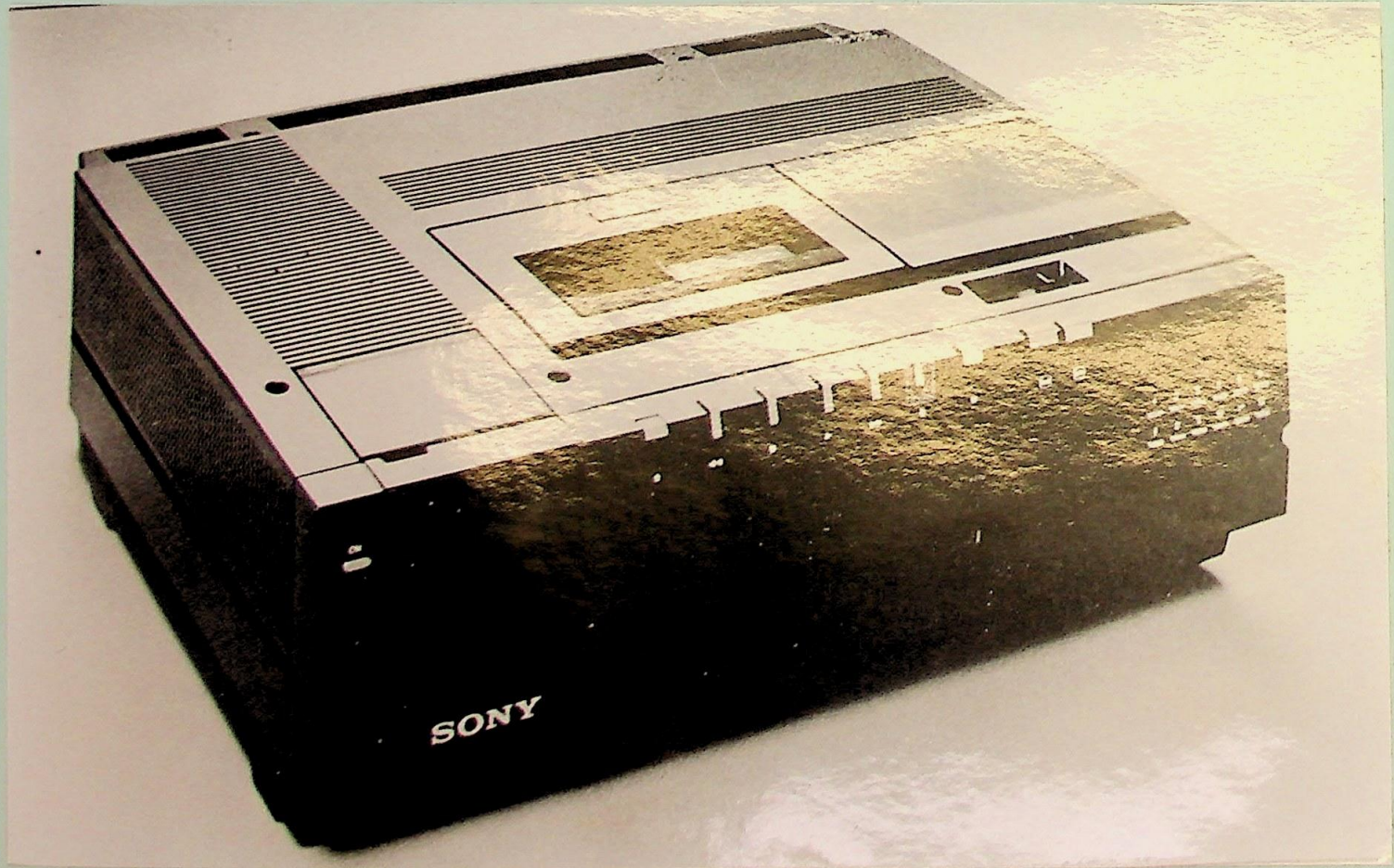
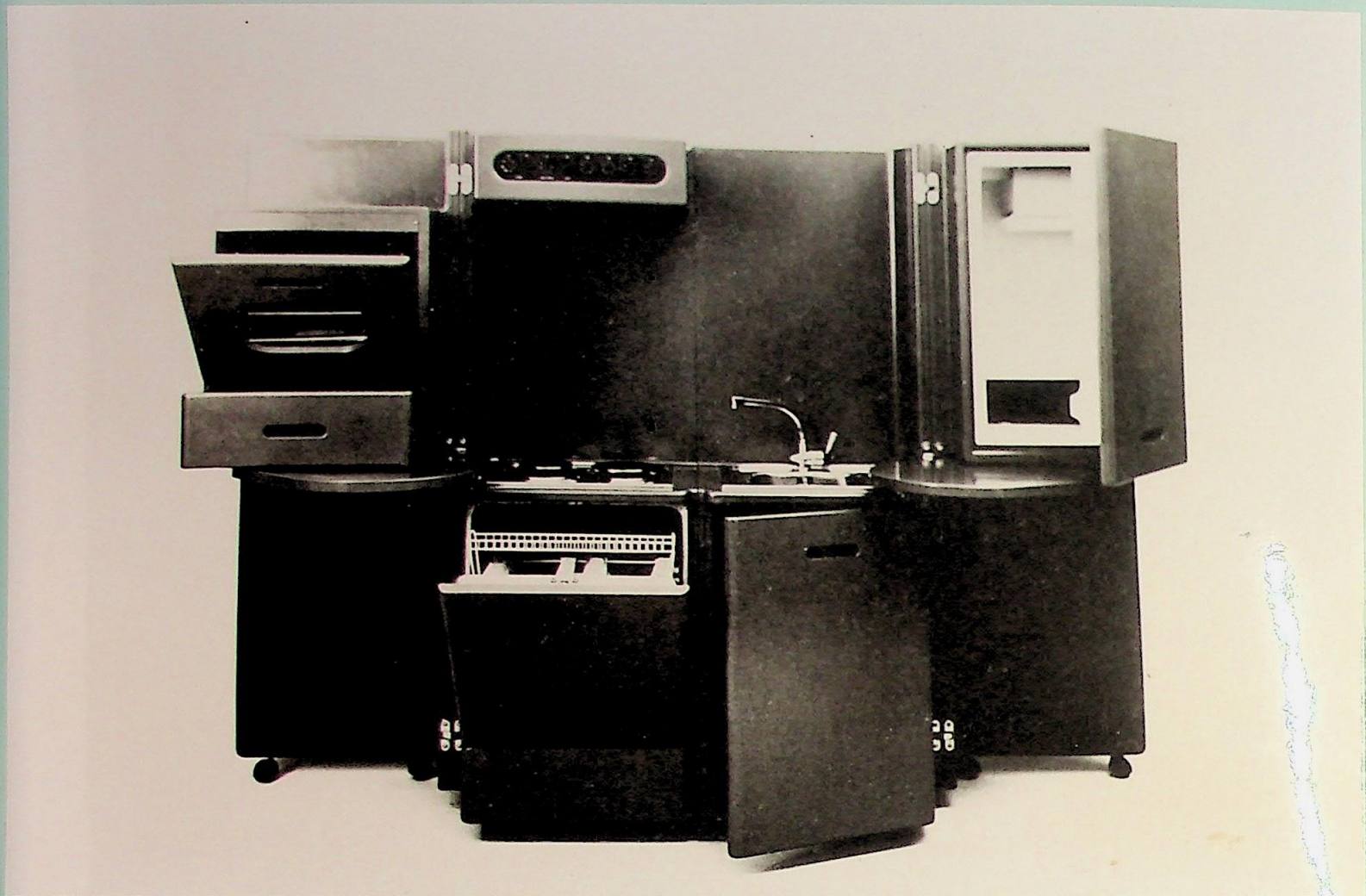
Looking at their interiors (photograph 2), we can see a stark simplicity, which is a direct hand down from the once powerful warrior classes of Japan, whose tastes were very spartan.

In these interiors we can see a masterly control of contrast, between the textures of cord du roi like floor straw mats, the bamboo trimmings and the stark smooth finished laquered wood. (Photograph 9). Also note the way in which the Japanese will "frame" a view, the window in a house "framing" a view in the garden. In the interior shot (Photograph 2), we see the two stark vertical screens framing the carefully composed composition of plant and table. Likewise as Jackie Cole of the Sunday Times notes in Picture 9 that "What little furniture there is, is simple and low level designed more to enhance the sense of proportion and balance than for comfort".

This love of silky smooth flat surfaces and spartan aesthetic is also found in the Japanese modern compact kitchen. (Photograph 3). This power of expression combined with simplicity of treatment is a notable characteristic of Japanese style.

Whether or not exploiting the possibilities of wood laquer, the translucency of rice paper in their wall dividers, or the moulding possibilities of polypropelene, they are, the true masters of their chosen material.

' Times Article on Japanese Interiors

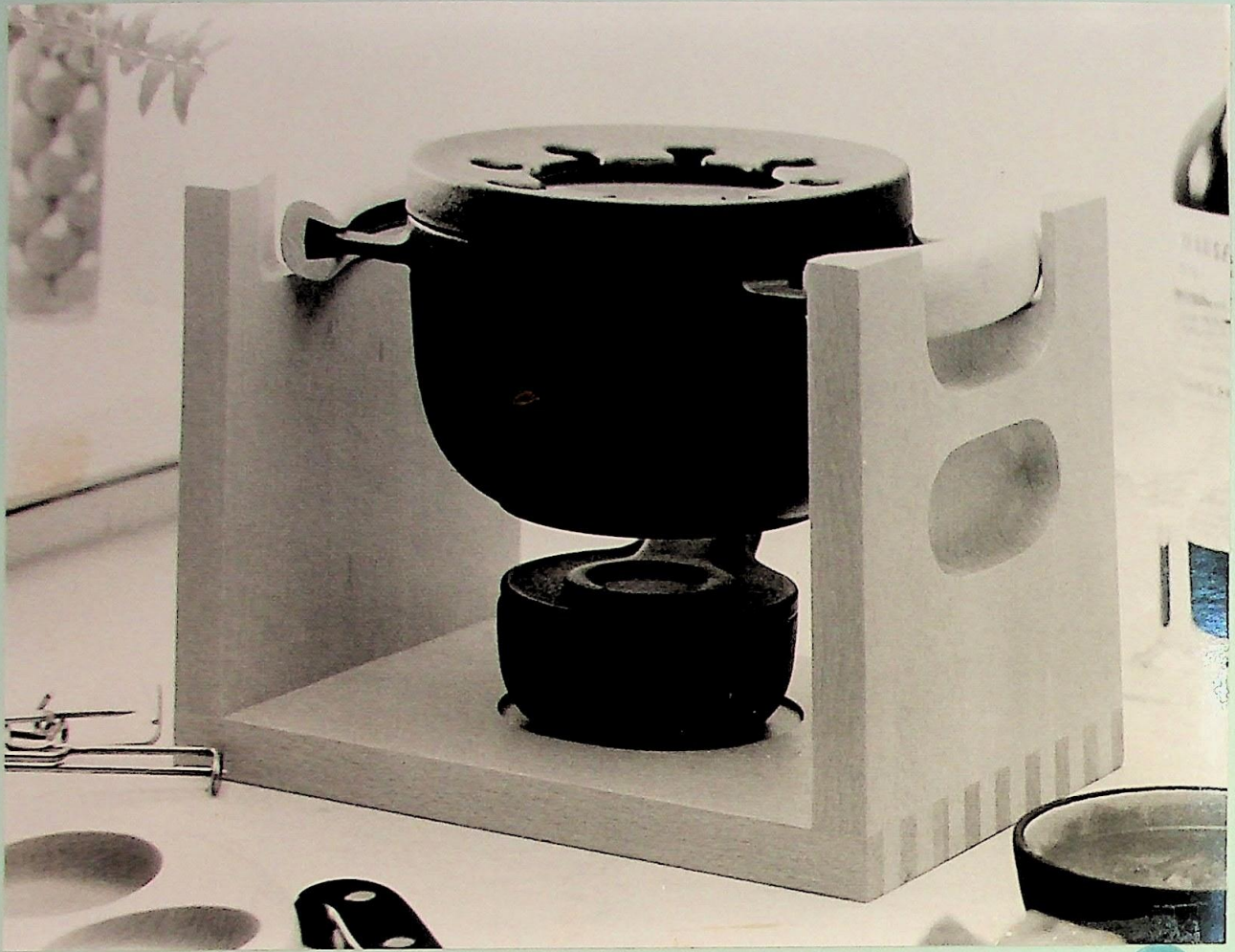


The compact kitchen is a beautifully plastic product, at one moment a bland and simple if not somewhat innocuous wall unit. Once opened up it reveals a whole multiplicity of functions each intricately worked out. Notice how the extractor fan intake shape reflects the handle slot design on the unit. Also noteworthy is a swing-out work surface/cutting board beneath the fridge. (Photograph 3). The whole unit is placed on castors so it can be closed up and, like the rice screen dividers, be moved around as function dictates. As Sir Rutherford Alcock noted in 1862, the beauty of these objects is based on "balance of inner meaning". This ability to package things, in often an exquisite manner, stretches across the whole spectrum of their culture. Looking at the beautifully "packaged" and laid out food tray (Photograph 1) reinforces this image and consequently tells us a great deal about traditional Japanese culture. Even the food itself is delicately segmented and arranged, beautifully compartmentalised in the little black laquered boxes, eating them seems a shame!

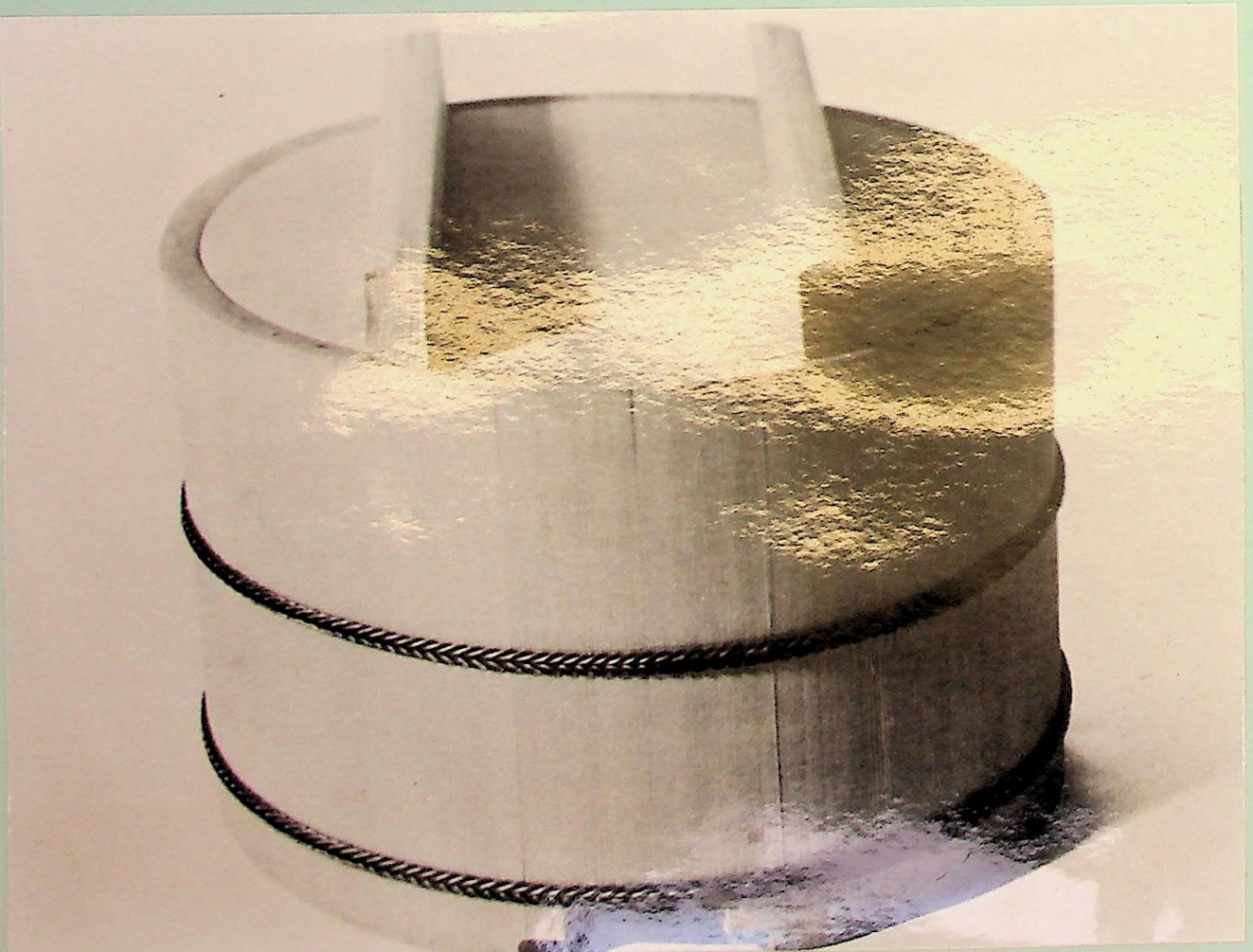
This tendency to arrange things in as narrow a space as possible explains the Japanese fascination with and love of compactness.

The belief that compactness is the inevitable result of "an undifferentiated megalopolitan hell of jam-packed commuter trains and office buildings, pollution, coin operated oxygen machines and roof topped golf courses", ' is far from the reality. In fact compactness is deeply rooted in their tradition. The Ancient Tea ceremony which originated in China and later became finally rooted in Japanese culture, is a simple human activity "involving fire and water (chashitsa) dramatised by being compressed into a very confined area". This compactness crops up in Haiku literature which consists of a mere 17 syllables.

' Masuru Katzumic (b)



5



6

The Japanese admire this kind of concision of form and "compactness of meaning", because like simplicity, they believe it cannot be achieved without perfect execution.

They thus have evolved a whole language of compact expression.

In the kitchen unit, the symbolism and expressive qualities are closely linked to the interior furniture design ethic. But the imagery used in the compact radio/cassette (Photograph 4/8), calculator and video, uses a different kind of language.

The rich textures of the warm and soft wood and its grain come through. Here again we see Katzumic's point about "simplicity of expression". The construction of the bucket is self-evident, simple wooden slats glued in a circle and delicately tied together by the string bracers.

This frank piece of craft design uses the material as the material and not carving or painting the wood to hide its original beauty form as was common with a lot of European furniture. However, in the Scandanavian Fondu Pot Holder (Photograph 6) we see a similar attempt to express the qualities of the wood. Yet not quite so successfully it is crafted into a very unwood like shape. That rectilinear shape does not quite have the same elegance of its Japanese counterpart.

On to a different product now with this tea ceremony kettle - the same material ethical qualities seep through. It is made of cast iron and is a stunningly beautiful object. The possibilities of casting a molten metal have been fully exploited the armour shell image with its crustacian like pimples. The dark strong cast iron perfectly mirrored in the tough yet delicate finish.



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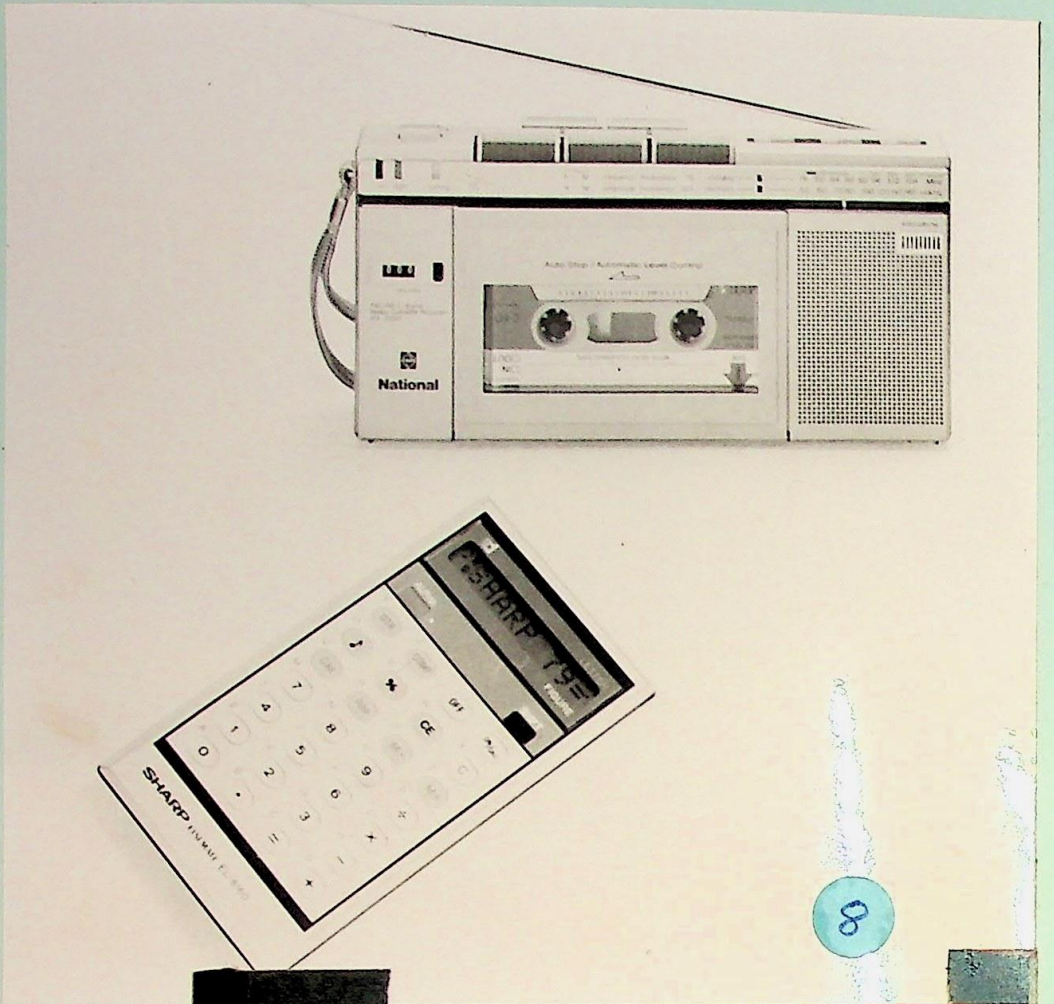
With the bucket and kettle we saw how the craftsmen were quick to utilise the inherent qualities and possibilities with the material they used and reflected it in the resulting object. When we come to mass produced Japanese goods the love of material expression takes on yet another dimension.

"I should like to believe that when we conceive a design in an international context but unselfconsciously adopt a Japanese approach, the result is something worthy of description". '

What makes the video, calculator and mini tape recorder very Japanese is their compactness, (perfection of internal organs to make it so and this a virtue in their own eyes) their exploitation of the material possibilities and their subtle language of design imagery to reinforce, that these are, compact, high performance, desirable and sophisticated objects. This reflects the materialistic nature of the Japanese, also, products are always tested at home first. Their desire to have objects, creates this demand, fuels it and seeing as the wealthy parts of the outside world also share this materialism, their products sell abroad too.

The hard, clean cut, precise, brushed aluminium finish on both the calculator and tape recorder banish any connotation of cheap and nasty plastic. This hard edge mechanical image reflects the old reliable, firmly engineered quality of performance cars, solid engineering in a solid case, the use of thin detail emphasises the compactness, fine delicate attention to detail is a symbol of what one would consider a "high craft product" like the 58 cuts on a diamond, the jewel like signal lights delicately perched on the edge of the recorder again cement this image.

' Masuru Katzumic (b)



8



9

On the Sony video the sharp edge is still very evident. But they have made exquisite use of the moulding possibilities of plastics. The image of a "black box" implies mystery, a surprise maybe! it is a reflection of the owner's sophistication. The fine line detailing also reinforces it as a compact, high performance material desirable.

According to Stephen Bayley, Japanese products "have beautiful details, look fine in one place but simply, do not work aesthetically".

A definition of Aesthetics is - "something relating to perception by the senses, relating to possessing, or pretending to, a sense of beauty".

Perception is the key word, for in Bayley's "perception" of aesthetics the Japanese product doesn't seem to fit. But "Perception" is a very subjective thing and culturally very different when related to beauty.

The video was designed with a certain range of consumer in mind. John Smith say, may have bought the video over a cheaper Sansui because its image appealed to him. The cool sleek, sophisticated, high tech. product in Mr. Smith's mind is a definite plus and consequently an aesthetic success.

It could be said then that the Japanese have mastered product aesthetics in their own perceived definition and that a great many consumers identify with it. Some would call them "neutral products". But it's more subtle than that. Press the power switch on any upmarket Japanese Hi Fi unit, hear it click into action, dotted with flashing L.E.D.'s, graphic equalisers and you know that its designers have given you more than a compact stereo with high performance electronics for your money.

CHAPTER 2

AMERICAN DESIGN IDENTITY

AMERICAN DESIGN IDENTITY

2 i "For those who revel in a society that tolerates and even encourages individual choice, this is the best of all possible worlds" ¹

Many of the traits of present day American design can be traced back to the young republic of the 18th and 19th Century. One of the major tenets of their new democracy was that everyone had a right to strive for a better life. All men were equal and that "the differences between rich and poor had nothing to do with blood, they were a matter of outward trappings". ¹

For many generations in Europe, the outward trappings of the aristocracy, were their sole preserve and could be seen in their clothes, houses, and personal belongings. With the advent of the centennial exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia, the direction of American Design Identity began to emerge.

"Manufacturers ... realised that the consumer would always seek to elevate his taste by purchasing fashionable products that reflected a higher level of aesthetic appreciation". ²

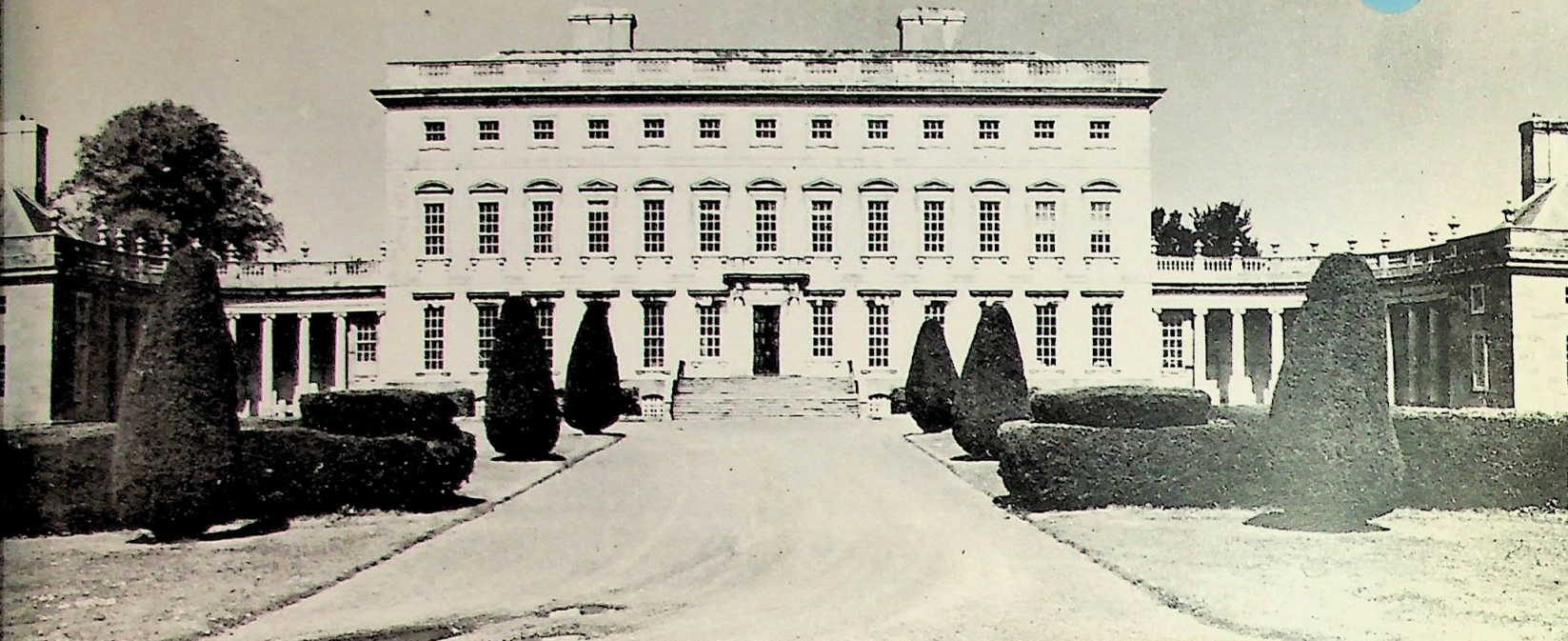
The tradition in Europe had been that "higher levels of aesthetic appreciation" came from the aristocracy i.e. those who could afford to pay craftsmen to produce highly crafted and unique items.

However, mechanisation made possible every kind of "contrived uniqueness that could be presumed to allow the expression of individual taste". ²


¹ William Pierce Randall (c)

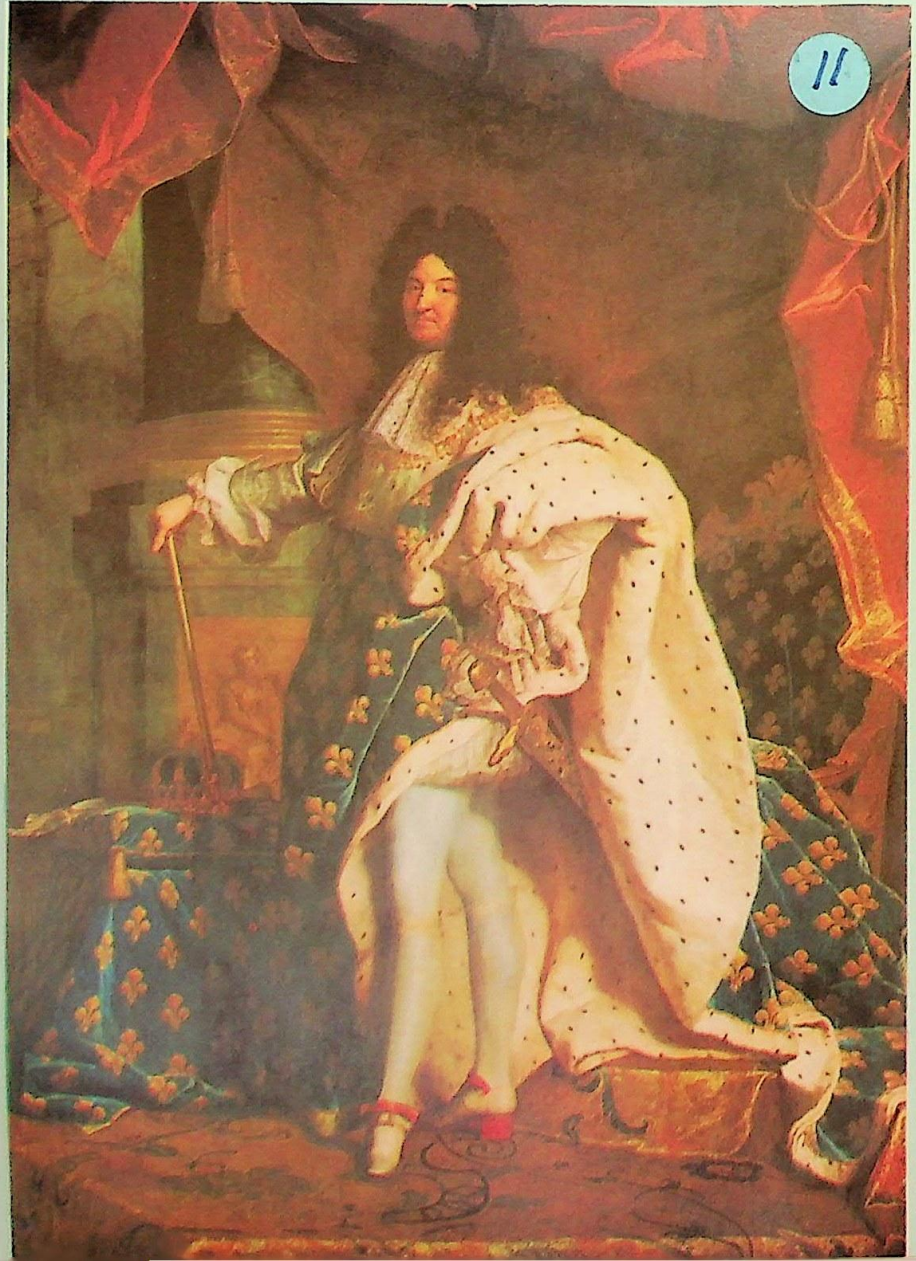
² A.J. Pulos (a)

10



MARK OF EXCELLENCE Cadillac Motor Car Division

Surprisingly New  Superbly Cadillac



11



People became their own tastemakers and thus began the "long and sometimes frustrating but always exciting game of style between consumer and manufacturers".¹

The result was that the middle class Americans strove for that kind of uniqueness and tried to buy "a semblance of the quality and rarity that is normally associated with the aristocracy".¹

Thus linked with the American dream, the seeds of their design identity were planted early in the last Century. But to say that plagiarism of aristocratic values is the corner stone of their design identity would be a generalisation. The emphasis was on "the expression of individual taste".¹

"The evolution of American taste is a history of how Americans have made those trappings available to every man, therefore making every man his own tastemaker".²

As a consumer society evolves and general wealth increases, people become more aware of taste possibilities, as a means of defining their own identity by opting for certain styles. The manufacturer tries to anticipate his preference and place it in front of the consumer when he or she looks for it.

"This continues unabated as another element of the American design ethic".¹

Eventually what has happened is that "the word design was used to identify such decorative treatments as were applied superficially to form the surface of a product".¹

Design in America today is one in which "no group has successfully gained control of American taste".²

¹ A.J. Pulos (a) ² W.M. Randall (c)



12.

2 iii Consumerism and how efficient the Americans are at Consuming

When discussing the importance of a design identity in relation to the Irish consumer, one of the basic pre-requisites is, - if you can afford to buy. In Ireland until quite recently the majority of Irish people had very little money to spend on anything other than essentials. Consequently Irish people are not very acquisitive, whereas the Americans are. Due to their wealth they stimulate demand for products. In the 19th Century a traveller in America noted their obsession with novelty and commerce as if they "were seeking distraction from their happiness" so eager were they to consume.

After the Second World War, consumerism in America got off in a big way and the "taste makers" soon began to establish themselves.

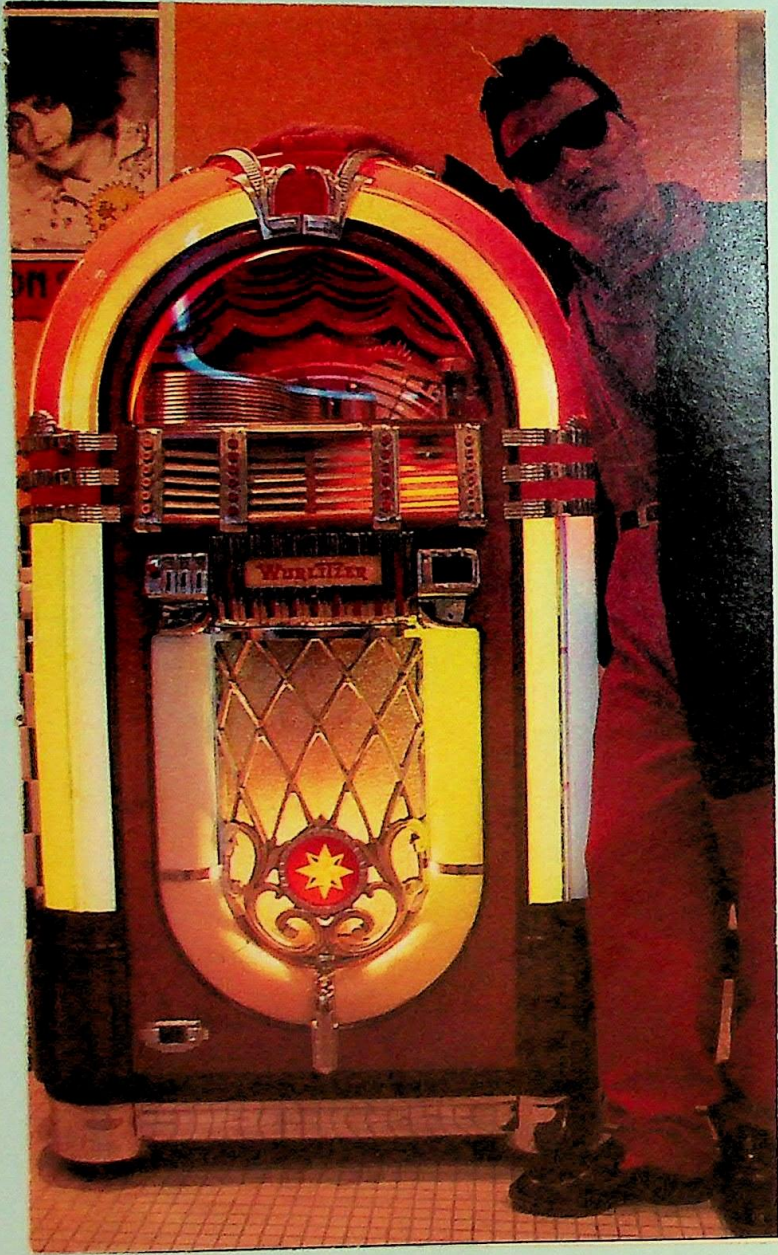
2 iv Ami Model "A" Juke Box (P12)

1948 style - or extravagance?

For those who are firm supporters of the Bau Haus Club, this design would probably seem vulgar extravagance, or a "dishonest" piece of design. Many aspects of it reflect the "unique" elements of aristocratic goods, but this time for the mass markets. Encrusted with ornament, excessive or otherwise, this is a very dramatic object and today would probably be classed by most as period charm.

Its designer hungry for new sources of imagery has loaded it with symbolic reference points. The fact that it plays music seems almost second in his mind.

The record culture was beginning to boom - this is a reflection of post war euphoria eagerly sought by all - excitement, display, fantasy and novelty reverberate from it.



13

Post war materials would contribute to new possibilities in design. The Aztec like belt and draping down loin cloths studded with jewels, say, "quality". the acrylic necklace beautifully ornamented in relief gives it a "rich rococco" look. The designer seems to be finding or searching for an aristocratic language to describe this object. The Duke Box comes complete with chrome bumpers and Art Deco fins on the top. The "Wurlitzer" Duke Box again is loaded with symbolism. The product seems to have a "magic" quality about it. "Alice in Wonderland" like imagery. In this case "put 5 cents in me and watch what happens"!! Even the "rainbow" around it suggests treasures hidden within. Both products seem more like buildings, with their intricately detailed motifs.

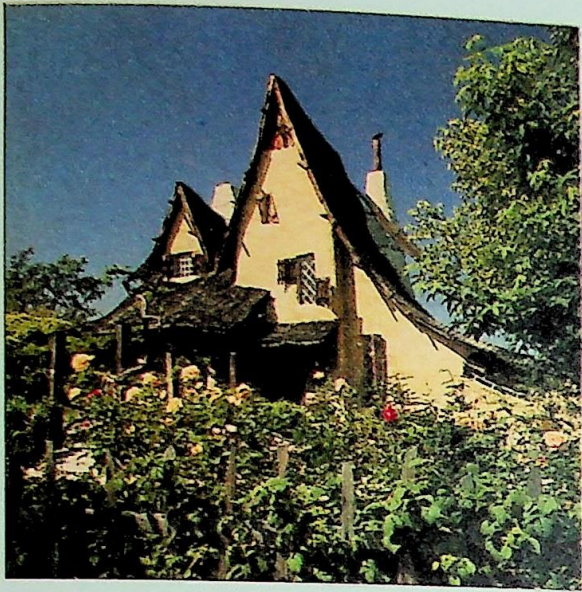
This ability of American designers to pile on escapist symbolism and strong imagery is something which crops up everywhere in their design. From the 1948 Duke Box to the 1983 Cadillac de Ville. It results from a society whose design identity is closely related to its consumerism. Often the imagery is very loud and some say superficial or vulgar. This results from the need for the consumer package to employ easily accessible imagery so it will sell to the people it is aimed at.

2 v The American House - an Expression of their Identity

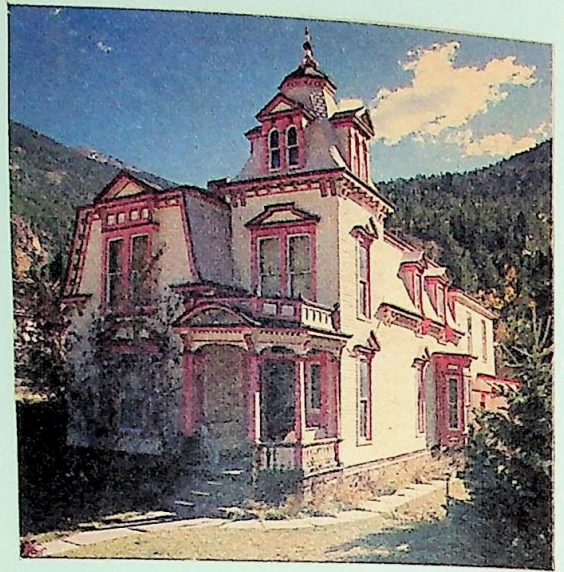
"If an Englishman's home is his castle, an American's is his chateau, schloss, estoncia, alpine retreat, cabin in a clearing, nuclear bunker or even mobile shack".¹

Homes in American society are often used as an expression of an individual's tastes and attitudes. "Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852) one of America's first tastemakers, built his house in the Elizabethan style.... on the grounds that since every man's home is his castle, it should look like one".²

¹ Times Correspondent * ² A.J. Pulos (a)



14

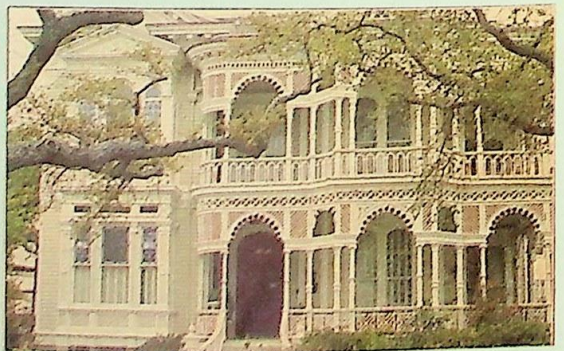


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Given the great fusion of their cultures this often results in a fantastic variety of house design. "American architecture shows a curious split - ultra modern for a public building, quaint nostalgic for most dwellings".

The no-nonsense construction of the Los Angeles home (Photograph 16) with its flat roof, large windows and clean lines, is given exotic treatment in its colours. Bubblegum coloured doors and "toothpaste" walls. Rather than blend with the lush tropical back drop it stands out saying "Modern" (60's). Adding to this exotic scene are two plastic flamingoes poised on the edge of the lawn. On the wall of the house is (or appears to be) a star burst wall light. Perched in front of this modern "with it" home, ready for take off, is the owner's "escape mobile". Finished in metallic baby blue, its curvacious mouth like front seems ready to guzzle up the air as it roars down the freeway.

The Grimm's fairy tale cottage (Photograph 14) up the road in Beverly Hills from the previous example, is fantasy of a pure kind, rose garden included. The thought that it exists in a desert climate and that you're likely to see the owner jog up to it in a track or swimming suit, makes a mockery of this fantasy somewhat.

The "Carpenters Gothic" and "Mid West Palladian" are (17/15) examples of the taste for American architecture which mirrors foreign traditional styles. This "traditional" aspect is supposed to reflect on the owner, giving him or her a sense of belonging, an age-old security. Again both houses are facade, being constructed mostly of wood like most American homes. Unlike stone or brick used in the genuine old originals found in Europe.

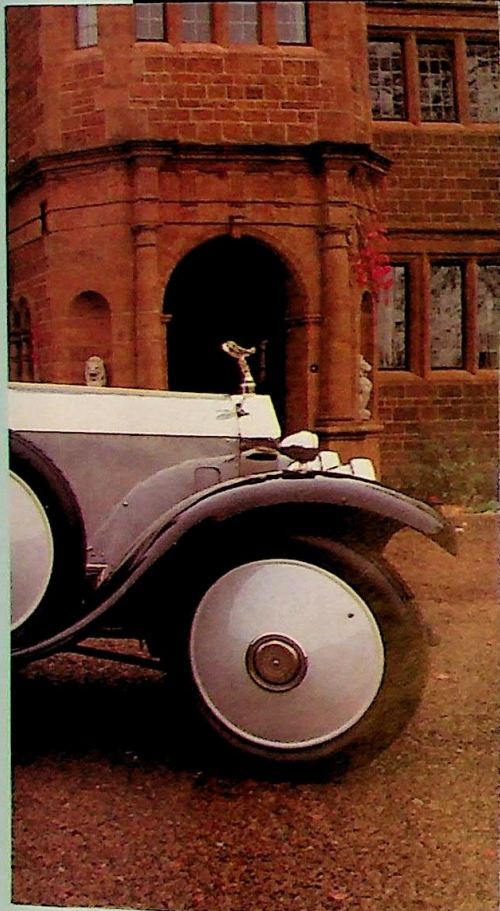
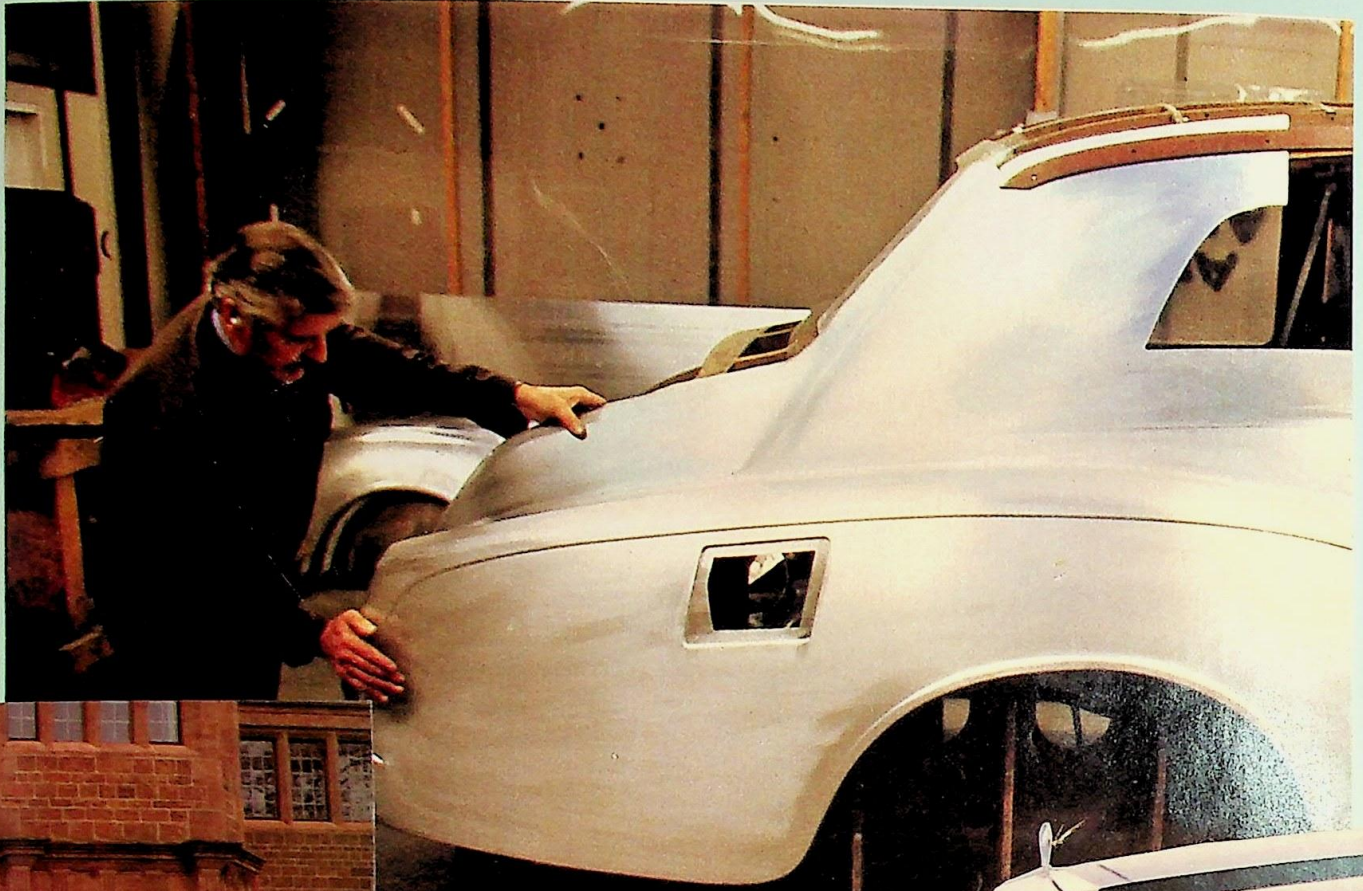
Even the beautiful wrought iron balcony houses of New Orleans (Photograph 176) have a junkapox of different architectural elements. The "Box Bay" windows with their triangular pediments seem to be plucked right out of a Edwardian facade and yet the Arch details, with their "pinhole motifs", are very Islamic looking. On the Colorado Gothic house, apart from the discontinuity of styles and materials, we have compressed motifs. The Bell Tower like corner piece looks as if part of a film set, forced perspective to give the illusion of height. However, the "glass bottle" house (Photograph 27) in the desert at Calico and the Frank Loyd Wright style house (Photograph 28) both show excellent use of materials. On the Frank Loyd Wright, particularly beautiful is the stone-like texturing of the concrete as if rock blending in with the lush forest back drop.

An exhibition in the Renwick Gallery (Washington DC) in 1977 on American homes, notes that "the presence of elements of architecture have symbolic meaning and gives messages about the environment that makes it comprehensible and therefore usable by people in their lives".

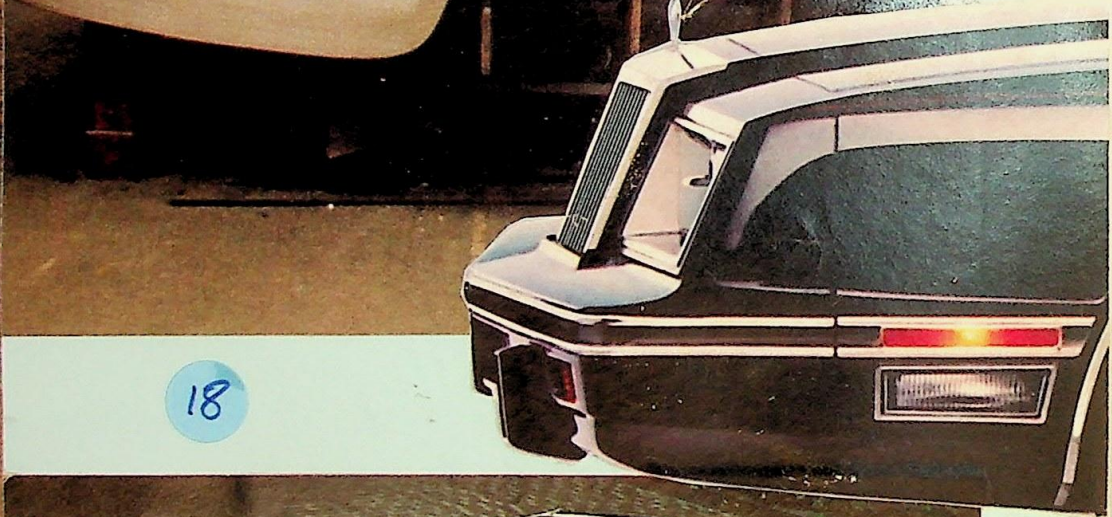
The interiors of their houses are often full of traditional motifs. For example, television sets built in a "Flemish chest" ' style, are popular and a great many products for use in their home are finished in fake wood.

2 vi Cars & Designer Lables

"Even in the golden age of Detroit tin, when oldsmobile vied with Chevrolet in the rush to scrape the heavens with their tail fins, their ads. promised "you aren't buying just a car, with us you are buying an image".²



18



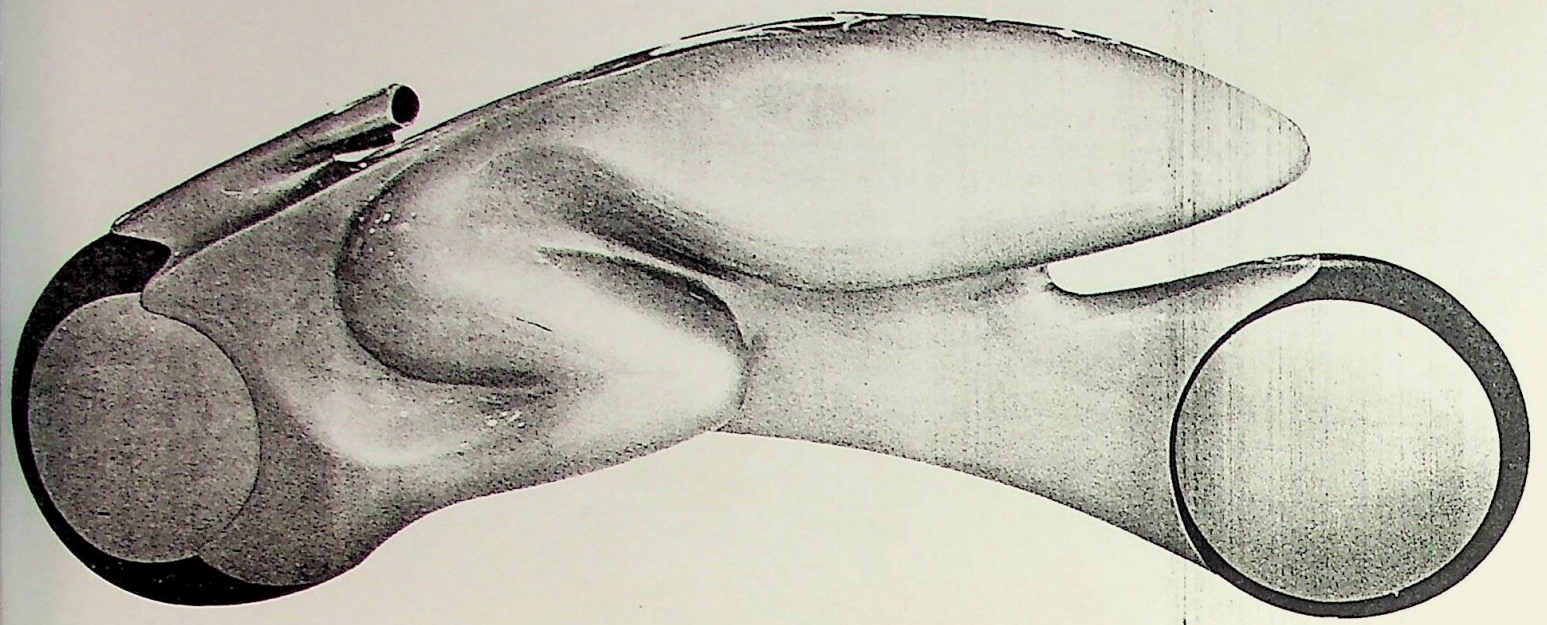
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Examples of the importance of the right image in a product is very prevalent in American car design. The present Cadillac de Ville incorporates a number of image generating motifs all of which are very accessible to the owner, and draw from the aristocratic crafted image. To start with, the car's badge is a coat of arms mounted with a crown, a sort of re-hash of a mediaeval coat of arms which would be painted on a Knight's shield. This gives a traditional, age old feel to the car and age in America is often associated with quality, stability and wealth. Secondly the model type "De Ville" is written in a flamboyant 17th Century like script, as if dashed on to the bonnet by a craftsman with a quill, as it left the factory. The car has of course, a chrome "Rolls Royce" like grill. This motif Rolls Royce got from the front of a Roman Temple (Photograph 18). Again a reference to classicism, tradition, style and wealth. The inclusion of spoked wheels with white rims again is a throwback to the classic cars of the 1920's, nostalgia, tradition and style. Note also the shape of the back of the car and how it mirrors an old Bentley (Photograph 18).

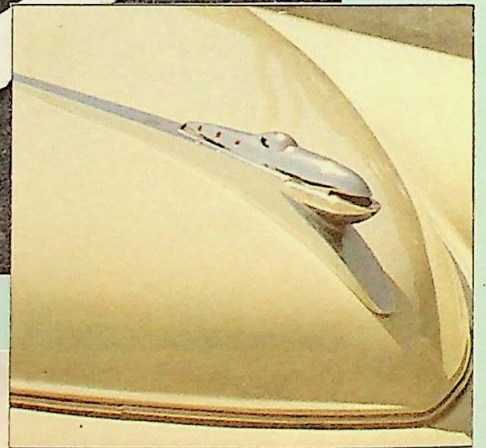
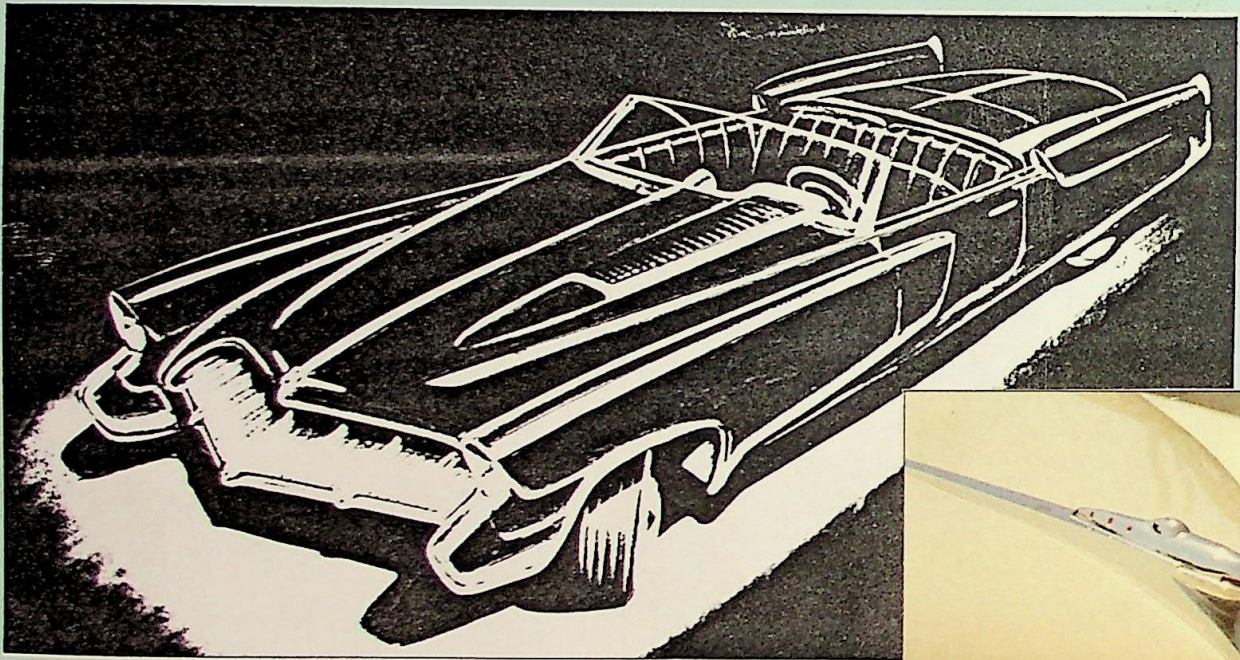
Siegfried Giedon once said about streamlining that "it is only natural that an age of movement should adopt forms associated with movement as its symbol, using it in all places at all occasions".

Reading that, one cannot help thinking of the work of Luigi Colani, (Photograph 20) described as the "oddest designer in the world". His forms are about movement and fluidity. Also similar is Charles Emmes organic chair of the 1950's. (Photograph 22). This image of speed was eagerly adopted by some American designers of the 1950's. Raymond Lowey's sketch for a car is of a form expressing speed and movement even before it moves, not unlike Colani's motorbike.

' Alessandro Mendini *



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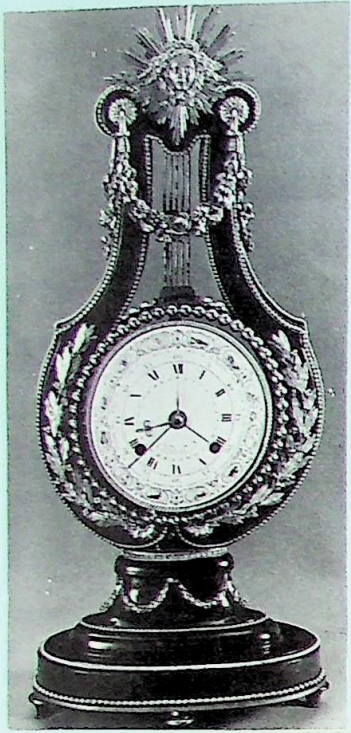
On this car a "mouth like" front grill sucks in air and shoots it out at colossal forces from "jet like" boosters on the back of the car. This is a symbol of the fast life, an age when NASA was sending rockets into space. So the car is also the symbol of American progress. The car will take its driver to another realm. Both Colani's motorbike and Lowey's car express movement. Colani's is related to engineering and his observations of nature (Photograph 20/21). Lowey's is an "image language" telling in bold motifs what this car is about and what it does for its owner. The escapist/fantasy elements in Lowey's car has the same thinking behind it as the crest embellished Cadillac De Ville. That is, your car, house, watch, clothes, communicate a series of easily identifiable symbols.

"The elements of a design language can sometimes, when deployed with sufficient skill, be used to fabricate a cult object". '

But this is a level above again, these symbols are of an escapist kind, or of "therapeutic action handing over to the objects the function of stimulating the perception of one's own adventures". ² This is not an uncommon desire in design, theory and practice. But it is in other cultures often much more subtly applied. In America, where the needs of a fast consumer society to make a "hard sell" are paramount. These visual clues are often more evident and dramatic. This enables the designers and the marketing people to "do more with less". ' Because the consumer has a basic understanding of the meaning of these visual clues, i.e. plush "royal red" interiors in a Cadillac imply wealth, luxury and aristocracy. This aspect of American design often opens it up to scorn from sophisticates and foreigners who see it as shallow and vulgar. (23/24)

' D. Sudjic (d)

² Ettore Sottsass (e)



23



The New Ford Granada

24



But, it is calculated and very successful for what it offers. So the consumer's ability to interpret things dictates to a large extent what the designer does in American society.

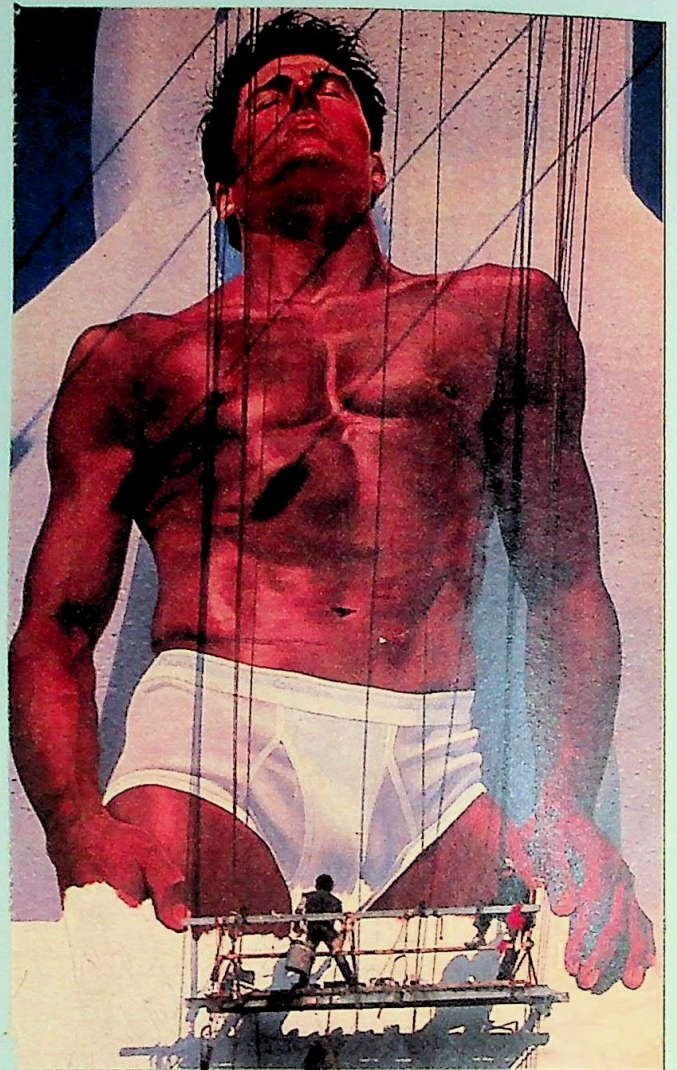
2 vii Designer Labels - Calvin Klein and his "Y Fronts"

This image building approach and the obvious way in which it is done extends to most facets of American life. It is very evident in fashion design.

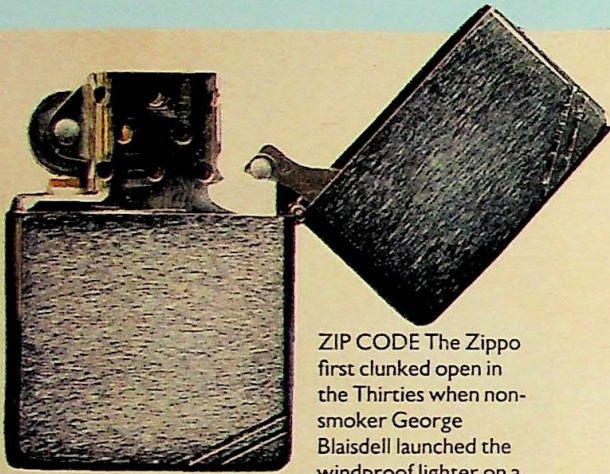
The Monolithic Mural of a dark tanned man sporting a pair of conventional underwear is a carefully calculated image (Photograph 25). What better way to sell underwear than to make them a fashion accessory. The image of a tall, dark, handsome, muscular male wearing this underwear implies that you too can feel so, (Photograph 25). It's advertising at its best (or worst). All the product has is the name of the manufacturer on the strap.

Ralph Lauren who "more than any other designer typifies the American way". ' The polo player logo which his garments sport "has become a snob symbol". ' So when Lauren took to hiding it on the hem rather than on the breast of his knitted polo shirts, "the whole of America took to wearing their shirt's tails flapping". '

' Sally Brampton - Times *

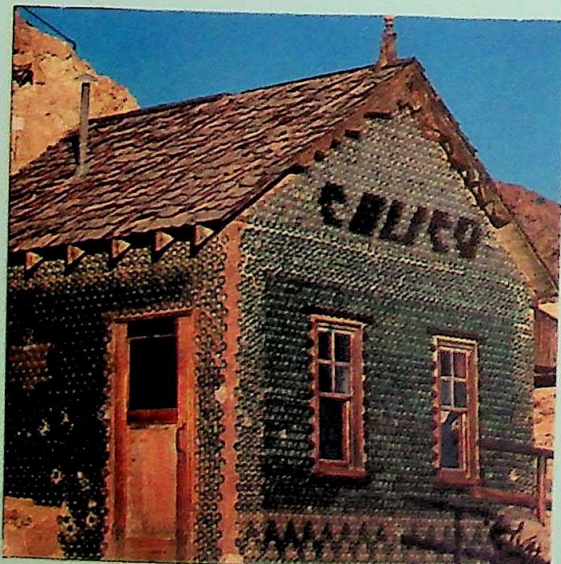


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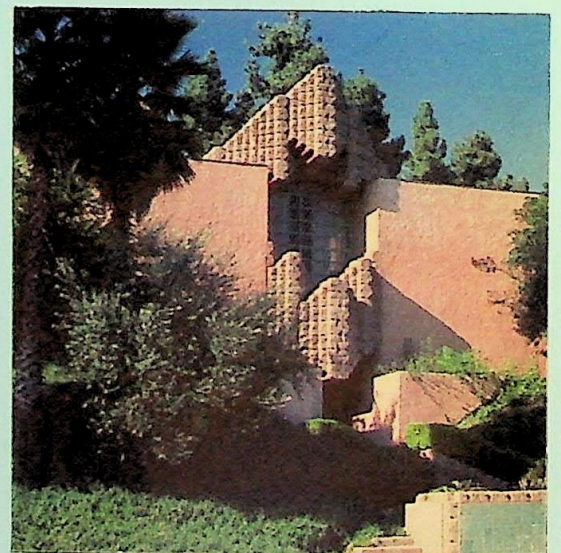


ZIP CODE The Zippo first clunked open in the Thirties when non-smoker George Blaisdell launched the windproof lighter on a nation of match-users. GIs carried it across the world, and today the company is reproducing the original design (above) for £12.95. They also guarantee to repair any Zippo free of charge – which makes it the light of your life.

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CHAPTER 3

DESIGN IN EUROPE

EUROPEAN DESIGN

3 "Our present post industrial society is characterised by the simultaneous presence of a variety of markets that correspond to different cultural groups, each with its specific behaviour, language, fashions and traditions ... the product, must actively select its own user, promote itself to a particular social group and must avoid apparently objective but substantially anonymous qualities".¹

In Europe we have well defined cultural, social and political groups. Mass production and standardisation has tended to coat things in a layer of homogeneous design. Both in architecture and product design objects who fall within this context assume a mass market appeal. The economics of this "a product for everyone" approach makes perfect economic sense. One way of assuring that a design, be it a house or a foodmixer, appeals to "everyone", is to follow the old modernist cliché of "less is more" or the less you put on a product in terms of finishes, materials and imagery, the fewer it will offend and thus it will satisfy the lowest common denominator regardless of culture. In an interview recently, an Irish product designer made a point to the author, that one reason why a product designed and made in Japan sells well in Europe, is because "their needs are not that different to our own".² His partner, David Morgan, adding that ten years ago a washing machine destined to be sold in Europe would have slight variations depending on whether or not it was being marketed in Germany, Italy or France. But now costs of production prohibit that.

¹ Andrea Branzi (1)

² Brian Stevens (1)



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Despite this international coating of neutral products which one finds, we can see in European countries where design has evolved to a high level, indigenous design approaches and characteristics related to their own social, cultural and economic identity.

Branzi talks of the need for product design to satisfy and reflect individual social and cultural needs. Thus avoiding objects "designed to suit everyone, whereas they are also unsuited to everyone".¹

But before going on to see if Irish designers could identify Irish social and cultural needs, which would give our products an identity, it is first necessary to look at our neighbours and theirs.

3 i French Design

"Functionalism and Rationalism cannot be the goal of design, an end in themselves they are simply part of the honesty required for the construction of an object".²

Design in France has had a long history of excellence in craftsmanship and progressive thinking, from the superbly crafted furniture of the Louis period to the sculptural beauty and ergonomic daring of a Citroen dash board.

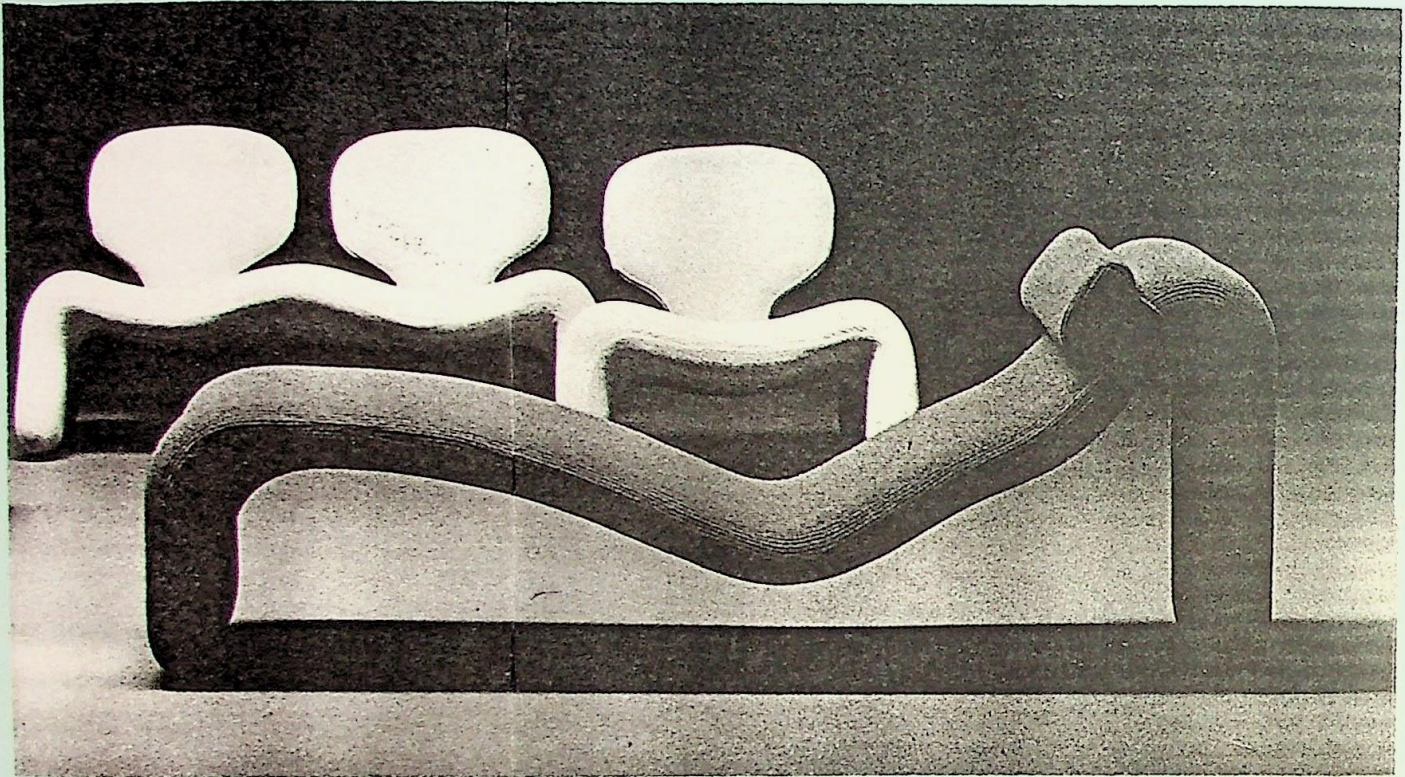
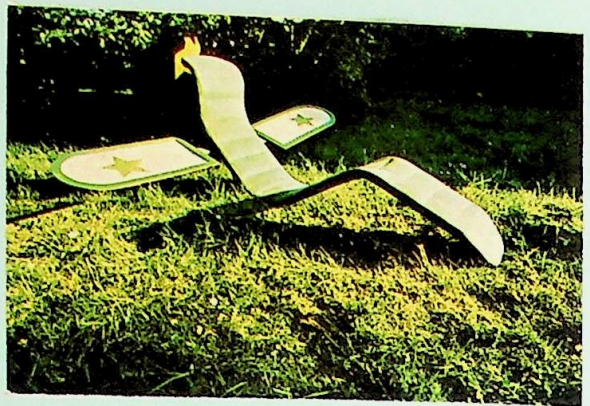
Furniture is something which the French have lavished much attention on over the centuries. The selection of chaise longues by Olivier Mourgue represents a very humane approach in French design. The beautiful Djinn chair designed in 1964 couldn't be simpler, steel frame, foam covered and finished in bright stretched nylon covers.

¹ Andrea Branzi (l)

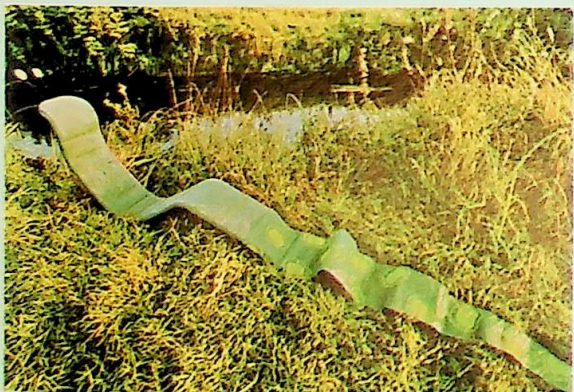
² Olivier Mourgue (k)



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The soft look of the chair along with its simple curvaceous shape reinforces its comfortable and friendly look. Mourgue views design as a "broader involvement in life", objects must relate to their environment, but at the same time "the good object is very moveable very displaceable". Both the Djinn and the "Bouloum" chairs could look equally well on a garden patio as beside the stereo.

The "Bouloum" is referred to as a "people seat" by Mourgue. The reclining figure in to which you then sit is both light-hearted and friendly. (Photograph 33).

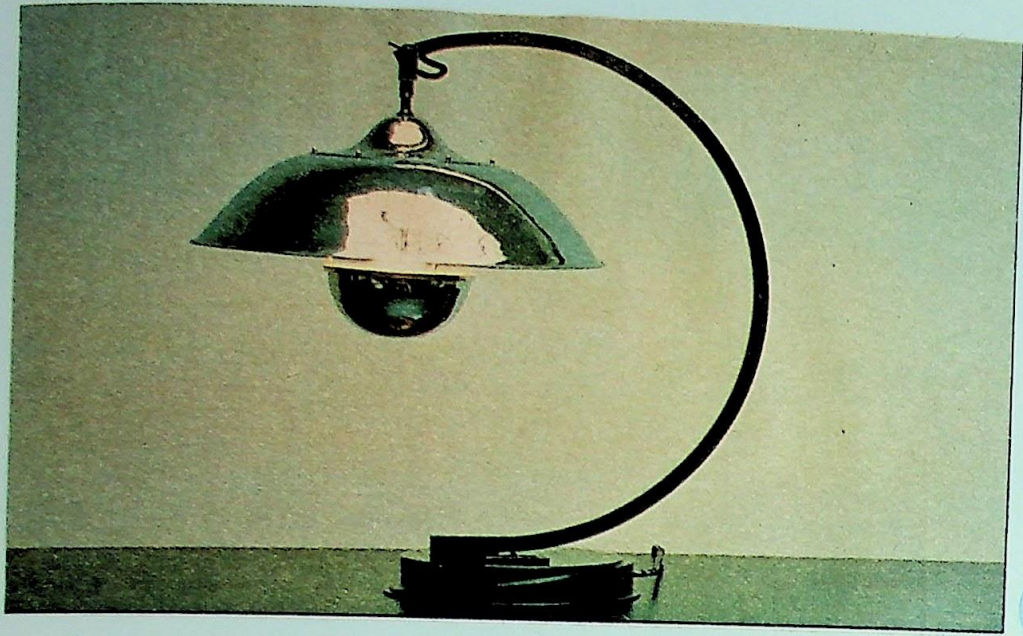
From the "people seat" came a spring of others, leaf seats, butterfly seats, airplane seats, kite seats, etc. (Photograph 31/32). Mourgue believes that in objects (and architecture) "there is a mystical or spiritual aspect or one of fantasy". This fantasy aspect of Mourgue's design is not unlike the fantasy and escapist aspect of some American designs. The Ami Model "A" Juke Box of the 1950's or their image loaded cars. What is also interesting is Ettore Sottsass's comment that "if you're to teach anything about design, you must teach about life". Both men seem to see design as a discipline drawing from life and not just a professional discipline.

3 ii Andree Putman and Ecart (34 → 39)

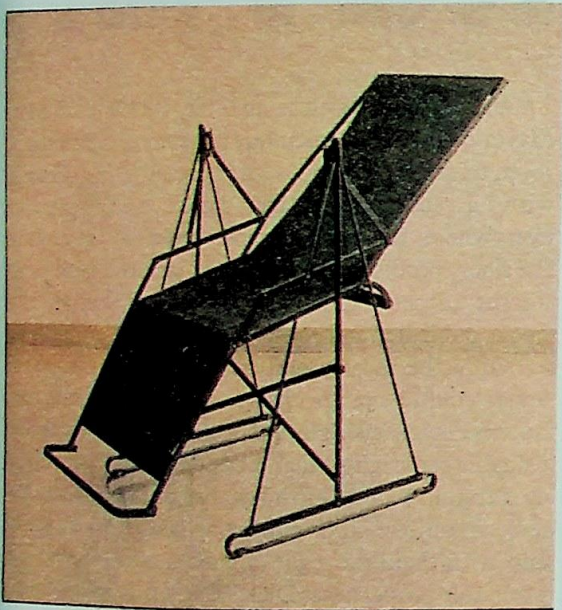
"France's most influential interior Designer". '

It is interesting to note, when talking about French design identity, that Andree Putman's company, Ecart International's, (Ecart is trace spelt backwards), main task is in reproducing early 20th Century designs "which for some reason have disappeared without trace".

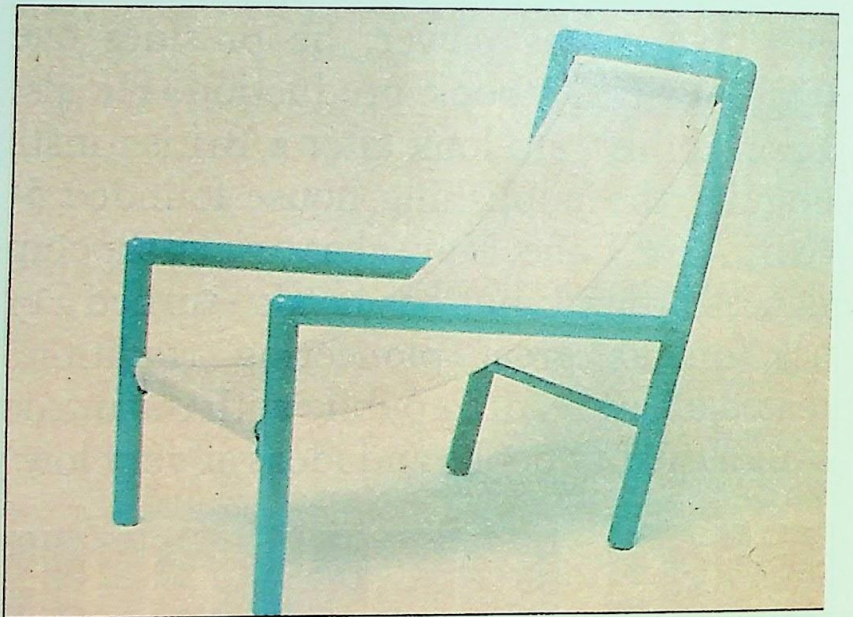
' Georgina Howell - Sunday Times Correspondent *



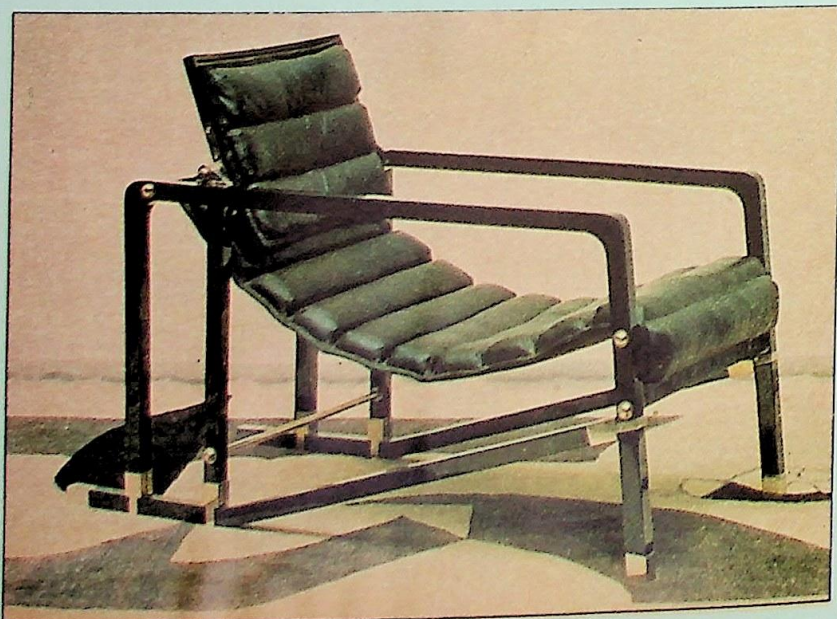
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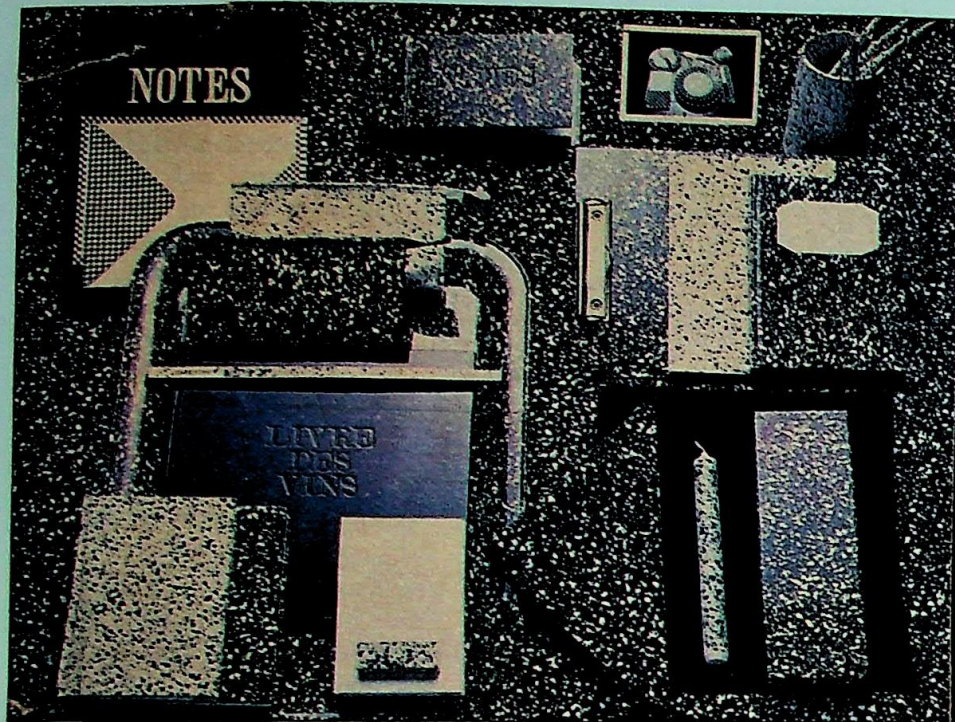
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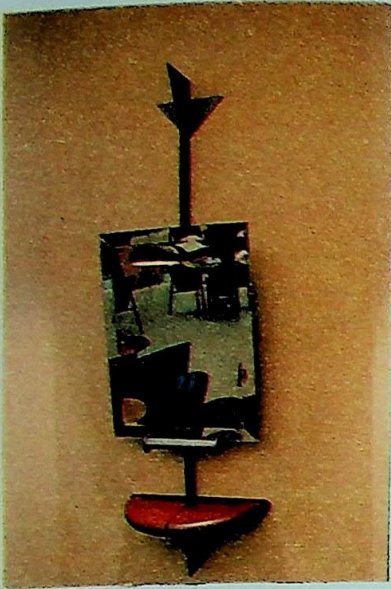
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so what is interesting is that most of their pieces are sixty odd years old. Maybe this is the "traditional" liking in French taste. By "tradition" I mean that they "view" quality like a good Bordeaux wine as improving with age.

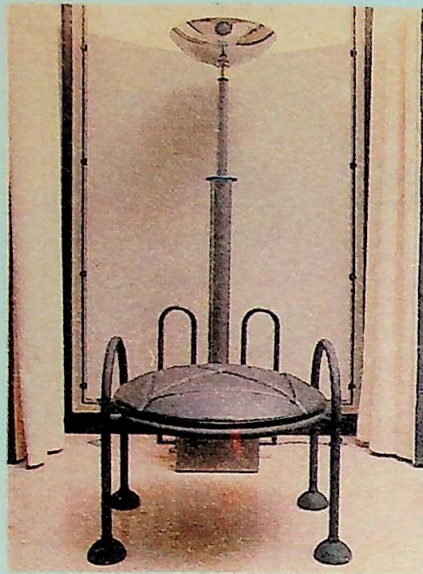
As Putman puts it "there are two kinds of design, one stands outside fashion it belongs to the eternal classical of classics, the other enters the hell of fashion". From the pictures shown (Photographs 34/39) a lot of their work is very dramatic, angular and finished in black and chrome. The transit chair (1927) by Eileen Gray is almost a personification of French chic (albeit an adopted one). The angular black frame with chrome fittings, and all in stark smooth finishes, contrast with the soft scooping leather seating pouch. By keeping colours in a lot of these products in black or chrome it highlights their geometry. This feature appears again in Robert Mallet-Steven's armchair of 1927. Again we have the geometric angular frame supporting a soft scooping seating part. (Photograph 37). So again in the "Kool" chair, Mariano Fortuny's desk lamp, we have in all an angular, minimalist, one and two colour design. (Photograph 24).

If we take these furniture design motifs ahead 60 years to the interior of the Elysee Palace under the auspices of President Mitterand's socialist eye, we see a resolutely contemporary French interior. In the sitting room furniture (Photograph 49) we notice a kind of elegant brutalism. Also note the reappearance of the chaise longue with the black angular frame supporting a soft black leather "sign wave" shaped seat. This time by Frenchman Ronald Cecil Sportes. So 60 years on we see a certain consistency in what Ecart is reproducing and what French designers are producing.

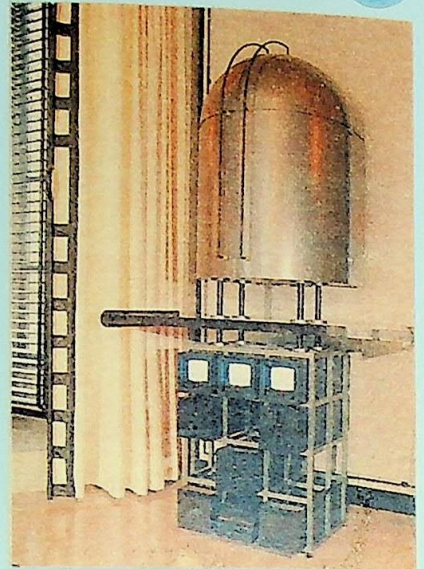
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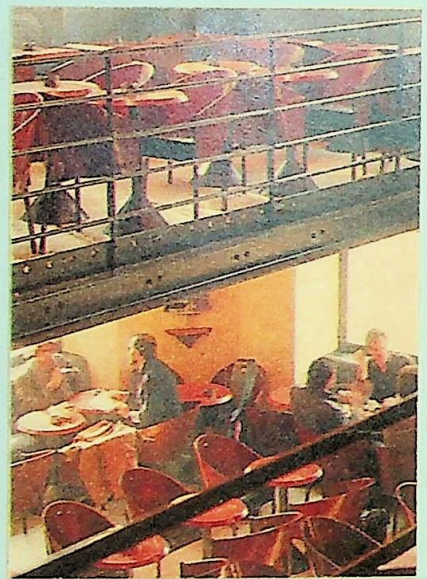
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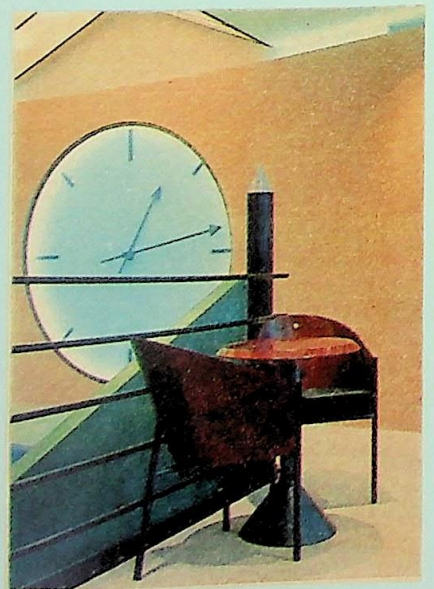
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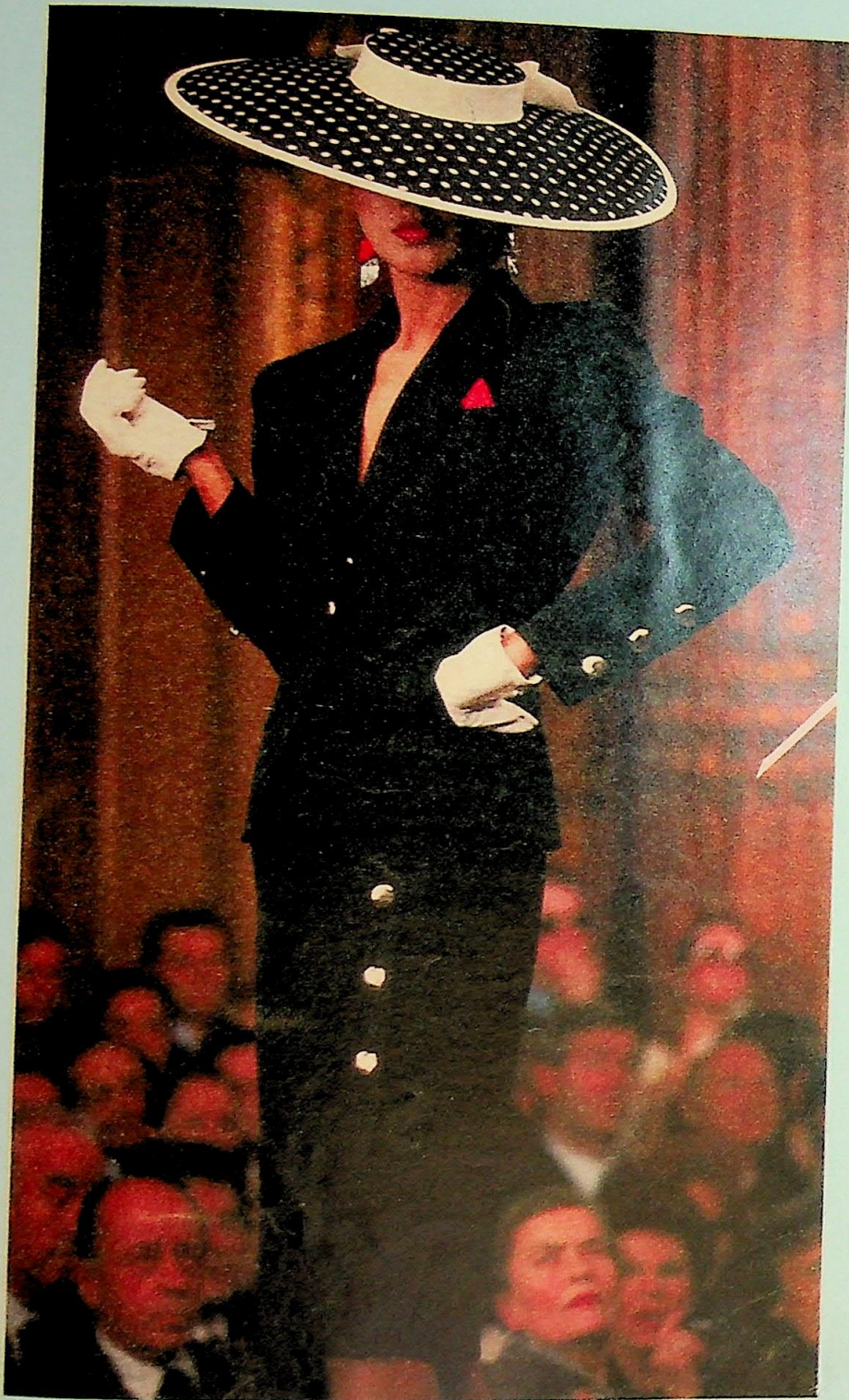


Mitterand chose 5 top French Designers to decorate the Elysee Palace as a show piece of good French design.

Work from self-confessed "enfant terrible", Phillippe Starck, to Jean-Michel Wilmottes elegant mix of oxidised iron, glass and bleached oak in Madame Mitterand's bedroom is represented in the Elysee. Starck's cafe is also included, (Photograph 46). One notices here in their design a sort of guts out, exposed and lumpified geometric shapes, but quite sophisticated in arrangement. There is also a strong use of cylinder forms from the Cafe to Elysee Palace's living room and it is reminiscent of the geometry of the Pompidou Centre. So although it is not always done by French designers it is something which they identify with or would, appear to. On architecture the Pompidou Centre was designed as a show piece by a former French President. Despite the time and ideological gap between the very conservative Pompidou and Mitterand, their statements, albeit funded, are remarkably similar. So possibly the only thing "traditional" about this aspect of French design is their approach in trying to promote France as a sophisticated radical, well with it.

In France "to be modern you must have lasting quality". ' Starck's cafe is designed to last no less than a hundred years. In true aristocratic tradition, styles in France have often emerged at the top and precipitated down, so Mitterand hopes that this new image for the establishment, will also precipitate down the line. As Phillippe Starck puts it "the Italians have gone too far, their imagination has broken down. The Japanese are not yet ready, the Americans hardly do any furniture design, the English are stuck with a left-over Hi Tech. and the Scandanavians are still locked into their national style. The French have found a new identity, the intelligence and equilibrium that is the image of France".

' Jean Phillippe Rafferty - Journalist and Writer *



47

Matt Black and Socialism

Mitterand's Living Room: (Photograph ⁴²)

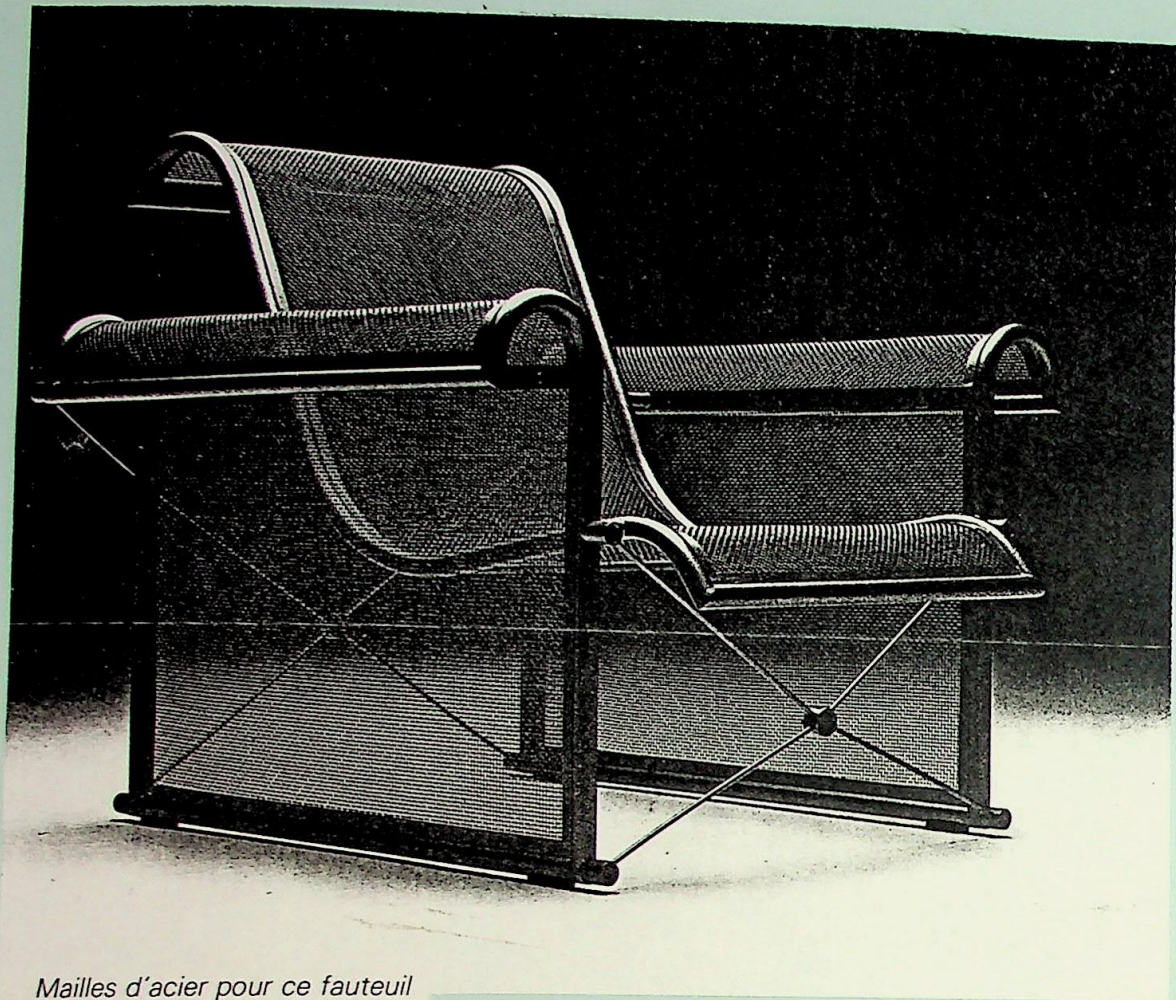
 43
 49.

The objects in this room are executed in a cold precise combination of materials, colour and form, which contrasts nicely with the warm beige of the walls and floor. The objects have a sort of sleek precision about them, a combination of matt grey spheres, cones and cylinders. The table with its glass grid engraved top, piston legs, stabiliser like feet and cross member "roof like" stays, gives it a strong "machine age" quality. Yet it has the same kind of simple elegance about it as a Yves Saint Laurent's black suit. The concept of both are simple, one colour so you can concentrate on line and form and a few nice details. In the suit it's the chrome buttons, on the table it's the etched grid on the glass top and the feet details on the legs. In Martin Carlin's chest of 1780 attention to detail hits you right in the face with its Rococco trimmings highlighted not in chrome but in gold leaf. All three are sophisticated in their own way.

This simplicity of geometry which all the furniture in the room possesses is not reflected in function. The sophistication behind this "machine look", sets it apart from earlier attempts, the large couch "automatically adjusts to multiple positions".

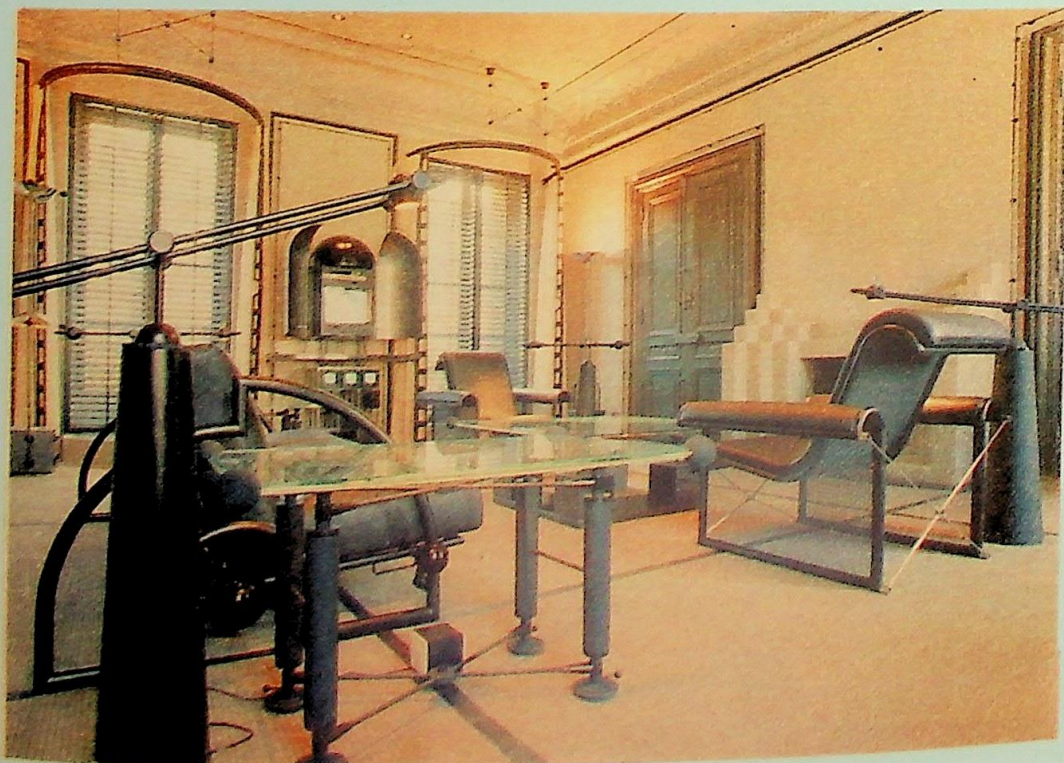
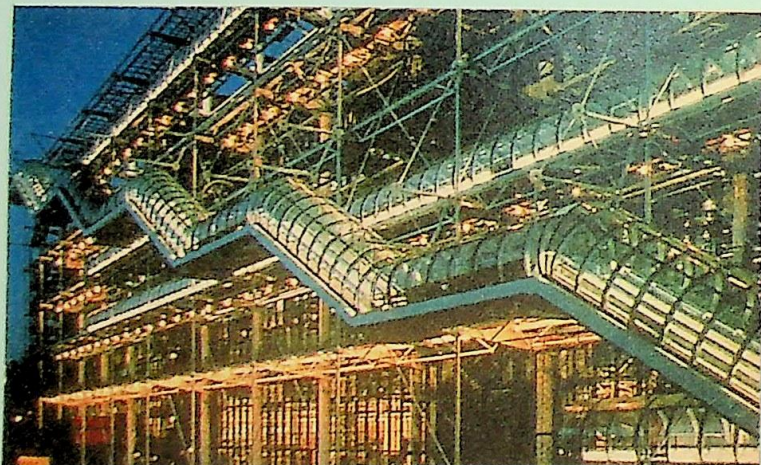
The wall unit (Photograph ⁴³) with its pressure vessel like top, warehouse like component base, is a piece of high technology. Hidden inside it is a video/audio stack, complete with geodisque world wide antenna.

' J. Rafferty *



Mailles d'acier pour ce fauteuil conçu par Ronald Cecil Sportes pour les salons de l'Elysée (Mobilier International).

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So like Louis XVI with Martin Carlin's chest, President Mitterand is getting the very best, but with a new image. As Stephen Bayley puts it "if anyone has got the balance right between the humane and the mechanical, it's the French".

3 v French Cars

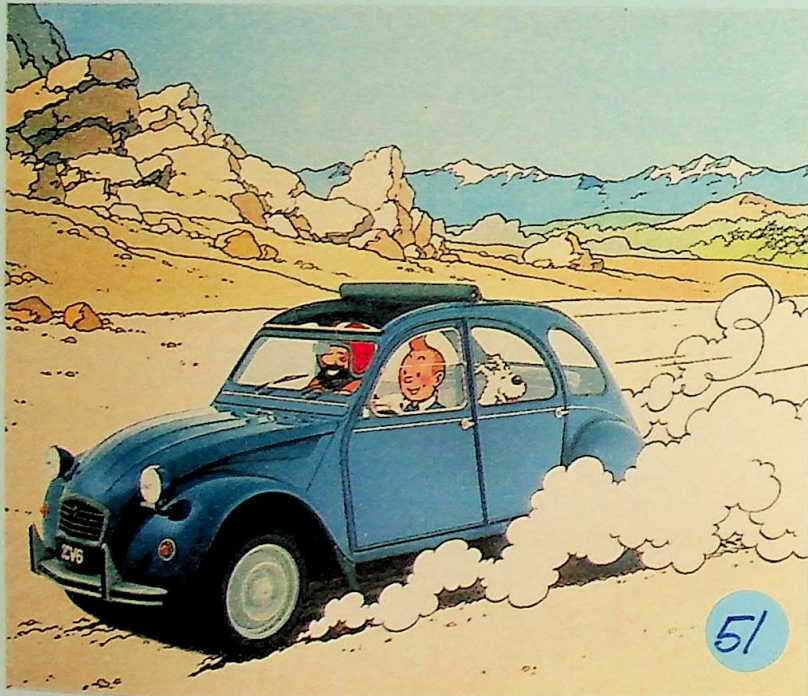
In the realm of car design the French have undoubtedly developed a knack of producing trend setters and at the same time producing classics.

The Brief for the 1937 Citroen 2 CV was, to basically "design an umbrella on wheels". The result was an unpretentious piece of vernacular design which "when painted in fashionable colours" has become a very trendy accessory indeed. The 2 CV now occupies cult object status.

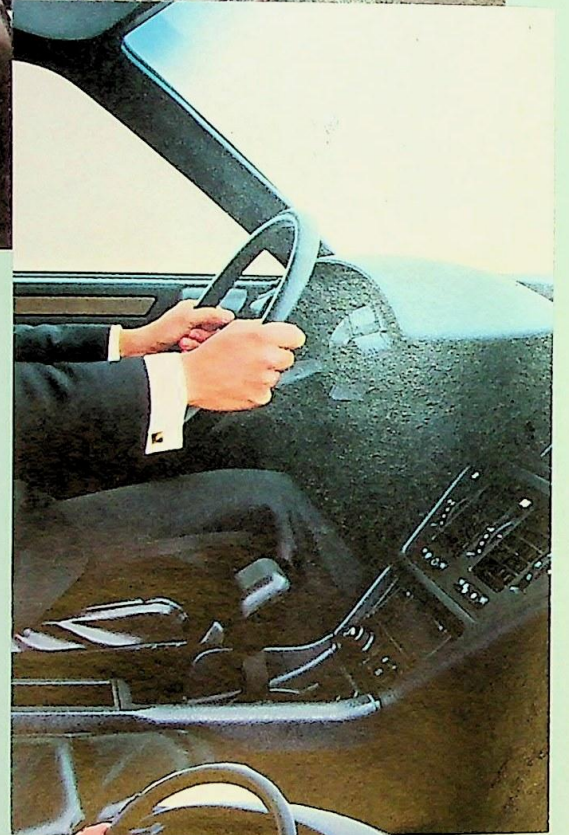
The Citroen DS was first displayed in the Milan Triennale suspended from the ceiling, to emphasise this new aerodynamic, smooth, flush body. Boasting also self-levelling suspension and head lamps which turn with the wheels. French car designers often set paces with the rest of the world and this could be interpreted in the same light as the Mitterand or Pompidou developments, seeing French design as being advanced and with it. In a design discipline such as car design which has such a large impact on the world market, this aspect is very important. In 1976 Citroen launched the first CX, we have again, a visually aerodynamic and technically advanced production car. The aerodynamic wedge, single windscreen wiper, satellite dashboard controls, fluid organic interior, digital displays, were features well in advance of most production cars of the day.



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In summing up, it could be said that design in France is often very consciously employed to define France's own identity, strength and independence in the world. We don't hear too much about French design, it fails to get popular public attention like that which one often associates with Italian or Scandanavian design. But with recent developments in the "high establishment sector", backing vigorously more down-to-earth design other than that of TVR trains, this silence may very well change.

CHAPTER 4

BRITISH DESIGN

BRITISH DESIGN

4 i "Does Anglo product design exist? Not yet - only some jolly decoration and meek attempts to enliven "Black Box Products".¹

On the face of it what more could a profession ask for. Encouragement and financial aid of government, with the "Funded Consultancy Scheme". The "Young Blood" exhibition "backing young talent... and backing the schools of art and design themselves".²

The British as great educationalists have recognised the importance of good design to their economy and its "invisible export value". So with tremendous vigour they have backed it from start to finish. And this surely is an inspiration to the Irish design profession. Yet, when we look for design flair and visual inspiration, it's people like the Italians or French who spring to mind, not the British. In Italy design has achieved no official schooling until quite recently, with the Domus Academy, most of Italy's famous designers come from Architectural Schools.

Historically the British have been excellent and innovative Engineers, from the cast iron Severn Bridge of the 1770's to the Edgley "optica" plane of the 1980's.

When people do think of British, the popular old faithfuls come to mind. Connolly hyde upholstered Rolls Royces, Wedgewood, Axminster carpets, wallnut finished Jaguars, V8 Lagondas, Red 'Phone boxes, London cabs, Burberry coats, etc. Yet this represents a very small minority of the design presently coming out of Britain, especially with regard to industrial products.

¹ Design Magazine 1984 *

² Designing Journal 1985*

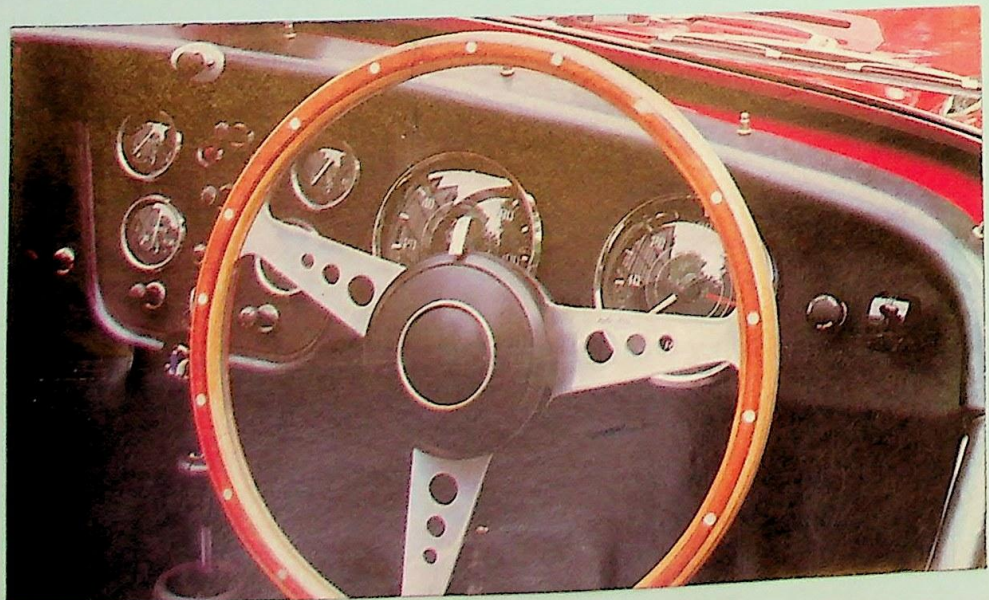


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This popular traditional image has been constantly re-inforced and was recently buttressed by Stephen Bayley's Boilerhouse Exhibition on National Characteristics and Design.

So it is important to try and unravel what sort of identity exists in the other 80%.

4 ii The Neutral and the Daring

"In London at least, one can find designers who will deliver elegant but internationally acceptable neutral industrial design solutions".¹

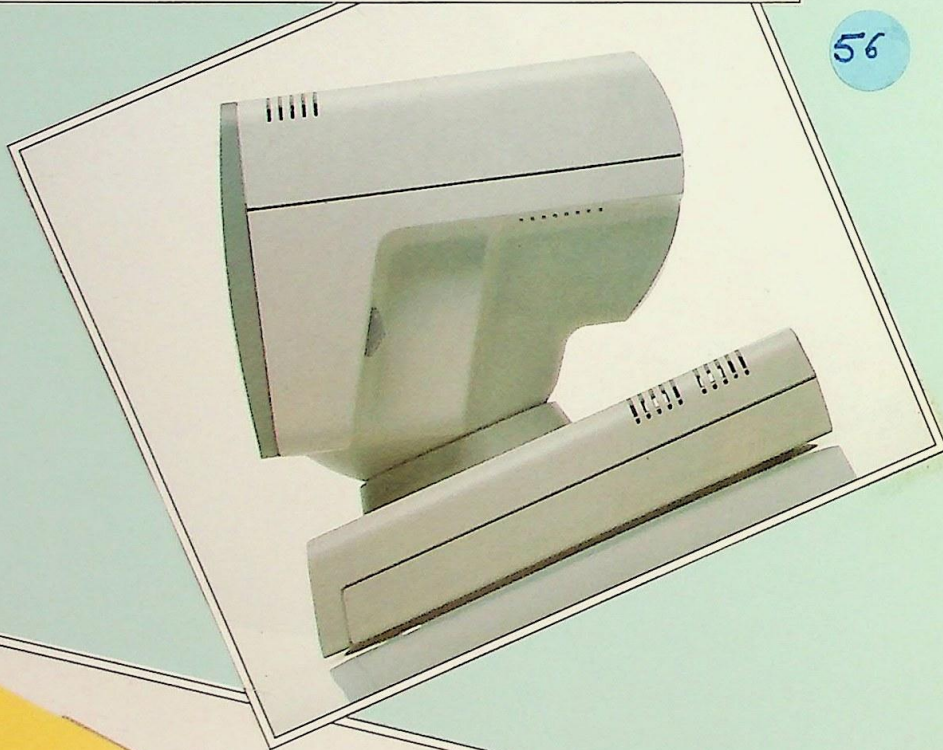
The ability to design neutral products, well engineered and reliable, is from an international point, very desirable. That is products which you can be sure will satisfy most, by not conforming to one cultural style. Perhaps this explains why "All over the world... British Industrial Design is in demand".² Directly opposed to this is the highly progressive daring and non-conformist design, which like the Anti-design, Banal or Memphis movements (all primarily associated with Italian Designers) asks just as many questions about design and its development. The latter is primarily the work of young and senior student designers. Whereas in Italy it is often associated with well established designers in a position to spread an international reputation. Could this be one of the major differences between the two cultures? An attitude from those directly outside the design process, the clients and senior managements but with a large say in its end result. If Britain has an international reputation for "neutral products" then the "penny pinching"² design clients in Britain shall demand this kind of product.

¹ James Woudhuysen, Blue Print 1985 *

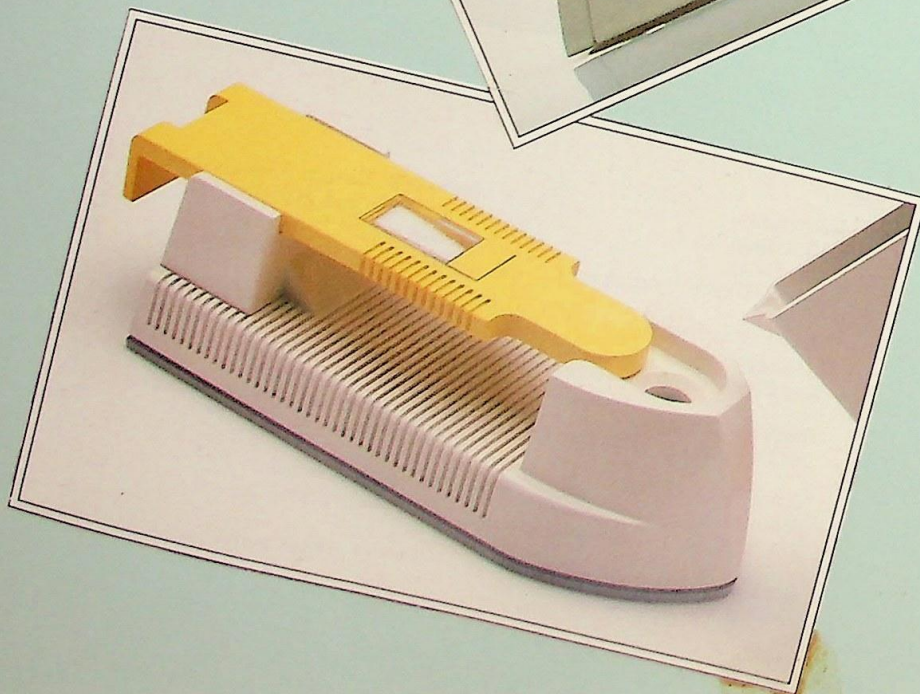
² Alastair Thain *



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57.



Conversely if in Italy or France the reputation abroad and at home is for radical products, then the clients may very well tolerate it in the designers. So this partly explains also the differences between the two spheres in British design. Those who come out of schools and tend to be radical and in being forced to make a living either conform or leave.

4 iii Neutral Products

To say that only senior student designers were the only ones proliferating this kind of design would be a generalisation, however, the majority of examples in this section come from their ranks.

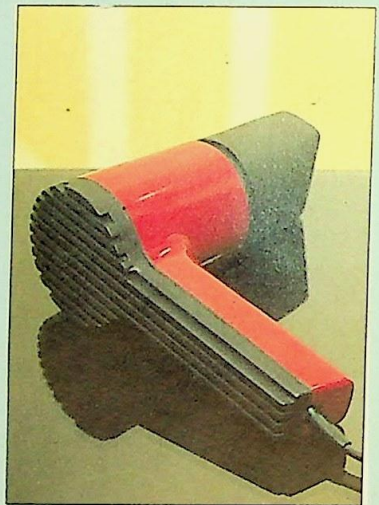
Internationally Bland:

The "meek attempts to enliven the black box image" ' here take the form of go faster stripes engraved on the side faces of the 3 products shown, (Photograph 56/57). Notice also the colour of each, very similar, rather in the tradition of IBM. The Iron takes the stripe attempt to its limit. Its angularity and sharp edge handle, bears more at an attempt at styling rather than at any ergonomic consideration. With the Red 'Phone and hand Hair Dryer the "Black Box" assault, takes on bright red and popular poster graphics, a re-occurring feature is the deep relief stripes on the handle of the Dryer, (Photograph 60). The exciting possibilities of a "Desk Pay 'Phone" received a sufficient degree of blandness as to make the coin slot near invisible - note again the recess grooves. The compact Food Mixer Kit is an example of an international product with a little kick. The tail like power cord is both practical and aesthetically pleasing, (Photograph 61). Likewise the receptionist's word processor/'phone has a blandness about it which would ensure that no-one was offended, (Photograph 64).

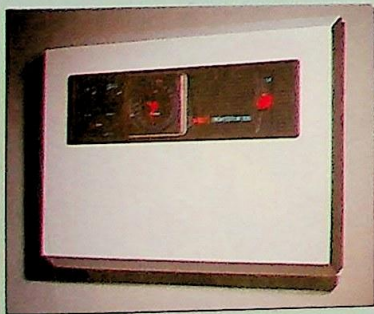
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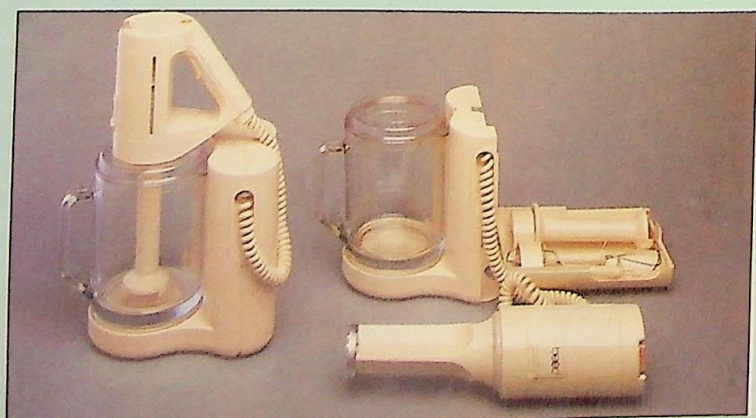
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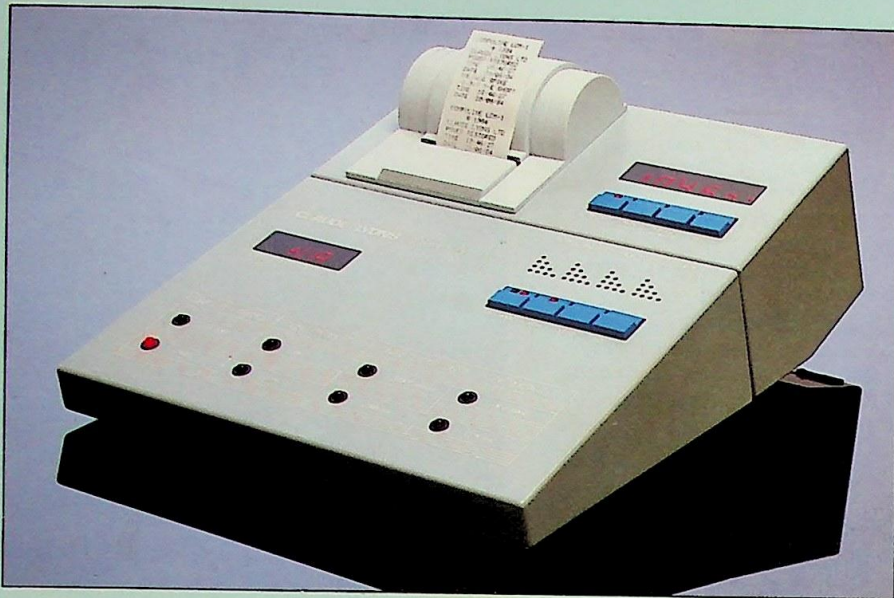


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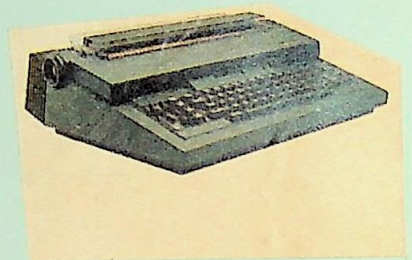


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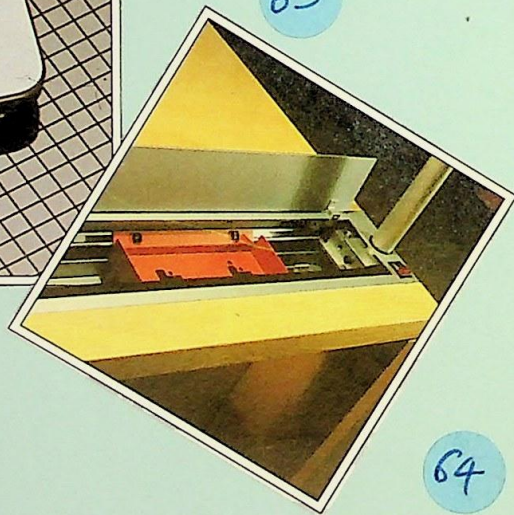




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The Production Monitor (Photograph 62.) bears a resemblance to Mario Bellini's wedge shaped typewriter for Olivetti. But in Bellini's typewriter he has accentuated the wedge shape with the step down to the keyboard. The moulded veins at the back help to balance the wedge. Cover them with your thumb and the typewriter looks clumsy. Thus the veins are detailed well here, like cooling fins at the back of a fridge. So they seem to have some symbolic use as well. On the Iron they are awkward and meaningless, Bellini's Typewriter looks as if it has just ground to a halt in front of its user.

The Production Monitor, has none of these qualities. Its form says very little. Likewise the Wordprocessor (Photograph 64) makes an attempt at being exciting, the wedge shape and the parallel shape veins on the back. But the blandness of the keyboard and the stuck-on L.C.D. display resemble a half finished prototype.

If we look at all these products as a group, there is a pattern of conformity about them. Firstly that milky colour, secondly the clean edge angularity, thirdly their repeated use of parallel slitting details. Maybe this is an idiom of the international product.

With the exception of the Desk Pay 'Phone, all these products come out of an article in last August's Design Magazine, entitled "Design Show Case", as a representation of the work "of some of our best". '

4 iv International Elegance in a Neutral Product

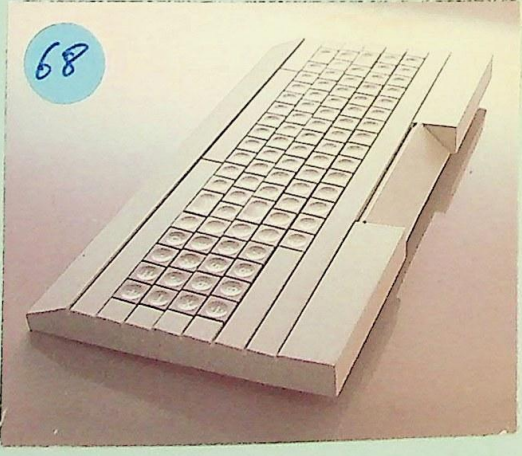
The difference between the Executel Communication Unit (Photograph 67) and the previous examples talked about, is more than just budget. All the products on this page are in many ways as simple, and neutral, as the previous examples.

' Design Magazine - August 1985*

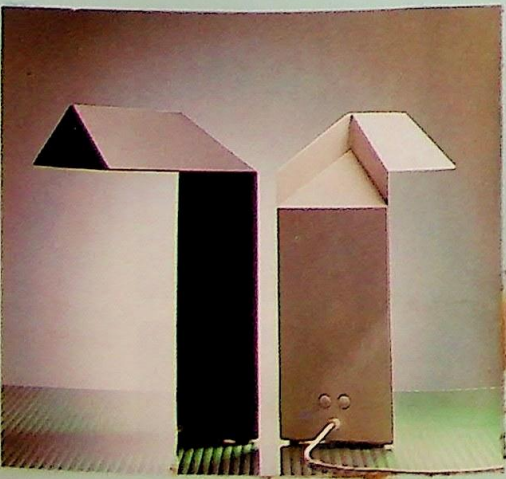
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Yet they have a definite style about them. In the Executel, it's the mixing of plastic, brushed aluminium, flush keyboard and sleek monitor. Compared with the heavy handed and clumsy monitor on the other machine (Photograph 67) this is very much more pleasing.

The Lamp couldn't be simpler, (Photograph 69) . Bent pieces of sheet metal, arranged in clean cut geometric shape. It beautifully expresses a material from which it is made and has, as a result, a simple elegance about it.

The keyboard by Ben Fether & Partners is milky white in true neutral style, (Photograph 68). Yet its surface is broken up and made interesting by the cavities of the keyboard and continuing the slits throughout the top surface, giving again a simple elegance to the final product.

Looking at the British Telecom Telephone and the Wall Light, we see two shapes which beautifully express the fluidity of plastic. In both these products, this kind of handling is practical and aesthetically pleasing. Only 3 of the above products were featured in the "Design Show Case" article.

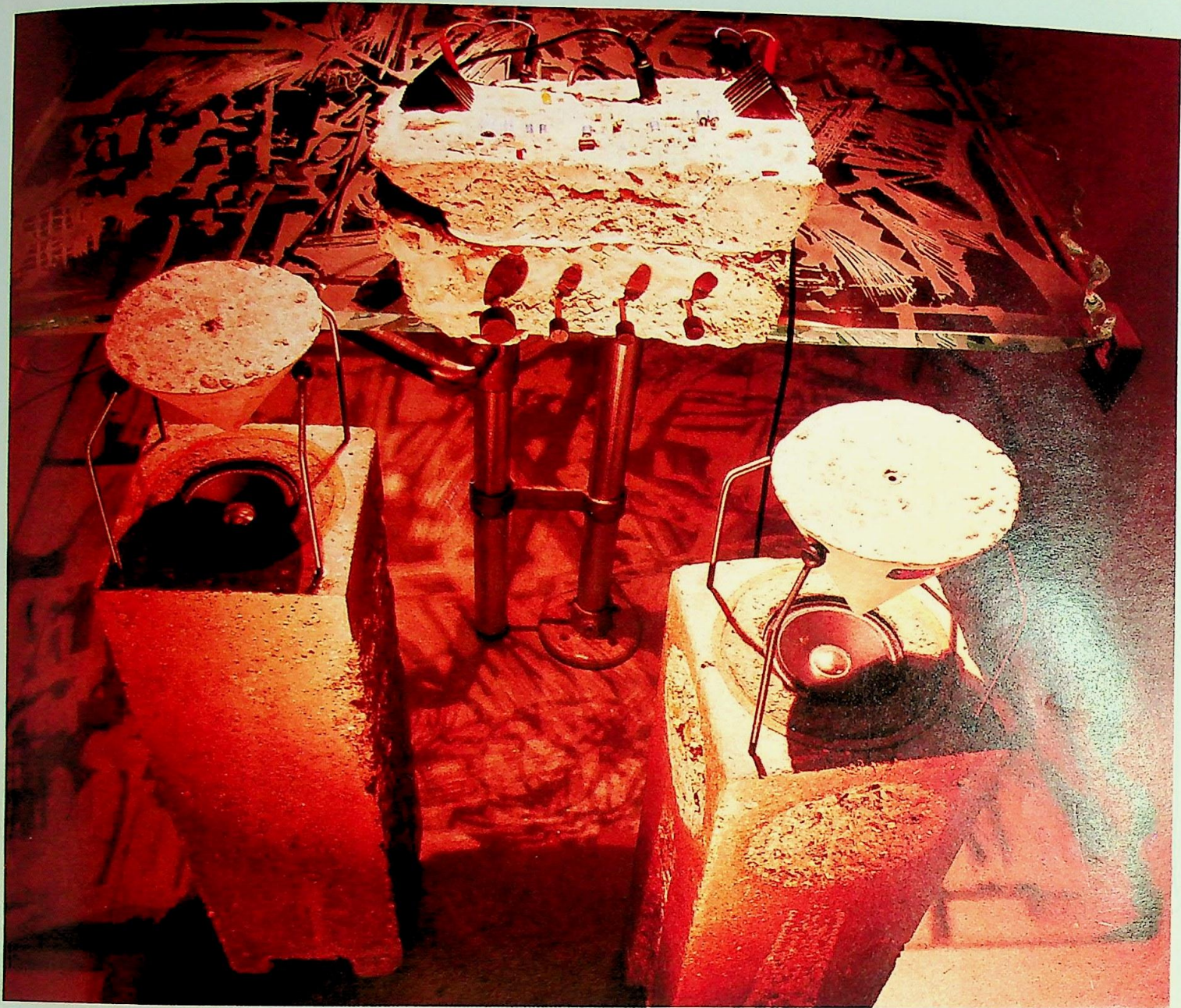
4 v

Revolutionaries - Young and not so Young

"This charismatic Architect has continually challenged the assumptions behind mainstream Italian designs". '

Looking at the Photographs (70/75) in the following pages, the same could be said about these products in regard to the British Design establishment. With the exception of the concrete hi-fi by Ron Arad, and the Dura Beam, the products shown are by final year British students.

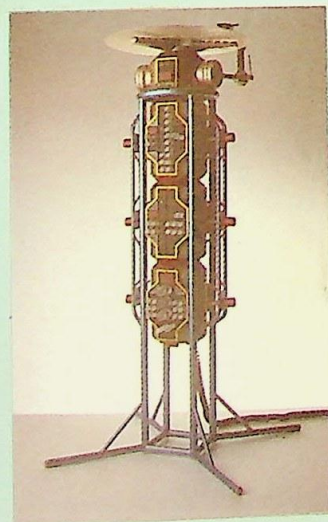
' Penny Sparke on Ettore Sottsass (e)



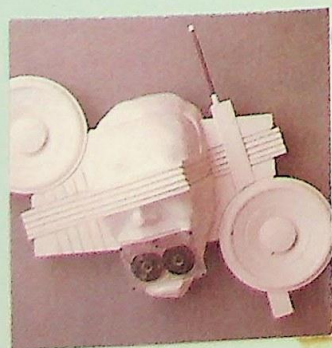
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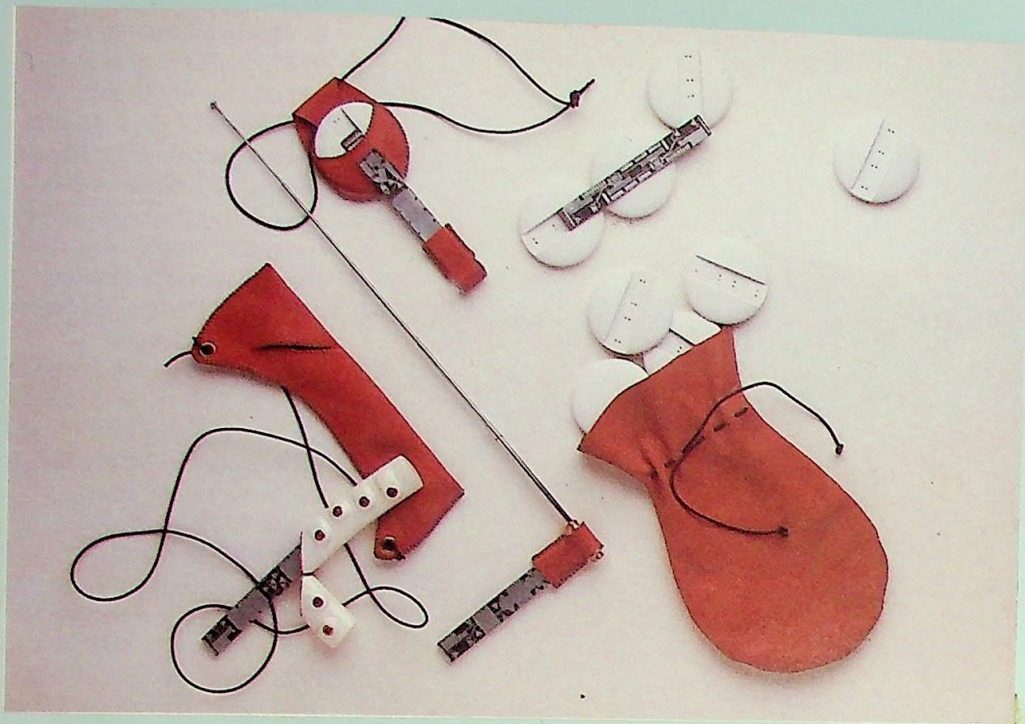
72

Ron Arad felt that "electronic design has really gone stale". All the components are embedded in irregular concrete blocks, with metal fins to dissipate heat. He designed this hi-fi system as a reaction against present trends. Arad's design is a "one off" yet his "U turn away from the army communication equipment style" is designed to provoke a reaction, hoping that its vibrations will spread down to the mass market. The robotic looking hi-fi by a Polytechnic student shows also what a hi-fi could be! (Photograph 70)

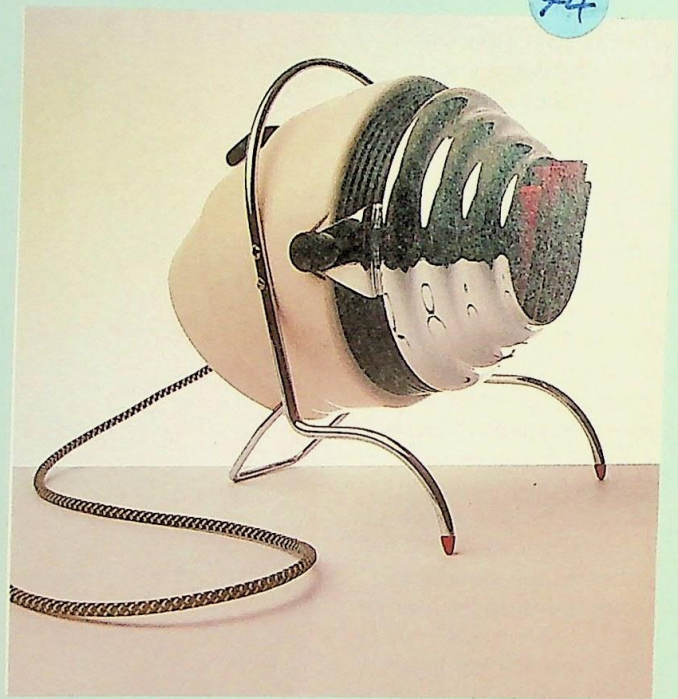
The Dura Beam is an excellent example of a mass produced product which shows us what a torch could be like and is. According to the Judges of the Design Council "this is a compelling product, one wants to hold it, use it, buy it". '

Mathew Archer took miniature electronics to their limit with his computer, (Photograph 73). The dagger like white instrument is a single hand-held keyboard. The white discs store data and the rectilinear slabs receive and transmit data. The title of the project was "Four Magical Instruments of Sorcery". This title baffled the author until he started talking to their designer and the philosophy behind them came out. He tried to look at technology and computers taken to a highly advanced stage, where only a very few could fully understand its functioning and uses. These four "magical" instruments, enable the user to find out a whole myriad of things about his or her environment. The tiny instruments are so complex, sophisticated and useful, that they have a magical quality about them. Rather like the magic wands and magic potions of Druids and Sorcerers of old.

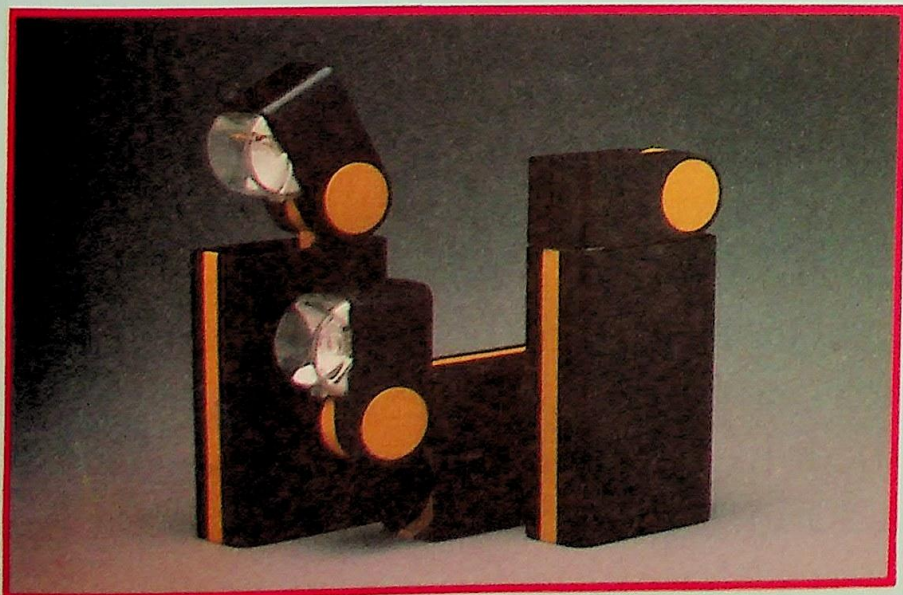
' Designing Journal *



73



74



75

The Camera shows us a roll of film with a lens placed in front of it, simple yet beautifully expressive. (Photograph 71)

The Cassette Player is highly unusual in that the image of a head blasting out music is used and to re-inforce the image you place the cassette in the sculptured head's mouth. This combination of sculpture and electronic forms is extremely original. (Photograph 72)

The Domestic Fan, (Photograph 74), is interesting insofar as it represents a movement in British design. "To rediscover traditional British engineering qualities in the industrial designing of domestic products".¹

In summing up British design identity would appear to fall into three groups. Firstly there's the traditional image epitomised by Jaguar cars, Connolly hyde upholstered Rolls Royces, London cabs, etc. Secondly there is the international neutral factor which puts her designers in demand worldwide. Thirdly there is the radical, mostly young, approach.

Something seems to happen the radical end, probably because in order to make a living they have to work for companies which produce "elegant neutral products".² Because that is where the money is and that is why "the world's industrial design clients gravitate to London for advice - in London at least one can find designers who can deliver elegant but internationally acceptable - neutral - industrial design solutions".²

In Italy, clients would seem to take a slightly different view as we shall see.....

¹ Design Magazine *

² Alastair Thain - Blue Print 1985 *

CHAPTER 5

ITALIAN DESIGN

ITALIAN DESIGN

- 5 "Perhaps the most striking iconic characteristic that marks Italian Design is nothing else than an ultimate form of Art".

Around the turn of the 18th Century, a debate raged in higher circles around Europe. It became to be known as the nature versus nurture theory. It briefly went like this. The Naturists believed that your character, your talents, likes, etc. were determined in your mother's womb. The Nurturists, while accepting that the fundamentals came from your mother's womb, believed that the greatest part of man's character was determined through interaction with his environment. Today the Nuturist theory is generally accepted as the case.

Your environment includes such factors as, climate, other people, education, and the man-made physical environment, all affecting you in their own way.

Now, if you live in an environment where evidence of two millennia of civilisation is visibly evident, or relatively close to you, it (regardless of your interests or orientations), is bound to have an effect on you, in some form or other.

Italy has been a home of the arts and artists alike for many hundreds of years. Art often consists of individuals with whom achievements are associated and in Italy they are manifold. If we look at the 1986 "Artimede" catalogue, one notices that all the designers names are mentioned. The catalogue is selling the work of an individual and as such, you, the consumer can identify with this individual. He assumes the status of the artist or sculpture. This link between art and design is very noticeable in Italy.

' Italian Re-evolution (f)

Patroclo
Gae Aulenti

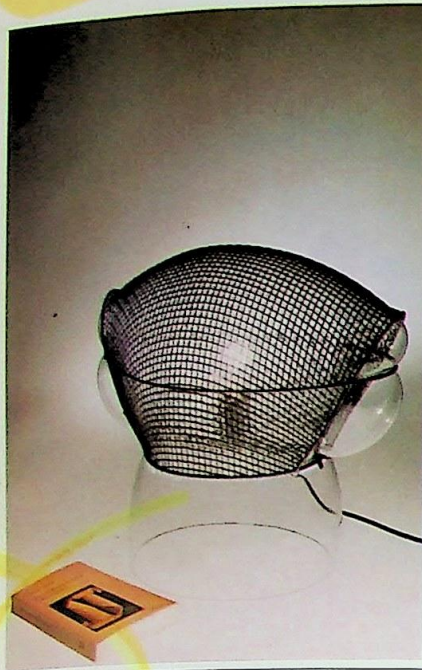
cm 47 x 39,5 h
max 1 x 100 Watt (E27)

Saffo
Angelo Mangiarotti

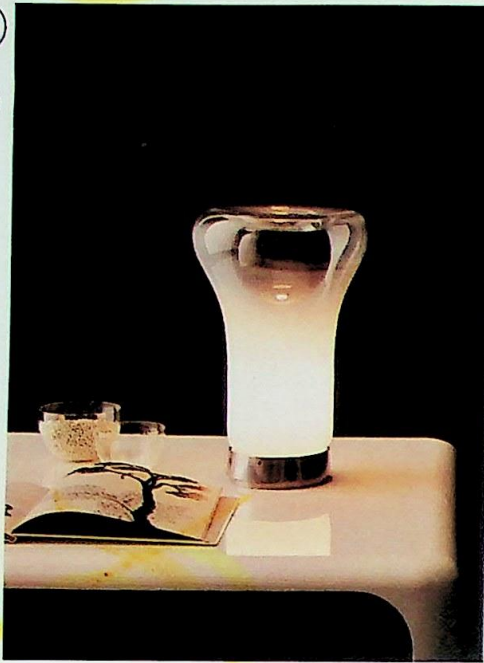
Ø cm 21 x 33 h
max 1 x 40 Watt (E27)

**Sintesi
a morsetto**
Ernesto Gismondi

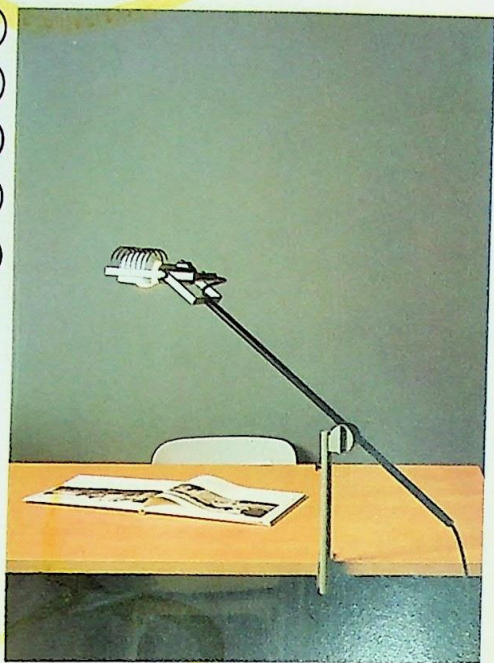
max cm 85 x max
max 1 x 75 Watt



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Pausania
Ettore Sottsass

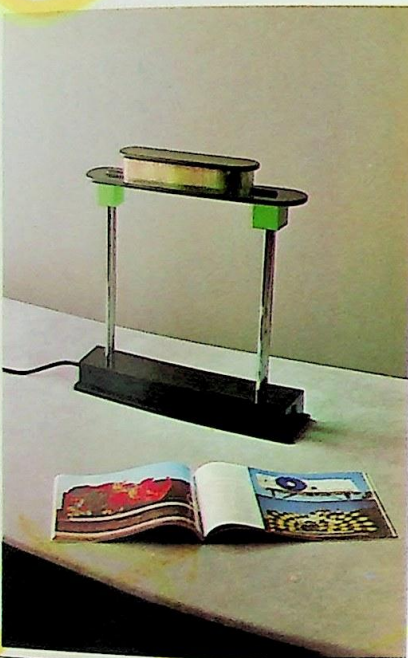
max cm 48 x 43 h
max 1 x 11 Watt PL 11 (G23)

Sintesi
Ernesto Gismondi

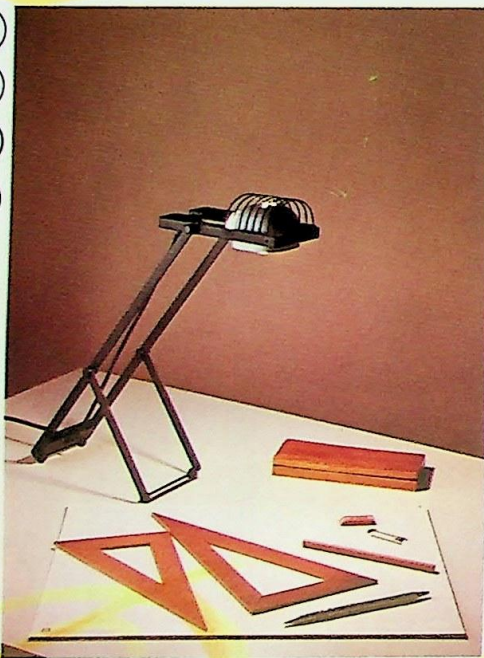
max cm 55 s
max 1 x 75 Watt (E27)

Sintesi faretto
Ernesto Gismondi

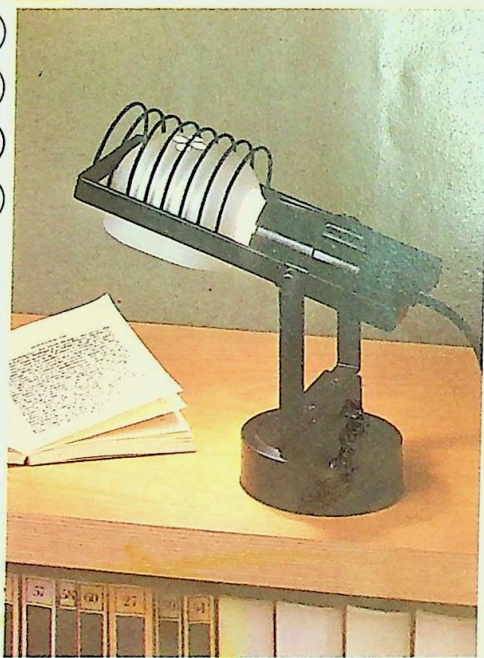
Ø cm 9 x max cm 26,5 h
max 1 x 75 Watt (E27)



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Porsenna tavolo
Vico Magistretti

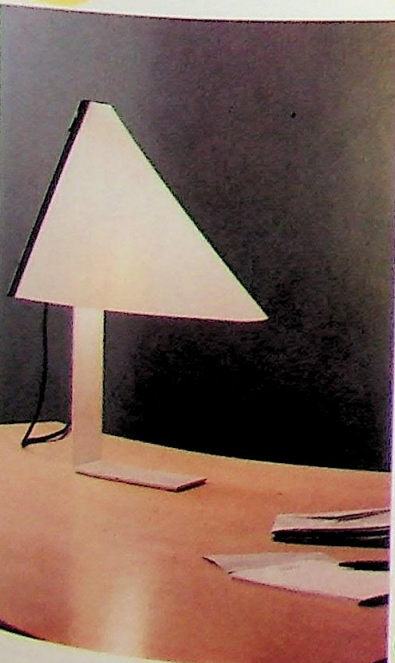
cm 57 x 48h x 29s
max 1 x 100 Watt (E 27)

**Sintesi
base tavolo**
Ernesto Gismondi

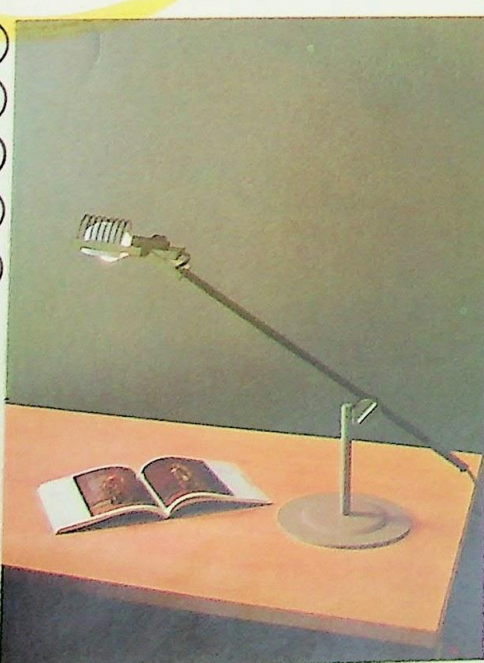
max cm 91 x max 103 h
max 1 x 75 Watt (E27)

Sintesi pinza
Ernesto Gismondi

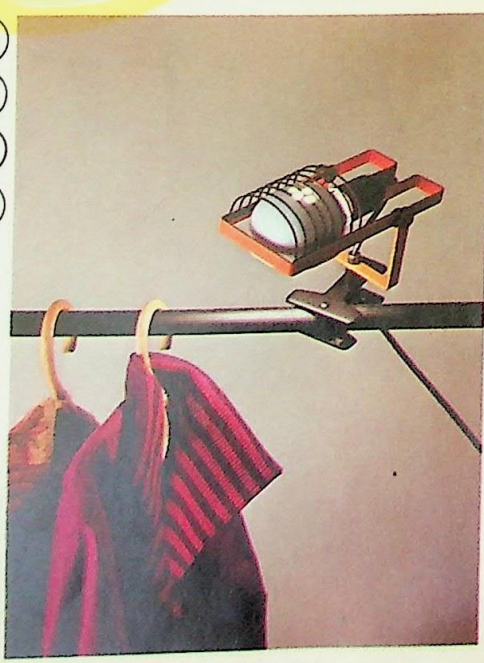
max cm 31 h
max 1 x 75 Watt (E27)



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Creativity is evident in their environment to a very high degree. Few other countries have the fortune to inherit a city like Venice, which is considered a work of art in itself. Often however, the artistic and inventive achievements are noted as the work of individuals. It is only natural that an environment which has been doing this for so long, should continue. The design of an uplighter could be viewed, to be just as beautiful and as innovative as a renaissance sculpture.

5 i A Consistent Attitude

"Design and its development have therefore ended up co-inciding with the development of industry itself. This process can be said to have arisen most prominently in Italy, where a part of the added value of products is by design itself". '

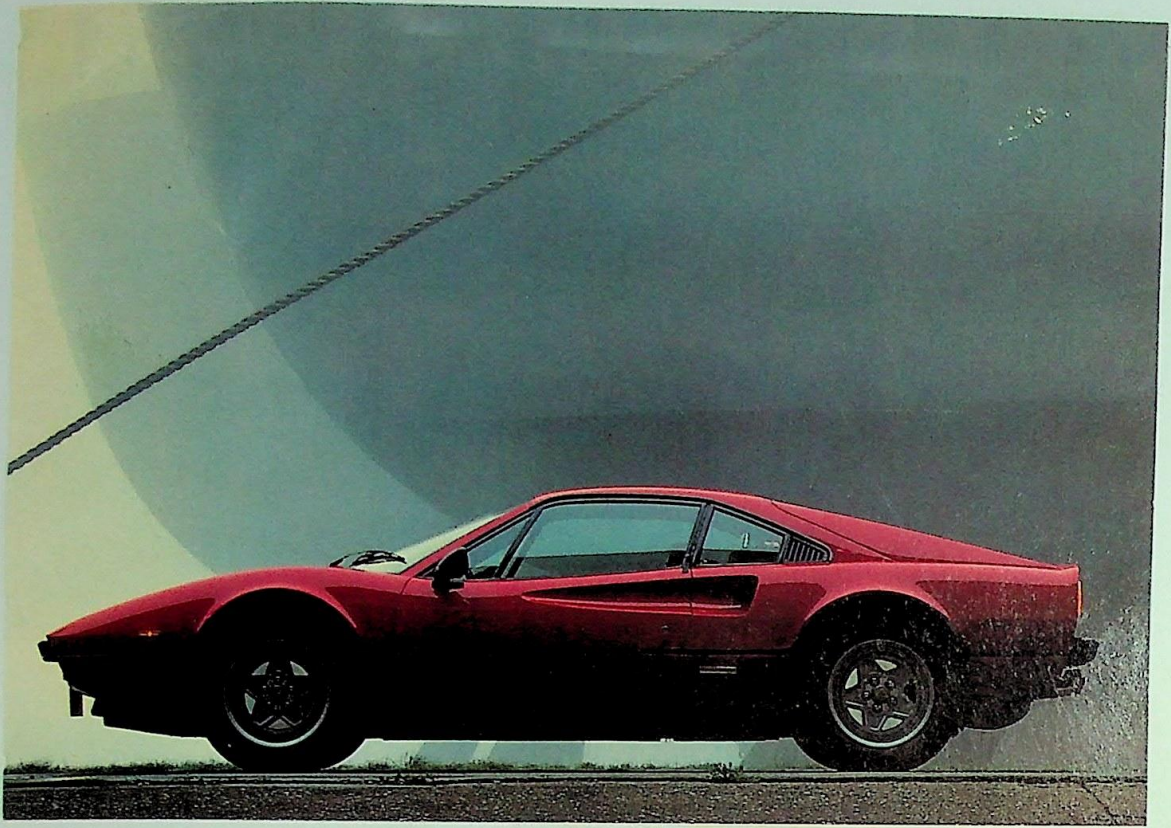
In Britain, the added value of design, is only of relatively recent recognition. As James Woudhuysen drily remarked, "the inferior status of industrial design... has had a long history in Britain".

So, in Italy, design developed along with industry, (shortly after 1945) and design drew from "the wealth of our tradition". '

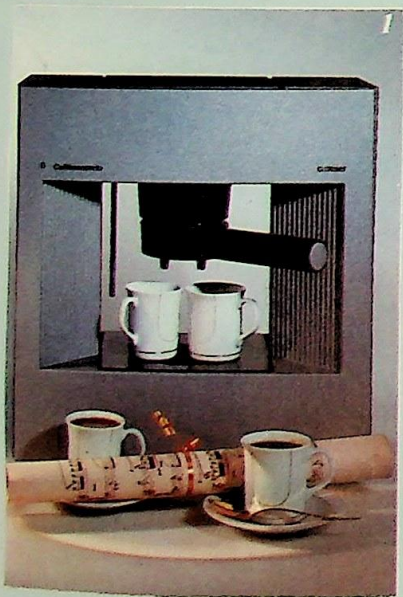
The creative, imaginative, and inventive content of their tradition is well documented.

The following is a selection of their objects designed to give an impression of the design approach and characteristics.

' Giannino Parravicini , President of the Banco di Sicilia (g)



77



78



79



80



81

The objects on this page are all very different,.
(Photograph ~~77~~ 78). One is a Ferrari sports car, the other
a domestic Espresso machine and the third, a Perfume
bottle. Despite their differences all three are lavished
with good looks. The forms are very sculptural and
delicately detailed. On the perfume bottle, it's the
colour detailing on the cap and the cut out logo on the
body, with the glass and liquid showing through,
(Photograph 79).

The proportions of the Espresso machine are almost
classical, being reminiscent of a Roman Triumphal Arch.
The nice stepping detailing on the sides are like fluting
on a column.

The much lauded Ferrari is not without good reason - that
sensuous hip line curling over the front wheel arch. The
continuous recess running along the side of the body.
That scooped out air intake above the line recess and on
the door, is remarkably like bullet slots on the nose of
a fighter. Maybe a similar image was intended for the
Ferrari.

While Pininafarina had the time and money to lavish
sculptural qualities on their 308, the design brief of
the Fiat Uno had a very different customer in mind. This
small family car type tends to be the bread earner of
most European car manufacturers, and great emphasis has
to be given to their fuel economy, ergonomics, cost, etc.
Car Designer, Giogeo Giugioro, notes that, "form takes
second place to a product's practical requirements". The
Uno had to be, above all else, practical. The car is
innovative, insofar as its height makes it easy to get in
and out of, a break from standard, low and short, than
that of most other small cars. This car too, possesses a
simple, clean, sculptural quality all of its own. That
clean cut wedge shape of the body and the smooth surfaces
and flush glass. The interior is delicately handled.
Notice the ashtray on the dashboard, and what better than
to use your own car logo as a seat pattern! (81)



All practical considerations, unlike the Uno, seem to have gone out the window, with this dramatic sideboard. Here we see an aspect of Italian design which is not concerned primarily with practical constraints.

"The relationship between an object and man is something more than a connection between form and function..... When an object goes into circulation, alongside practical recognition of its usefulness, an emotional process of mutual dependence is set up with man". ' This emotional or deeper involvement of design with man is very evident in the writings and work of some of Italy's most noted designers and design theorists. Andrea Branzi, Alessandro Mendini, and Ettore Sottsass being a few of them.

The dynamic form of this table, comes from its uncompromising conglomeration of geometric shapes. The dagger like table top seems to spring through, rather than from the wall. Bits of triangles, circles and cylinders, all treated in different colours, leads the viewer to assess it as individual components rather than an homogenous table. So dynamism of form seems to be the point its designer is making. The object, is more of a statement for sale, rather than a mass market product. A bit like Ron Arad's concrete hi-fi in the previous section. The vase too adds nicely to the composition.

5 iii View with G.T.O. and Alessi Pot

The fact that a country which is predominantly rural and was only industrialised in the latter half of this century, could produce a symbol of such elegance, sophistication, both technological and aesthetic, as the Ferrari G.T.O. is truly a reflection on their rich tradition and present enterprise.

' Mercedes Garberi (9)



83

84

Yet Giugioro noted that "although we Italians do downgrade ourselves, we can't deny that we do possess individuality and creative spurts which are detached from the socio-politico and economic context of this rather dull reactionary and unstimulating country of ours".

It is interesting to note, that one of the pinnacles of modern Italian design, would consider his country dull and unstimulating. For a country which produces so much design work, seven-tenths of it is in the Northern wealthy part. Maybe this, is the majority to which Giugioro is referring.

The Alessi Espresso pot has all the elegance of a Gothic spire in a domestic item.

5 iv Oppenheimer and Einstein

Unusual names for a clock and a box, (Photograph 85). They form part of a range designed by George J. Souden and Nathalie du Pasquier. What's interesting about these products, is the use of patterns to decorate the surface of the items. As such, it is a welcome breath from the monotony of corporate colours. Also, similar to the Memphis table, (Photograph 82), is the use of simple but excitingly arranged geometric motifs. Note, the stepping motifs, the rectilinear shapes and the triangles on the box. The clock has almost classical proportions and looks as if it could have been derived from a Roman column, (see drawing).

5 v New Wave and Others

"Thus design abandons its traditional and sterile vocabulary, in order to find a new richness and a capacity to bring its user into an emotional dialogue. '

' Andrea Branzi - New Wave Italian Design (1)

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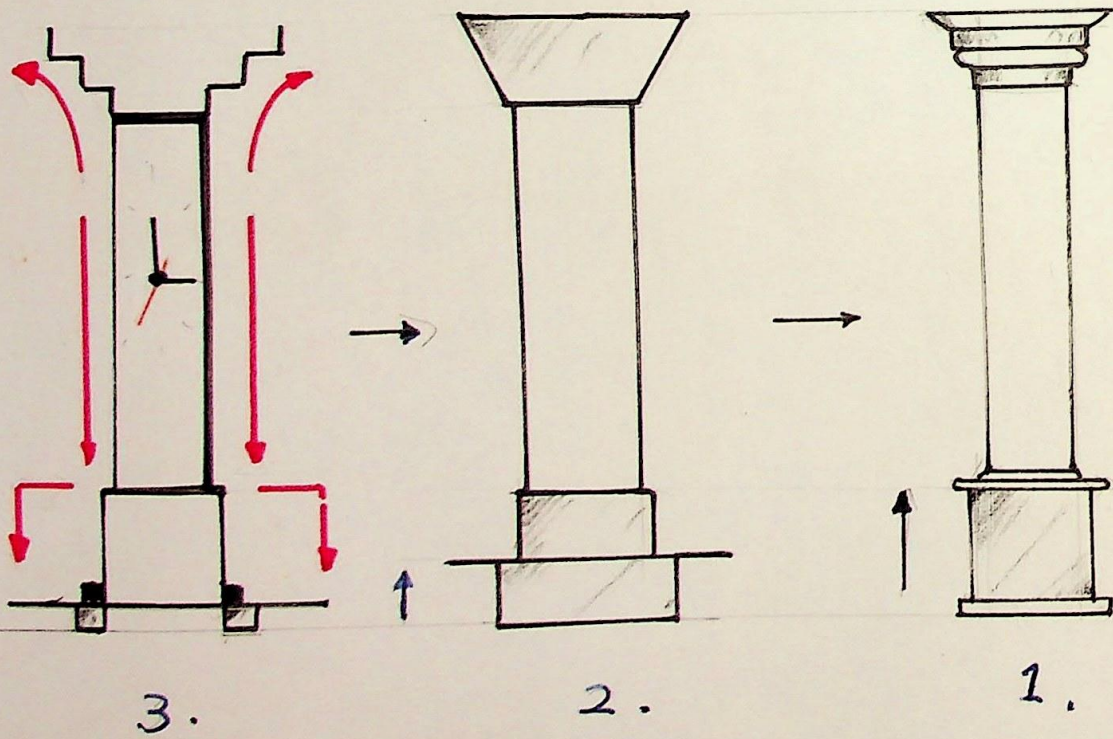
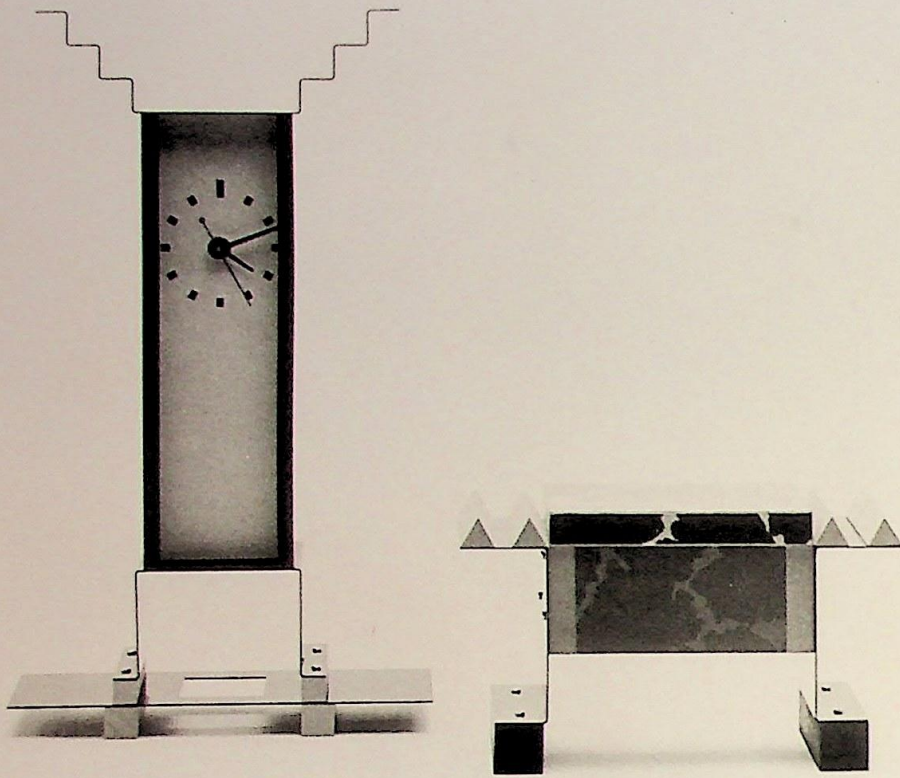
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' Andrea Branzi - New Wave Italian Design (1)



Branzi represents a mood in Italian design in which the basic method by which design communicates and interacts with society are explored. The product assumes an "emotional value" which is "not created by the object's functionality but by its expressive level". Expression design is not new. Mendleson and Steiner were two early exponents of its virtues. This explorative part of design has always been an intricate part of the Italian identity. In the 1960's we had design studios such as, U.F.O., 9999, Archizoom, all trying to push new frontiers in design. This aspect of design is essential, for starting at such lofty levels, the effects often filter down through the system and a dilute reality manifests itself on the mass market. An example of this leeching effect, is the interior design Michele di Lucchi does for Fiorucci, which "are the closest his Memphis ideas have got to the High Street". '

The pictures on this page, (Photograph 87/10) are an example of the vast profusion of experimentation. One of the more extraordinary is the gun pictured with its designer, Luigi Colani. The form of this gun is a truly fluid and organic shape. The arm butt resembling the lower jaw of some carnivore, (Photograph 88). This fluidity is typical of Colani's work. Described by Alessandro Mendini of Domus, as if it had been designed to exist in a liquid rather than a gaseous world. Luigi Colani, distances himself from Italian and most other design, considering the mass majority of it to be "bad".

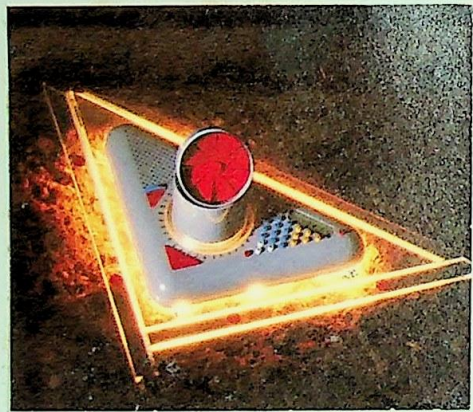
The sofa, (Photograph 87), again is a very fluid and free shape. That wavy back, seems enticing you to sit in it, delicately cradling you in the process. The black details on the large arm cushion tells you it's a seat, with a writing table to one side.

' Penny Sparke (e)

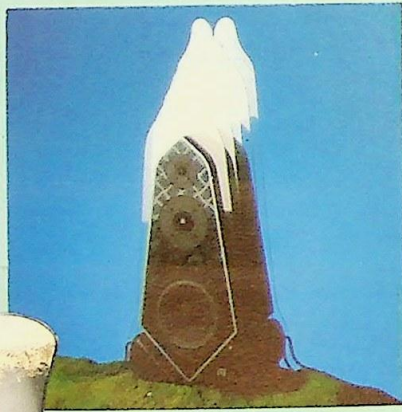
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88

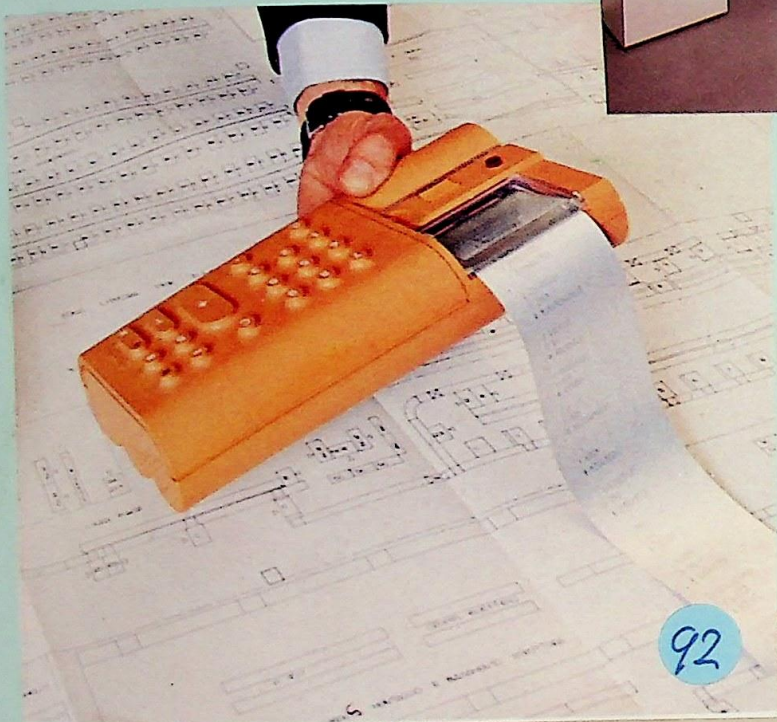
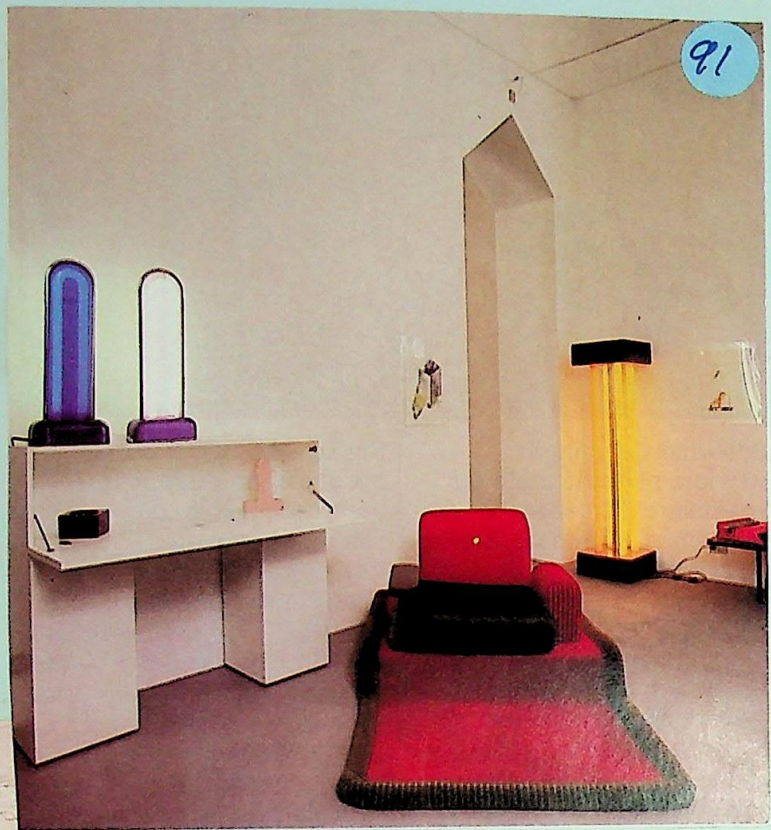


89



90







AEO, Archizoom/ Paolo Deganello, 1973

The arm chair, (Photograph 87) resembles Colani's fluid approach. A chair grown by mother nature almost, or rock which has been sand blasted down by desert winds.

Paolo Deganello's A.E.O. is an example of a product of the Archizoom studio which has become a present day classic.

The Flying Carpet chair by Ettore Sottsass is a very unusual piece of design. Sitting in it would give the owner the illusion of flying off into another world, a piece of escapist or fantasy design.

5 vi Expressive Exploitation of Materials

Table by Sottsass: (Photograph 96)

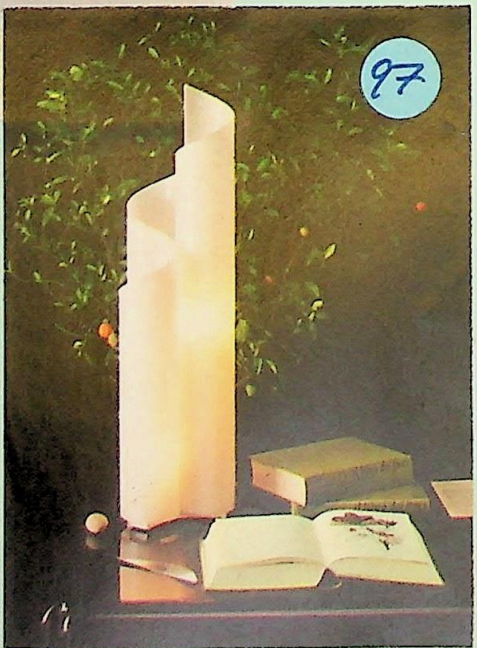
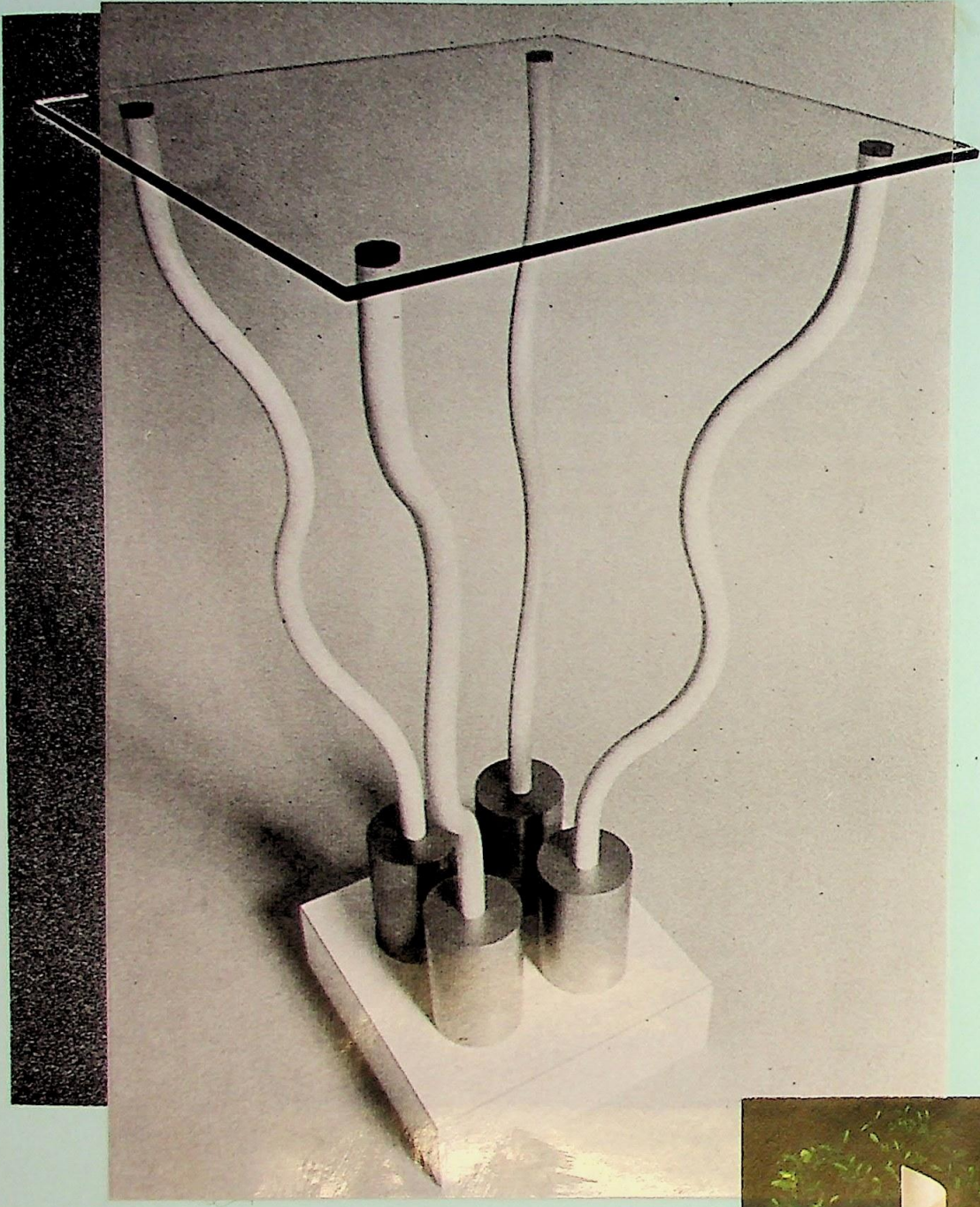
The glass is crisp, thin, sharp, transparent and fragile. The legs, soft and wobbly as if toothpaste squirted out from the powerful cylindrical steel pistons on the base.

This is a rigid table, yet everything it tells you about itself is the opposite, an ironic piece of design. The Chimera Light, by Vico Magistretti, again uses the materials in a very expressive manner, the elegant swirls of the plastic shade, resemble a stalactite.

The Light by Mario Bellini, (Photograph 99), is again another example of expressive exploitation of materials. The fabric like shade, waves itself around the top of the aluminium stand, producing a flower like shape.

The ability of the Italians to do beautiful things with materials, transcends the whole spectrum of their design work. Fashion designers like Versace, Krizia and Armani, "create clothing that is as controlled in line and as rich in surface as the best pieces of modern Italian furniture". '

' Sally Brampton - Sunday Times *



98

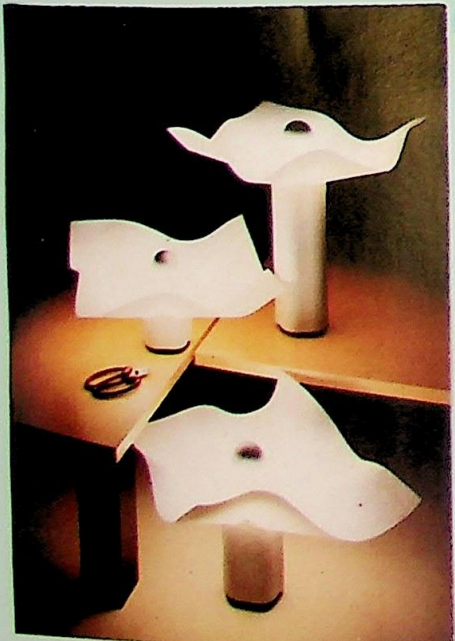


• VERSACE •



• KRIZIA •

99

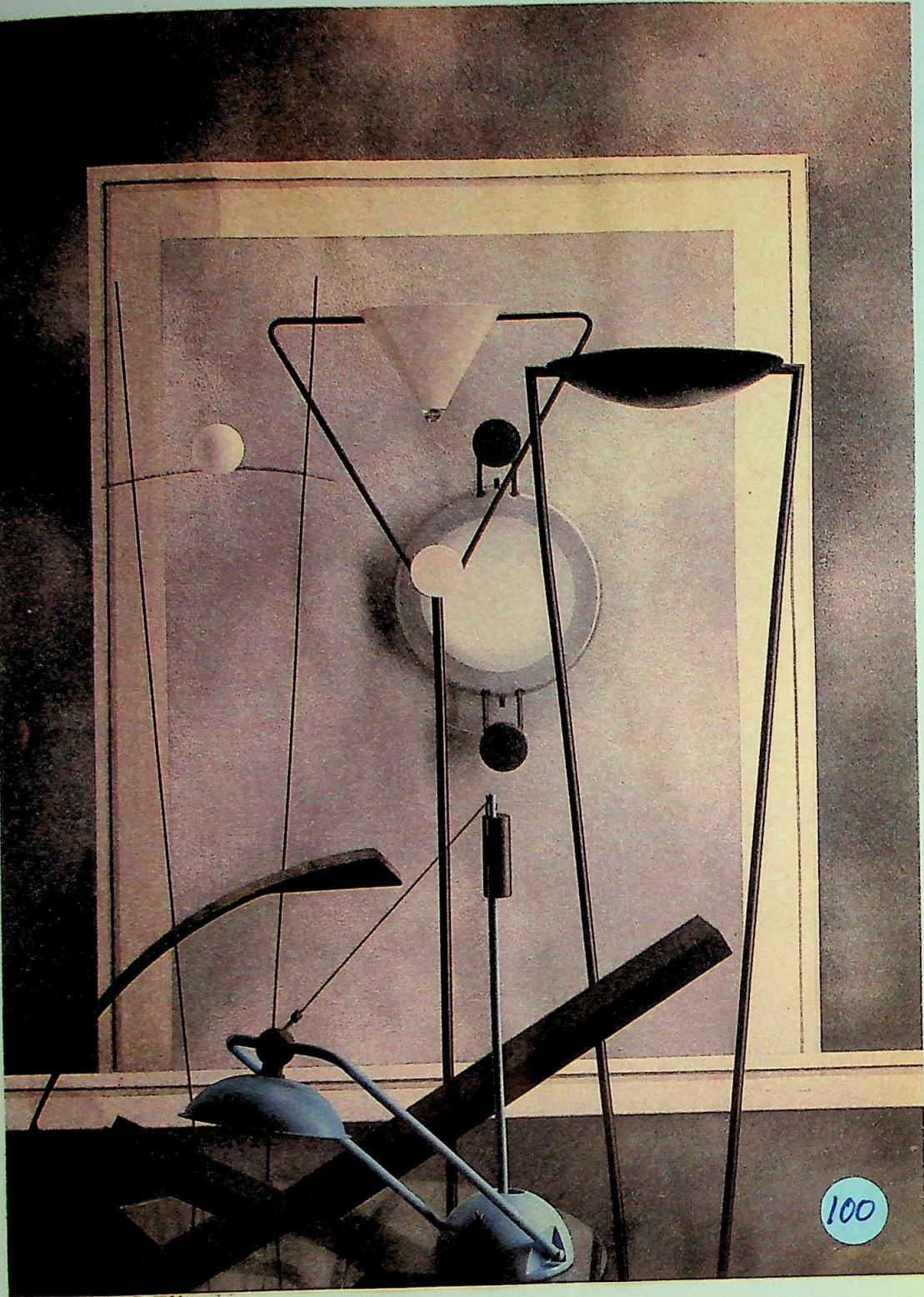


• FENDI •

Sculpture and beauty through material and form, has as much to do with these lamps, as providing an even spread of light.

It must be said that their ability to co-ordinate practical and aesthetic considerations into the one design, is without doubt a strong point of Italian design.

Perhaps, in many ways, the Lamborghini Countach is a personification of the best aspects of Italian design. Dramatic, sculptural good looks, and superb performance.



100



Lotus Esprit Turbo

Lamborghini Countach

Rolls Royce Silver Spirit

Aston Martin V8 Vanta

101

CHAPTER 6

GERMAN DESIGN

GERMAN DESIGN

6 i Streamlined Production

"The beauty of an object is based upon its function, the visual must not overwhelm its primary function".¹

Max Bill was co-founder of the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm. The ideas developed at this design school were later embraced in the Bau Haus school ethic.

Much is written about German design and special attention is lavished in art books, about the influence of the Bau Haus.

Looking at the collage of objects on this page, (Photograph 102), one sees a definite homogeneity of form, colour and texture. They represent a broad spectrum of work by four different German manufacturers.

The similarity lies in the use of large radiused curves, smooth flush surfaces and a predominance of black and white colours. They look as if they were the work of one designer, rather than many. The image given is that of serious, efficient, no-nonsense designs. As if they were the result of "keen, efficient, hard working factories producing crisply styled, clean lined, solidly engineered and thoroughly reliable products".²

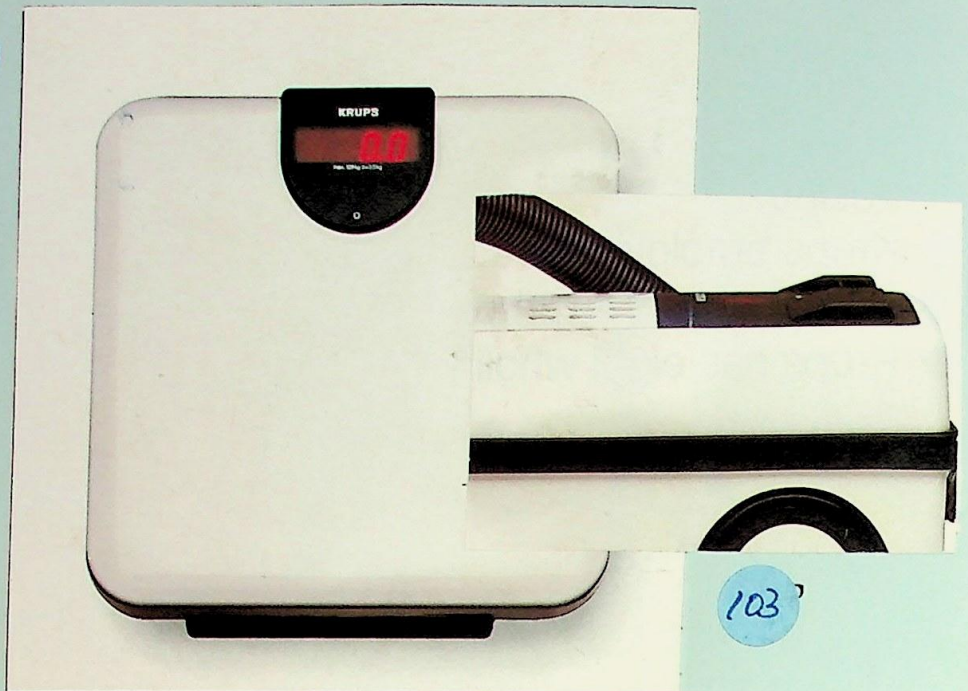
Now, this fits very nicely in with the ethics of Max Bill and Bau Haus and one might attribute their forms to an adherence to them. This, however is not quite the whole story. Rational design was "perfectly matched to the demands of the machine age".² Consequently, simplification of surfaces and geometry made excellent sense, especially when related to mass production.

¹ Max Bill (k)

² Jonathan Glancey (t)



102



103



TDA76



104

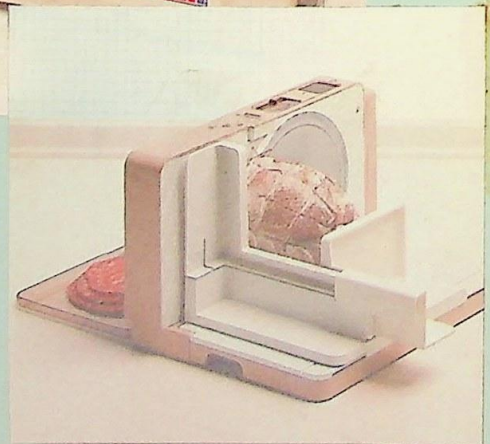


KG09

KG65



105



90% of the castings of these products, (Photograph/03), are injection moulded. In Japan the injection moulding technology consists of dies made up of thin section plates. This, results in many moulding lines. As previously stated in the section on Japanese design, the result is that Japanese Designers tend to cover up these features by producing complicated surfaces, stepping details, grids, etc. The advantage of "Plate Dies" is that they allow for rapid design changes. In Europe, the manufacturing tradition, has been the production of dies made in two halves cut out of solid hunks of metal. Smooth surfaces and large radiused forms facilitate this slower process, admirably. So what better, than to have a design theory, which demanded the same smooth clean lined forms, which industry wanted to produce.

This style, which the German products shown adhere to, has been not unfairly termed, "romantically clinical". This seriousness is reassuring, they look as if they had all been designed and "developed in spotless laboratories by men in white coats peering intently through wire framed spectacles".

6 ii Romanticism and Hi Tech.

The razors (Photograph/07), seem to embody two aspects of German design with regard to imagery. The Lady Braun finished in their curvacious "elegance", bear close resemblance to the domestic products previously talked about. Their soft and reserved forms presumably designed to evoke a sense of femininity.

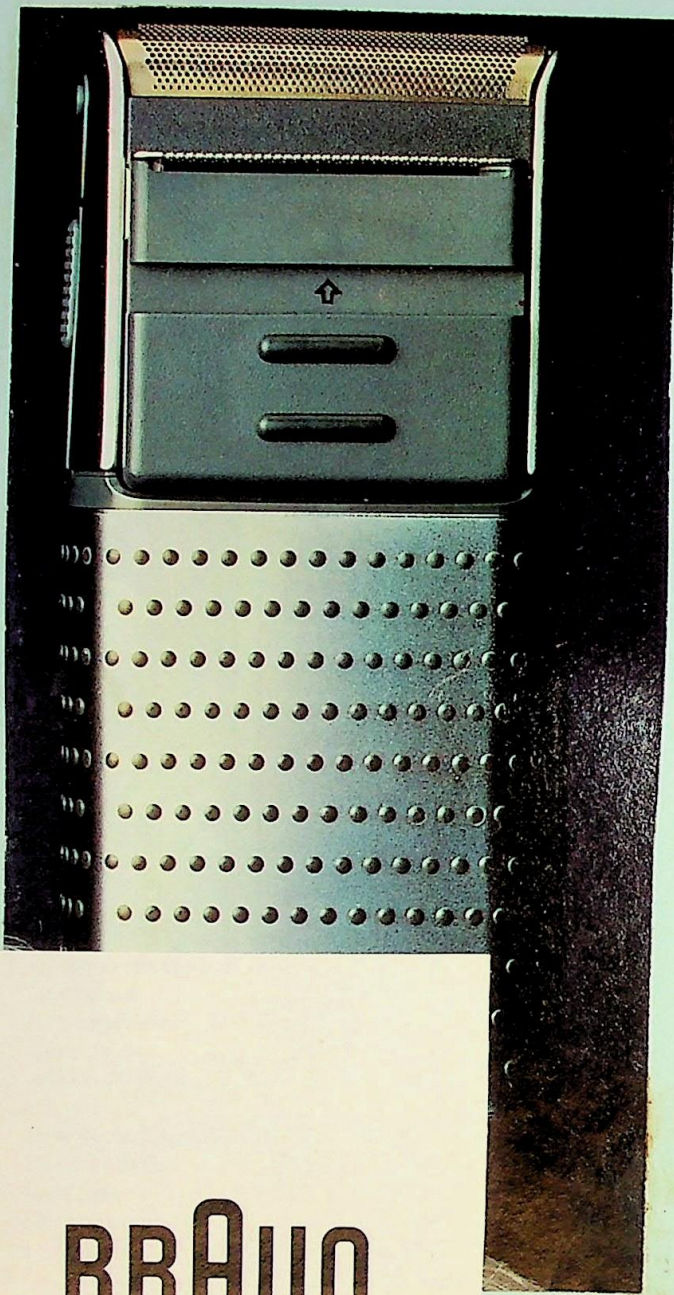
The male versions are of a very different order altogether. These are images of hi tech. macho objects. Serious engineers' tools and very different to the playful "elegant" female versions.

' Jonathan Glancey(t)



FK02

106



107

BRAUN
Lady Braun Elegance

Braun Mains, Rechargeable or Battery shavers – all with the superb closeness you expect when you buy a Braun.

BRAUN

108

The story goes that Dieter Rams, Braun's Chief Designer - Guru, spent many a frustrating hour trying to come up with the right combination of hi tech, functionalism and sleek sophistication.

The romantic image was the combination of the studded rubber and the brushed aluminium. However, as Jonathan Glancey, of the Boiler House noted, "it might look efficient... but the wretched thing refuses to shave half as well as the primitive safety razor".

6 iii Nostalgia

"Yet in other related fields - notably domestic and contract furniture - there is that same deadly nostalgic pull back into the world of excess and kitch".

Behind that popular, clean cut, functionalist image of German design, lies the love of nostalgic imagery in their identity. This is probably a throwback to the feudal times of their pre-Bismark days.

The kitchens shown, (Photograph 109), are both by the same manufacturer. The "chateau style" wood finished kitchen originated in Germany about 7 - 9 years ago and has subsequently become very popular all over Europe, though that is now dwindling. In the version shown, the image is very complete. From the pseudo masonry arch to the timber beam ceiling, (very reminiscent of Tudor houses). The attention to detail too is evident. Notice the parafin lamp, the lead frame glass windows, and the wrought iron drawer handles.

6 iv Macho Engineering

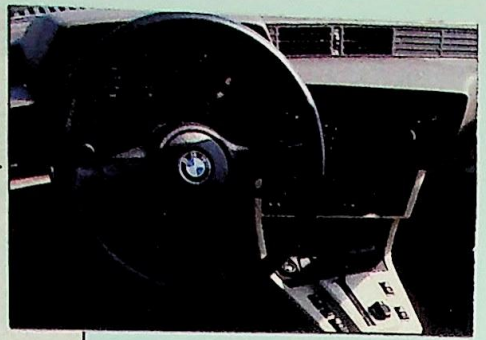
"B.M.W.'s latest K100 RS motor cycle... represents the dynamic efficiency that German Designers and the public want to believe in". (Photograph 112).

' Jonathan Glancey (t)

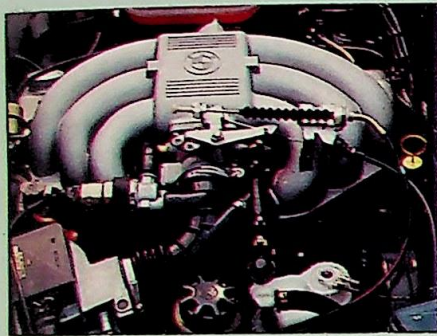


German engineering is world famous for its efficiency, reliability and advanced state. Their tradition in this identity stretches back before the wars into the latter part of the 19th Century and its influence can be seen across the broad spectrum of their product design. Even the B.M.W. engine, renowned for its smooth and quiet running, has a mechanical beauty all of its own, (Photograph //).

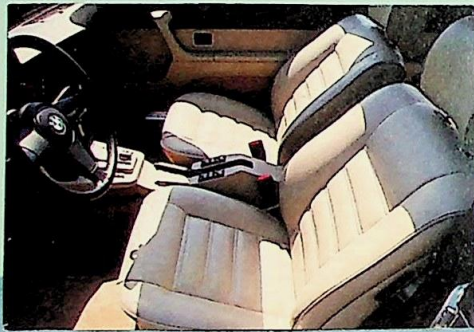
In the car we have a thoroughbred engine, a straight forward simple clean body. The interior of the car too is (very definitely different from its American counterparts), well designed, straight forward, with nothing there that ought not to be. Yet, that very sophisticated hi fi look to the dashboard, looks fit for a helicopter cockpit. This comprehensive array of controls and display lights gives the driver the sense of total command over this sophisticated piece of thoroughbred German engineering. This is an image German car designers thrive on and one not without good reason. Compare the re-sale value of German cars with most of its European or Japanese counterparts.



110



111



113



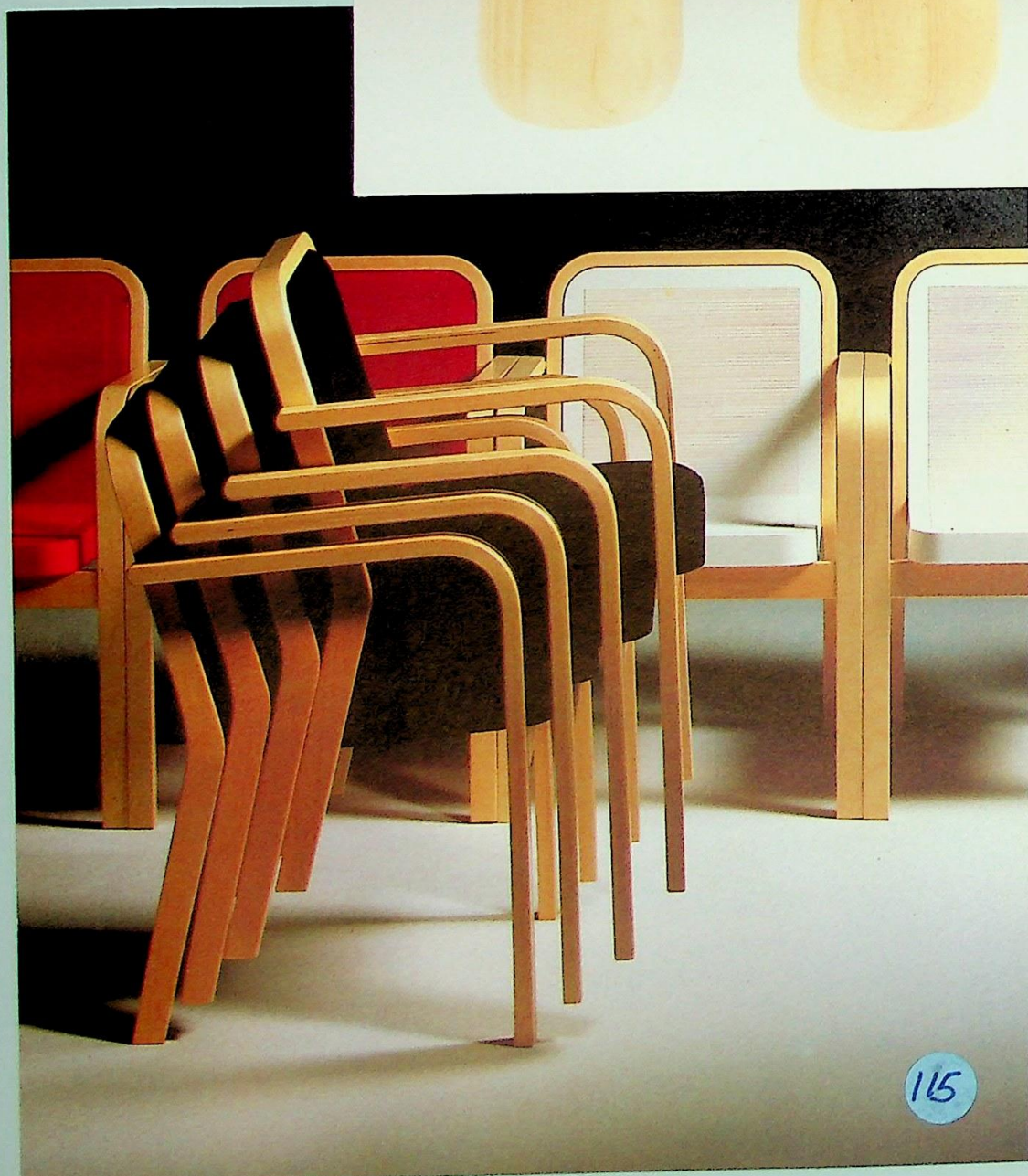
112

CHAPTER 7

SCANDANAVIAN DESIGN ETHIC
AND
ITS INFLUENCE ON IRISH DESIGN



114



115

SCANDANAVIAN DESIGN AND ETHIC AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH DESIGN

7 "They animated each other in their common sympathy for exquisite material and its properties, for treatments which paid regard to proportions, problems of production and use and finally, to the normal human scale. To an extent which makes ornamentation almost superfluous and which at any rate is not unduly influenced by passing fashions".¹

When in the 1930's Scandanavian design began to first get international attention and later in the 1950's and 1960's international praise, it was not because, their identity had matured and thus exported, but that it was firmly rooted in the domestic needs of design in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway.

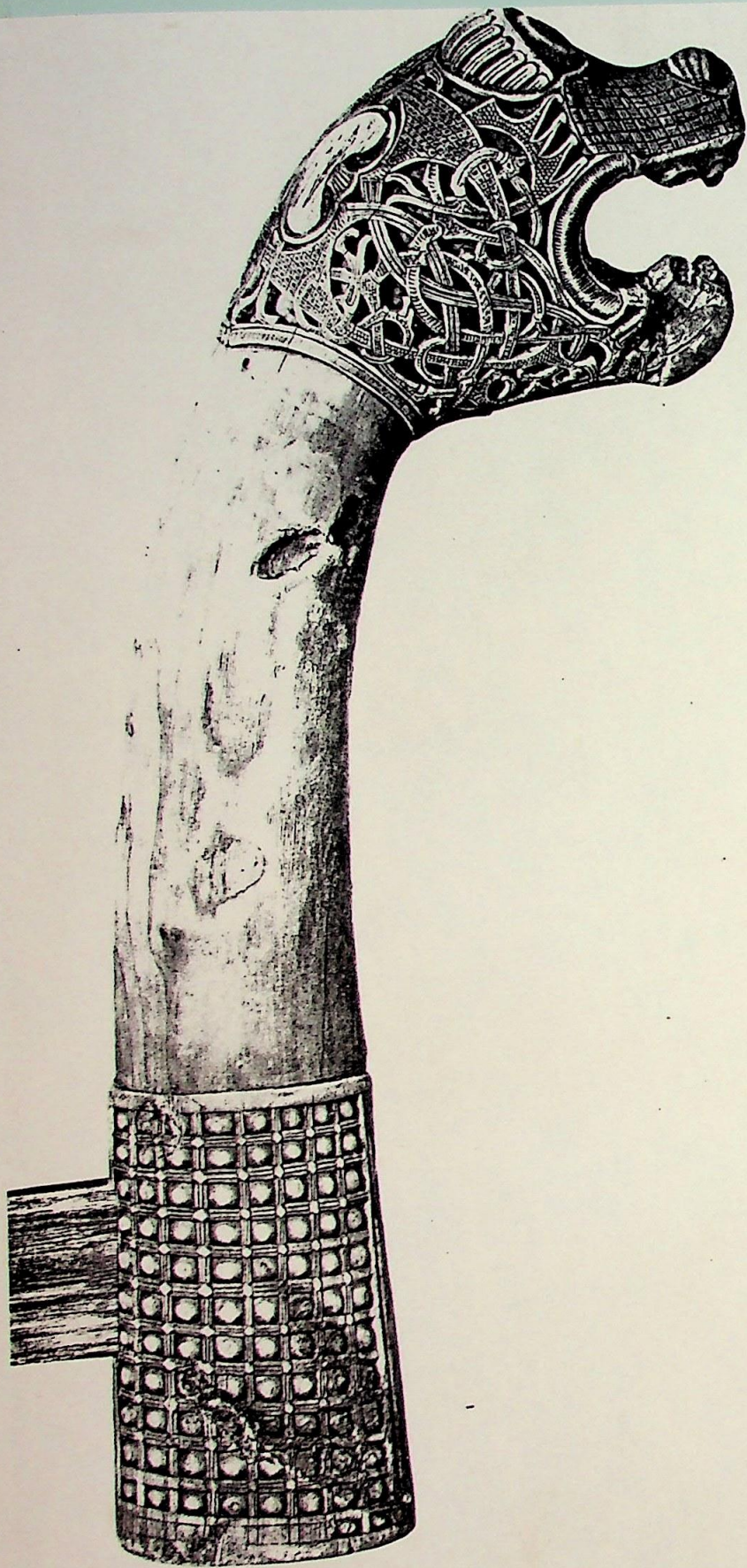
Optimising on what natural materials they had and the social responsibility felt by their designers, they established a very human approach to design. These attitudes are linked with their history, climate and social orientations of their society. "Disabled people are better looked after and provided for in Sweden than in almost any other country".²

The craftsmanship orientations of their design is evident from early times. Looking at the carved animal head from the Osenberg ship - burial (Photograph 117). Their superb handling and skill with materials, (in this case wood), is evident. In recent times they seem to have lost their taste for carved decoration.

There is no doubt that the abundance of wood in these countries plays an immensely important role in their design.

¹ Scandanavian Report 1961 (j)

² Jonathan Glancey - Boiler House (k)



The steam bent furniture and wooden chairs, (Photograph /15), are good examples of this kind of exploitation. The forms are soft, simple and in keeping with the modernist tradition. Lacking ornamentation, however, they have the warm look of Scandanavian furniture contrasted with the simple but sometimes austere modernist furniture of the 1950's.

In the Virgin and Child, (Photograph /14), the simple shapes and grain patterns give a very pleasing but simple effect. "With dedication and determination the Scandanavian countries have created designs that speak with eloquence and sensitivity of the concerns of modern man".¹

So, it could be said that design from Scandanavia reflects a wider social attitude towards life and needs. Their Designers and Architects see it essential to "design with the person in mind" and at the same time "design for the material".

"From our point of view, it has been continually emphasised that design essentially rests on the knowledge of materials and the ways they can be treated".²

If we look at the glassware, (Photograph /27), we can see how this ethic has been closely adhered to. The vases are almost fluid reflecting the clear, once liquid nature of the glass during blowing. The heavy vases on this page have an almost mountain spring feel to them, as if a splash of mountain water was frozen into the vase! These ice like forms echo the sort of winter forms seen in Scandanavia. Likewise, the goblets on the table, (Photograph /19), have in icy look to them. The design work is very evocative of their environment.

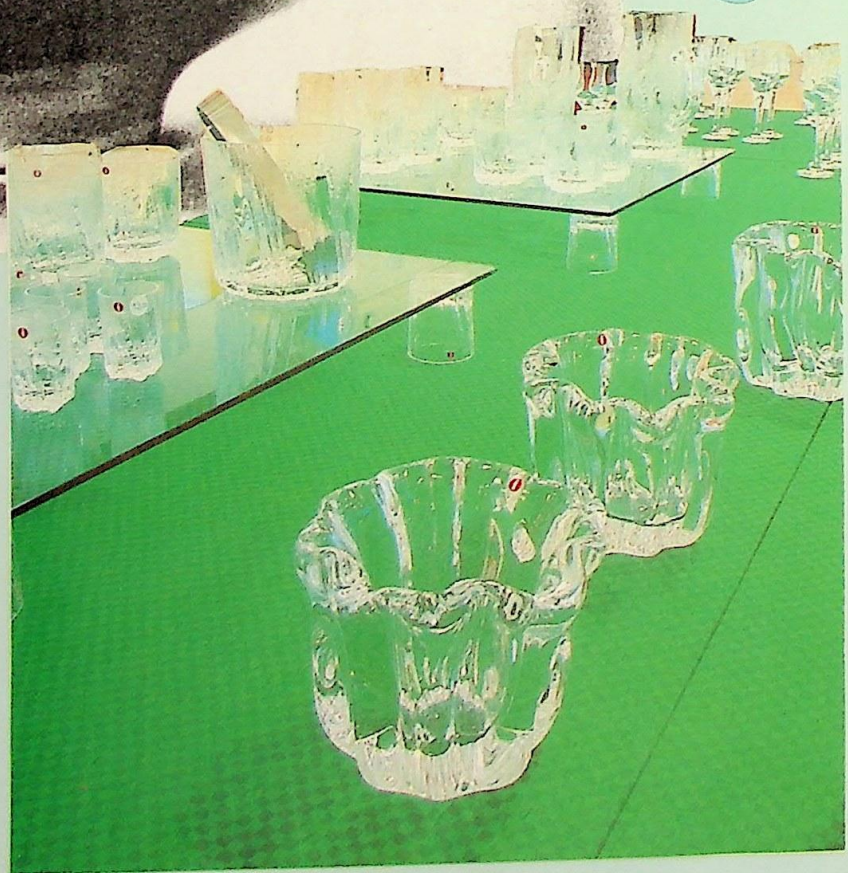
¹ Lisa Taylor, Director Smithsonian Institute (h)

² Scandanavian Report 1961 (j)

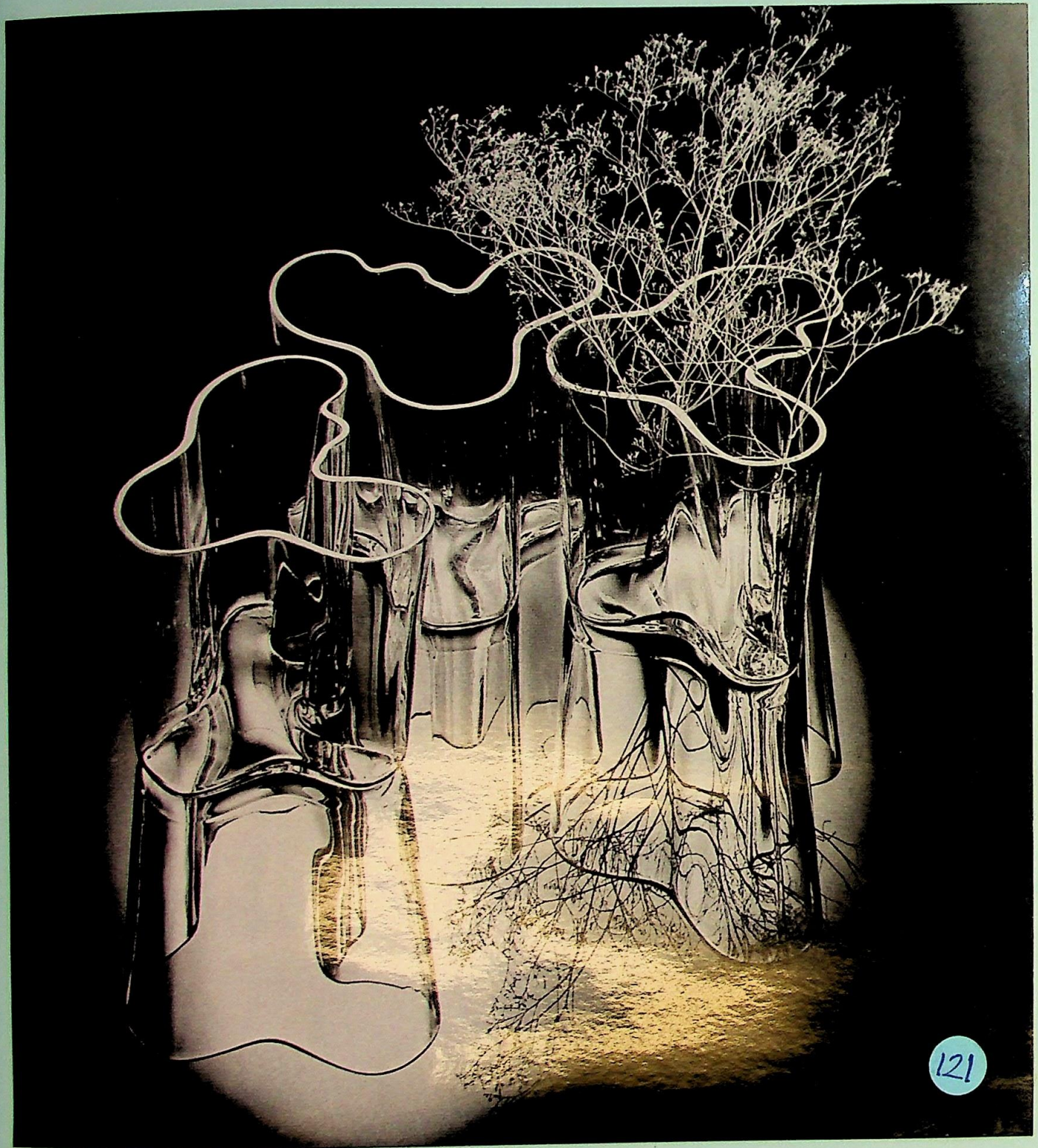
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Comparing their fluid, watery glass work, with the Waterford glass examples, (Photograph/120), we see a different approach to the properties of glass. This selection of "lead crystal", is just that, reflecting the jewel or crystal like qualities of the glass. Reminiscent of a clutter of natural rock crystal.

The team of Scandanavian designers and theorists, who, in 1960 visited Ireland in order to assess our design ability and make recommendations, felt that Waterford glass was "playing on the layman's sentiments.. the shapes are not aesthetically satisfactory and.... the relationship between shape and decoration is an unhappy one". One can see why they would be critical, when so little of their design indulges in carved decoration and when indeed it does appear it is usually echoing natural ones. However, today it is one of our major exports and one of the few things which the layman could pin point as Irish designed and crafted. So it has a place in our identity.

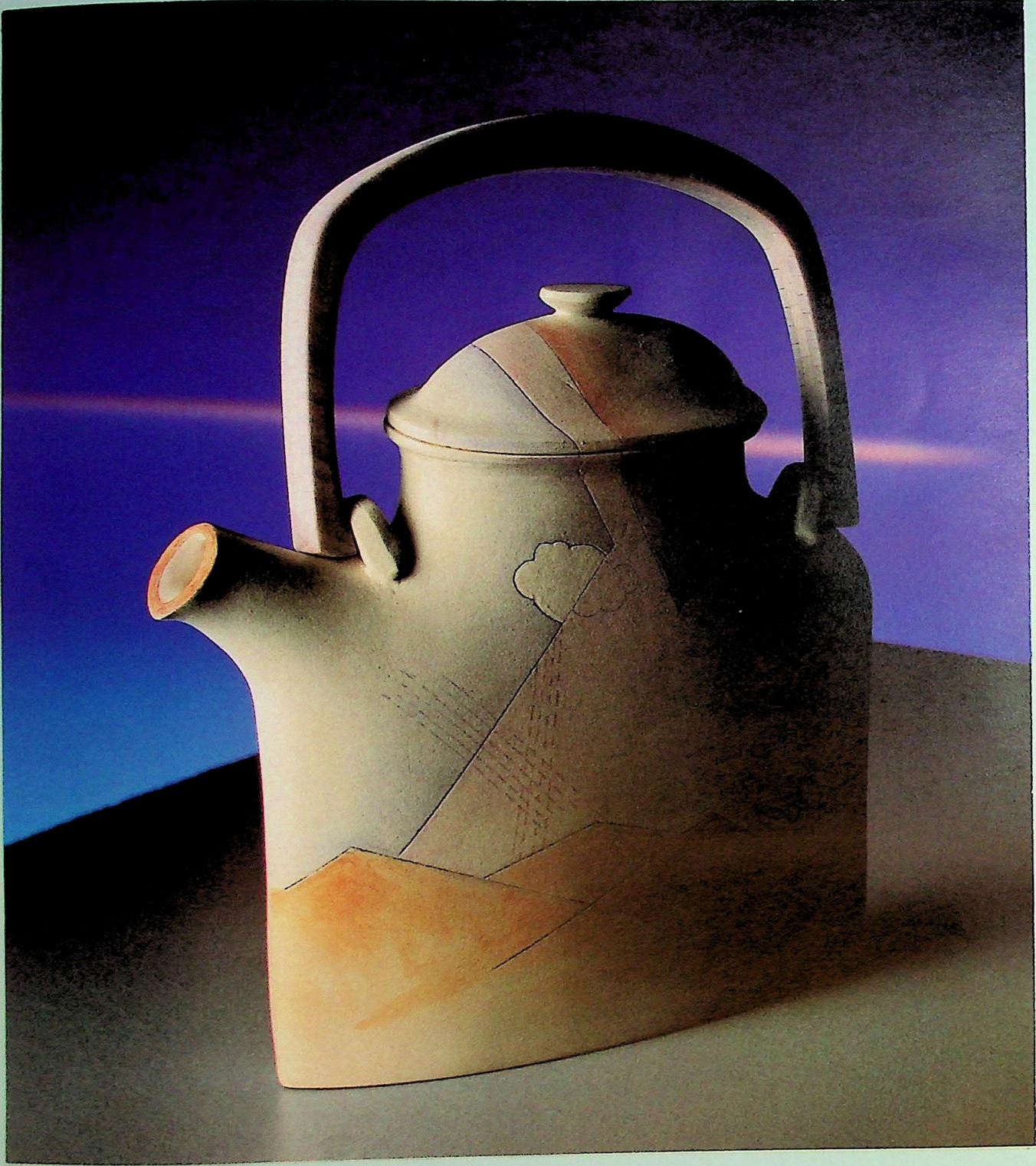
Colour, texture and pattern are all elements which the Scandavians believe are related closely to form and material. "Different materials with different functions claim different colours".

The beautiful earthenware Tea pot (Photograph/122) reflects the grain of the clay in its textured finish. Likewise the cool, sleek, smooth finish of the Jug by Hans Kappel, (Photograph/118), reflects the metal from which it is made and its fluid shape has an almost molten metal look about it.

The textured rug photographed in a suitably textured environment, (Photograph/123), again is a definite statement about what the craftsman is saying about the fabric.

In their mass produced items, the safety conscious and

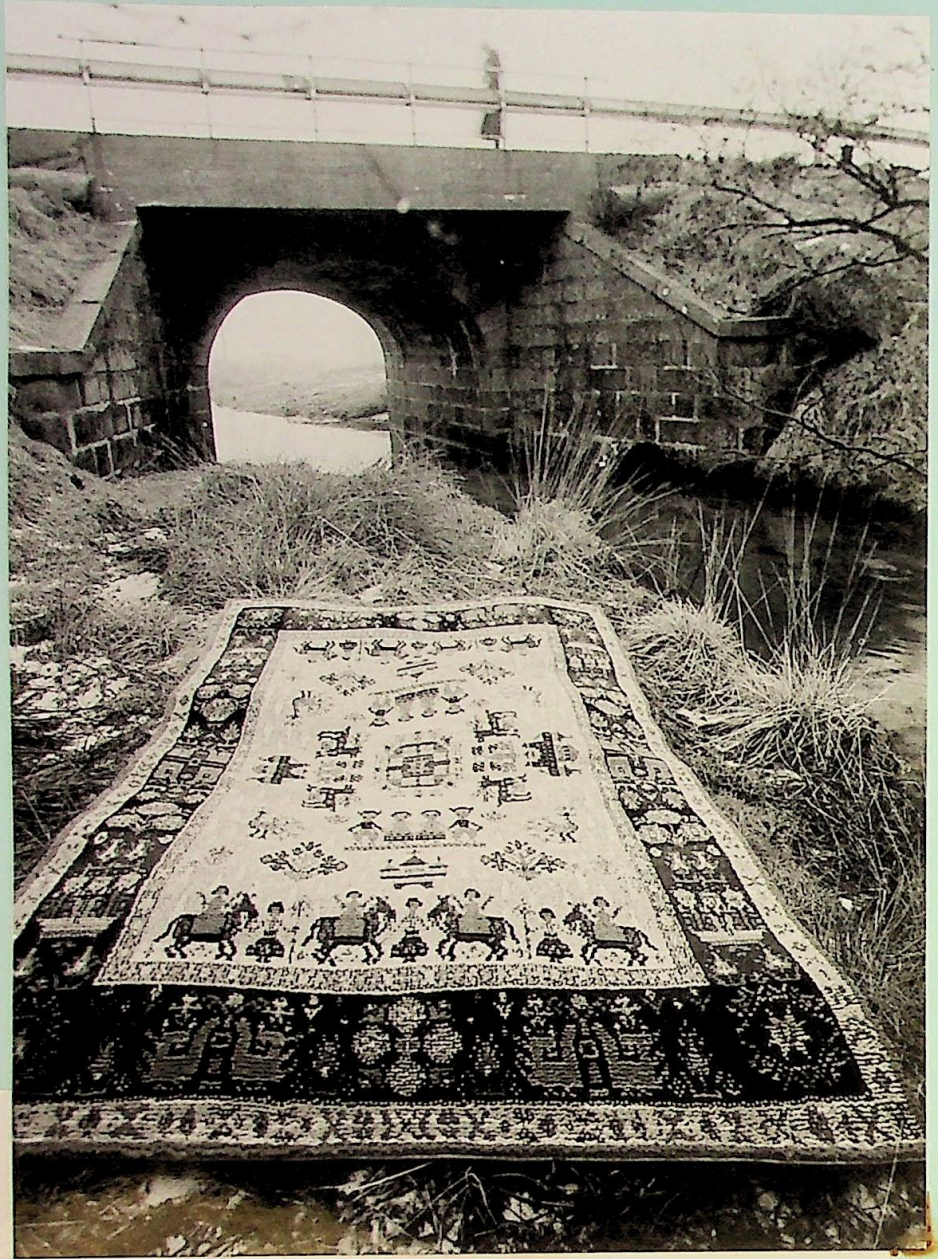
' Scandanavian Report 1961 (j)



socially responsible attitude of the Scandanavian designers is epitomised in the Volvo car. Here, the car is made safe partially due to climatic conditions in these countries. However, this safe image is capitalised upon when sold for export, (Photograph 126).

The Petrol pump and the T.L.D. metering device are straight forward, matter of fact, pieces of design. The pump, has a certain sleekness to it whereas the T.L.D. (129) device looks as if it religiously adhered to the teaching principals of Eskild Tjalve, a noted Danish Design Educationalist (author of "A Short Course in Industrial Design").

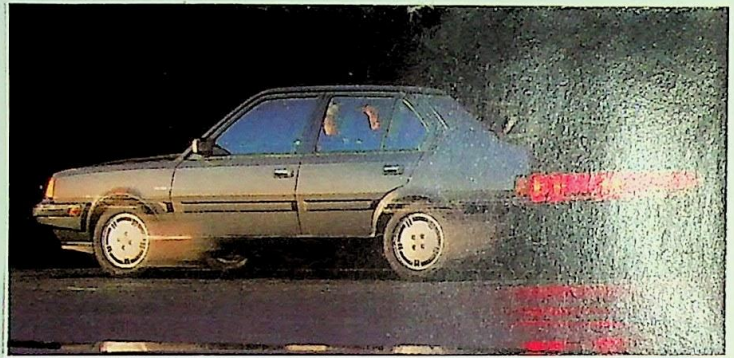
The Scandanavians are noted for their medical, surgical and dental equipment. Again this is an indication of the social bent of their industrial design.





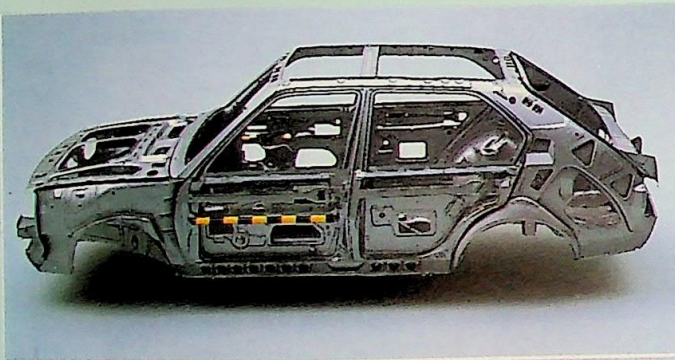
14 layers of primers and paint for lasting protection

125



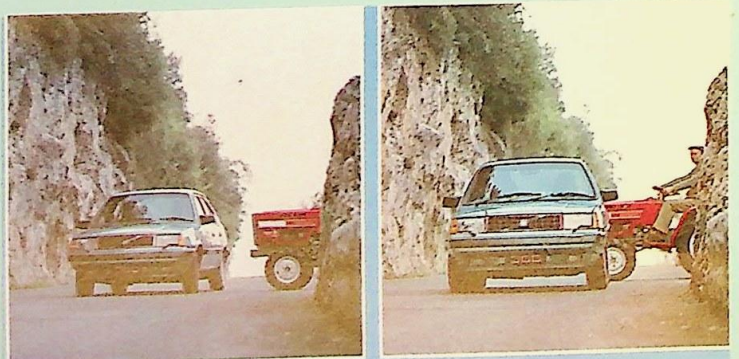
Safe braking in any weather, on any surface

126



A tough steel safety cage protects the occupants

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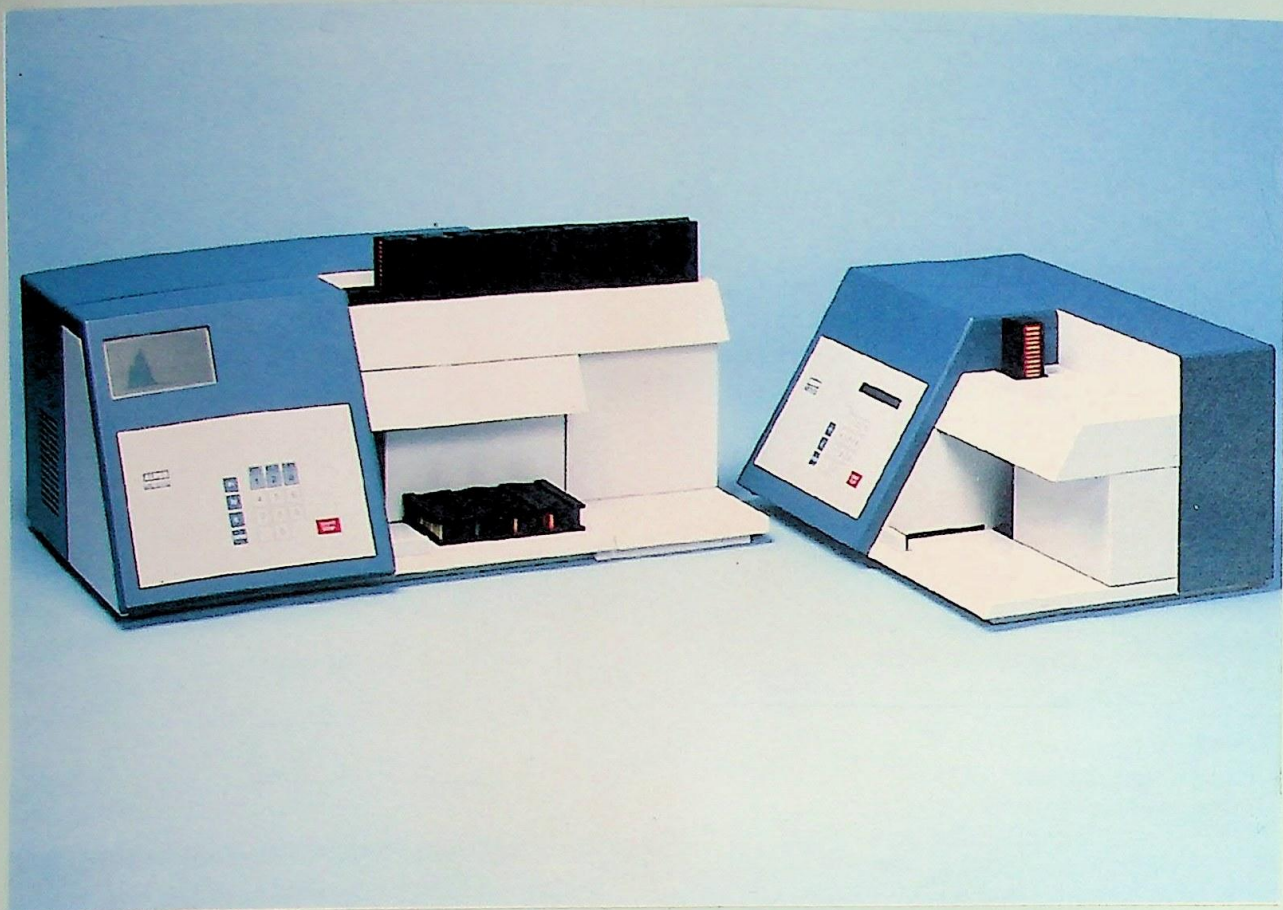


Safely avoiding the unexpected

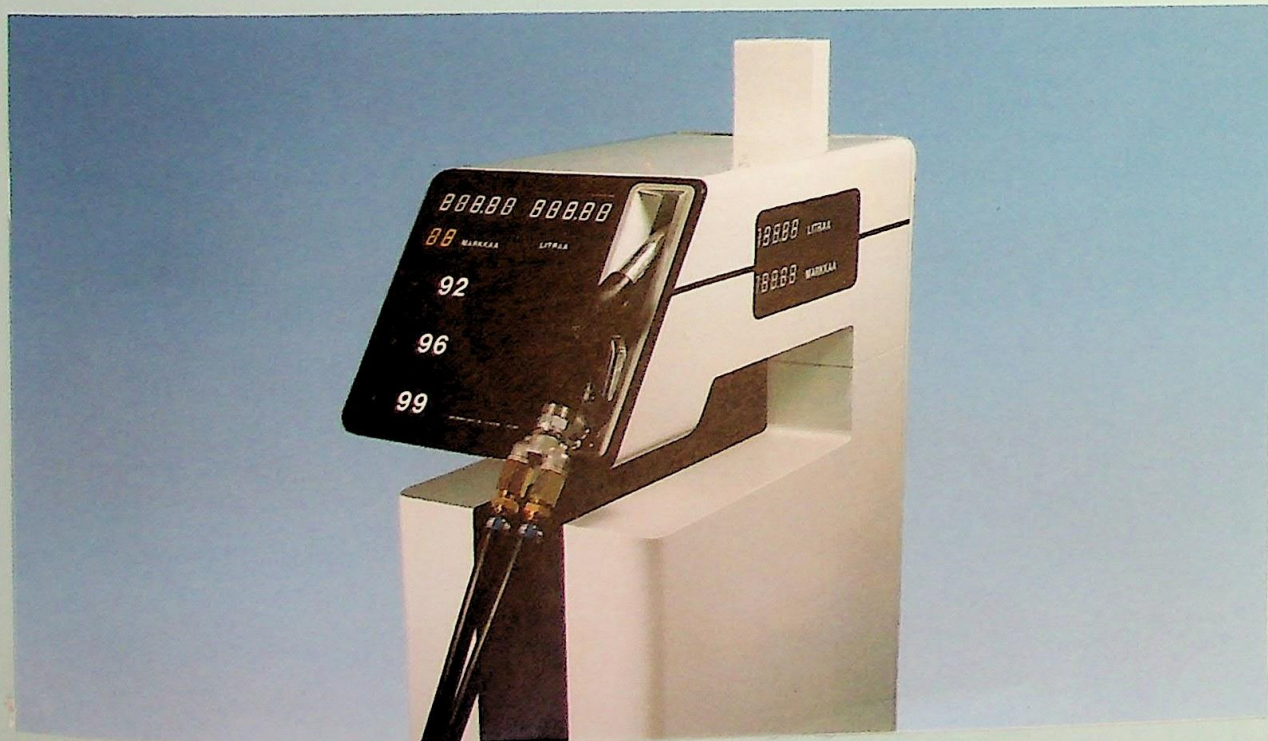
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Aerodynamically tested for directional stability



129



130

CHAPTER 8

AN IRISH DESIGN IDENTITY

AN IRISH DESIGN IDENTITY

8 When we talk of a design identity in Ireland, it is necessary to also look at it in the broader aspect of national identity. In Ireland, this too, tends to be an ambiguous thing.

In France, say, a definite national desire to assert herself is reflected in the political use of design towards this goal. From the other cultures looked at, design was often linked to a wider cultural and national attitude.

Ireland's national identity is a paradoxical mix of myths and legends. We have our export identity and our self image. High volume, mass produced products, tend, when designed in Ireland, to be aimed at the export market. Low volume products, craft items, etc. are designed and sold here.

Is there anything which Irish Designers can draw upon and would be seen by foreigners and nationals alike as particularly Irish, an approach or an attitude? A couple of the Designers which the author talked to, felt that there was no such identity. Oliver Hood, an English Designer working here, went so far as to say "God forbid". He mentioned that while studying in the United Kingdom, during the 1970's, there was a design identity in Britain. "Extruded with the ends cut off".

So could a design identity be more of an approach to design that we seek, rather than a style? This could then be capitalised upon for export.

In Scandanavia it was social concerns, limited raw materials and satisfying their domestic needs. This resulted in a craft dominated style where they exploited what limited materials they had to the best effect.

In Japan their cultural attitudes towards perfection and inner meaning and their high esteem for miniaturisation was due to that very perfection needed. Italy has made a name for herself in the almost, artist like approach of her Designers, their ability to design sculptural, beautiful items, combined with functional requirements. Their deep - seeking attitude towards design and its meaning, its role in society. This is all linked with their tradition in the visual arts.

From an export point of view, these identities are very valuable indeed. Like the clients coming to Britain, knowing that they would get "elegant - neutral" design solutions, suitable for broad worldwide non-offending sale. However, fundamental to the success of these design approaches, is that they have firm roots in their individual domestic environment.

So where does Ireland stand? We have a long tradition in the literary arts, spoken word and abstract thinking. Linked with this is a long speckled history, with cultural traditions burning strongly, only to be superceded by another. Unlike China, which was never really invaded, and whose tradition was continuous over two millennia, Ireland had a very strong Celtic tradition, which was never unduly influenced by the Romans. We absorbed Christianity and moulded it into our Celtic tradition or identity. "St. Columba's phrase "God is my Druid" seems to epitomise this aspect of our tradition. '

Today our Irishness, or our identity, does not seem to be quite as strong. It is more, that we are being engulfed into a wider, western identity, or will be?

Denmark, has had a similar political history to that of Ireland. They were, for many generations, kept under Germany's thumb. Yet, today they have a strong identity. "Of course every country must be influenced by its neighbours.... the particular forms of Danish furniture, silver, ceramics, etc. which led to economic success in later years, were based to a large extent on what came from Germany. But the core of Danish styles derive from the work of a series of Danish artists, architects, painters and sculptures, who, through generations were aware of the essential qualities of materials".¹ This core generation of craftsmen were to form the trunk of the Danish style of modern times. As Brian Stevens put it succinctly to the author, "we have to become Artisans before we can become hi tech. and yet we're still shopkeepers and insurance salesmen".

Of course, related to this is the fact that their economy became stronger and wealthier earlier than ours started to. Irish people are not terribly acquisitive. We tend to be very defensive about our history, "we belong to a race which has been tyrannised for over 700 years".²

Linked with the materialistic/wealth artisan aspect, is the work ethic, that entrepreneurial flair that the Italians showed after the war and which is popularly associated with the Americans today - the consumer hard sell aspect of their design.

For the majority of Irish people down through the decades, that get up and go, was to an extent drummed out of them, due to the socio-economic political environment. "The Irish character sometimes resembles the Arab Kismet in its fatalism - Ah to be sure it's the will of God, its fate".³

¹ The Scandanavian Report (j) , Tim Pat Coogan (o)

² Denis Johnson (p)

If the environment is right - (one or more of the aspects previously mentioned) then it will aid design and its development considerably. Rather than having a few individuals, who are exceptions (a bit like Jack B. Yeats in our recent Art History) we have a group of people, working separately, but who are products of their environment. So it would appear that design is closely related to life around and maybe here the link with a national identity is forged.

Ireland has three main traditions in design:-

- i Celtic
- ii Georgian
- iii Craft and Vernacular

The latter receiving a substantial shot in the arm, as a result of the Scandanavian Report.

Referring to Italian design, Giorgio Giugiaro remarked that Italian Designers possess individuality and creative spurts which are separated from the socio-political context.

In Ireland a major problem with regard to the Celtic heritage of our design may well have resulted from too close a link with the political context.

8 ii When the Celt Stood Tall

"Our peculiar curse lies in the fact that we have too many conflicting senses of Identity". '

' D. Johnson (p)

SIMULATED STONE



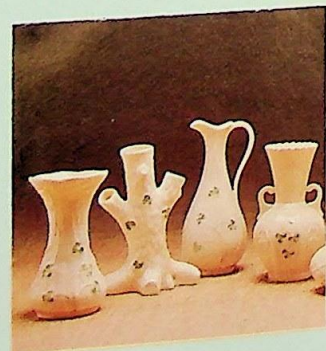
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In the late 19th Century, a group of Irishmen, seeking to sever English control of Ireland, resolutely set about the task of making Irish people aware that we were "a separate race, with proud and separate traditions of our own".¹

To do this they felt it was necessary to make Irish people aware of their roots, traditions and past. Uncovering the sleeping legends of Cuchalainn and Nial of the Nine Horses, the Celts, the Land of Saints and Scholars. The Gaelic League was founded.

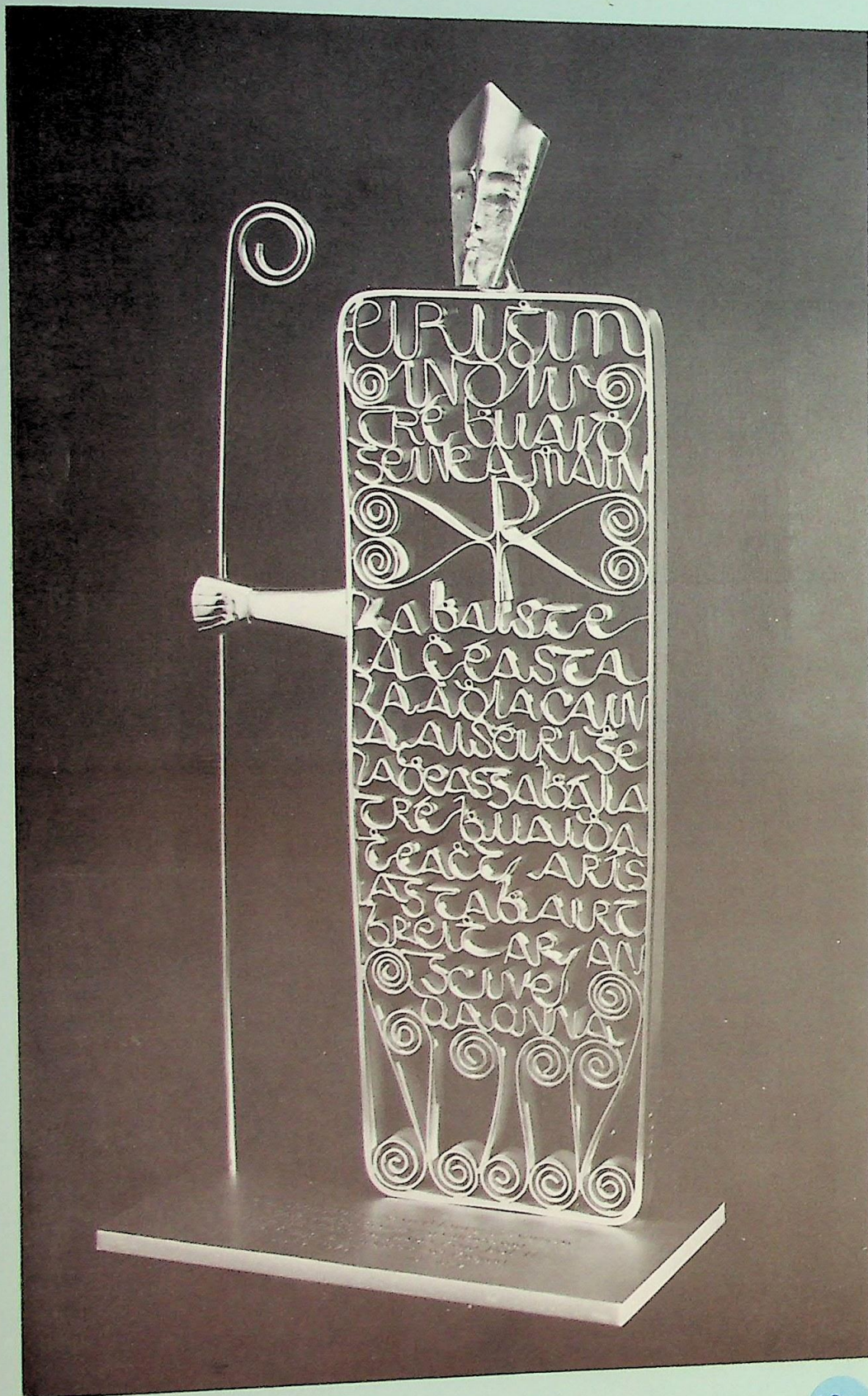
"The influence of the cultural revivalists of Ireland's past cultural glories (like Douglas Hyde and W.B. Yeats) which as popularised tended to create a "golden era, where the Celt was tall and pure, the country abounded with sorrow and laughter, milk and honey, Princes, Kings, Queens and magic, were commonplace".²

What happened to this romantic, Celtic Ireland? It has been neatly packaged up and marked for export. This sort of design imagery makes good tourism. The reproduction Celtic sculptures in "simulated stone" by Fergus O'Farrell Limited, (Photograph/33), and the Beleek pottery and Royal Tara tableware, both emblazoned with shamrocks, (Photograph/32), are mostly aimed at the foreign market. They sell in large tourist shops with names such as "House of Ireland".

This sort of neatly accessible imagery, neatly packaged Celtic heritage, earlier revived for political reasons, never really convinced totally the "layman" of this identity and tradition, both in design and as a national identity. It is merely a small part of a fragmented tradition and identity. As Yeats said "Romantic Ireland is dead and gone it's with O'Leary in the grave".

¹ K. Neil - Our Changing Times (n)

² J.P. Coogan



Contemporary Irish artists like Oisín Kelly, have, however, identified with this Celtic past in some of their work. Yet with a delicacy and sensitivity have reinterpreted it to their own design work. Thus, giving it a new lease of life. But, not sinking to mere and misapplied plagiarism, that the tourist items have become (as with most tourist items).

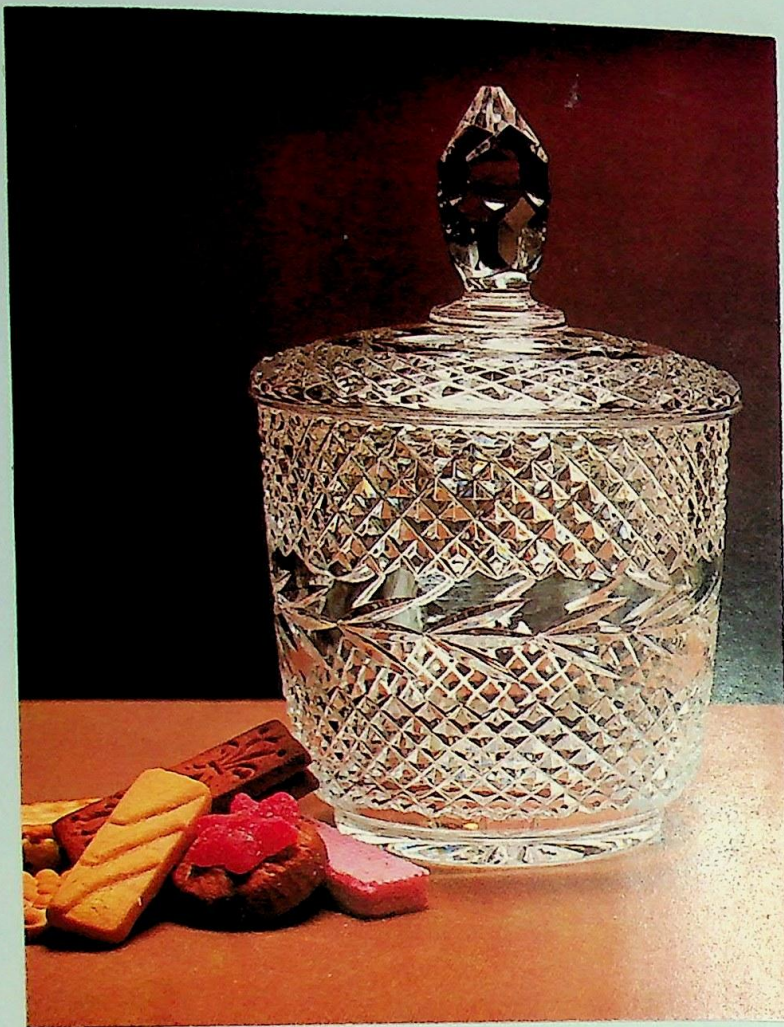
Maybe this aspect of our tradition, which, is closely linked to the image of an artisan, (Denmark, Italy), yet with an Irishness. Could, if properly handled, provide a source of inspiration for future Irish Designers.

An example of this in graphic design is the combination of Celtic and modern motifs on the Irish £1 and £5 notes.

8 iii Georgian Tradition

If we look at the lavishly engraved lead crystal, (Photograph ~~137~~), we see a style of glass which was developed during our Georgian phase in the 1790's. Yet, comparing the relief decoration with the Celtic Chalice, (Photograph ~~136~~), there is a certain similarity. That fondness of deep cut geometric patterning is still evident in the crystal. Notice the deep diagonal, diamond, cuts, on the neck of the Celtic chalice and how similar it is to the Biscuit barrel, (Photograph ~~135~~), by Waterford Glass.

Looking at the Georgian Terraced House door, (Photograph ~~138~~), we see another more prevalent aspect of this identity. Those classical motifs, in wood and plaster really come from England, which in turn was influenced by the Palladian style of Italy. Again today this aspect is frequently tourist packaged. The Scandinavian Report felt that this was not Irish, but more an English tradition. Irish people still identify with this aspect today. Copied motifs appear on "4 bedroomed Georgian style semi-detached houses". This is a kind of nostalgia, giving the house owner a semblance



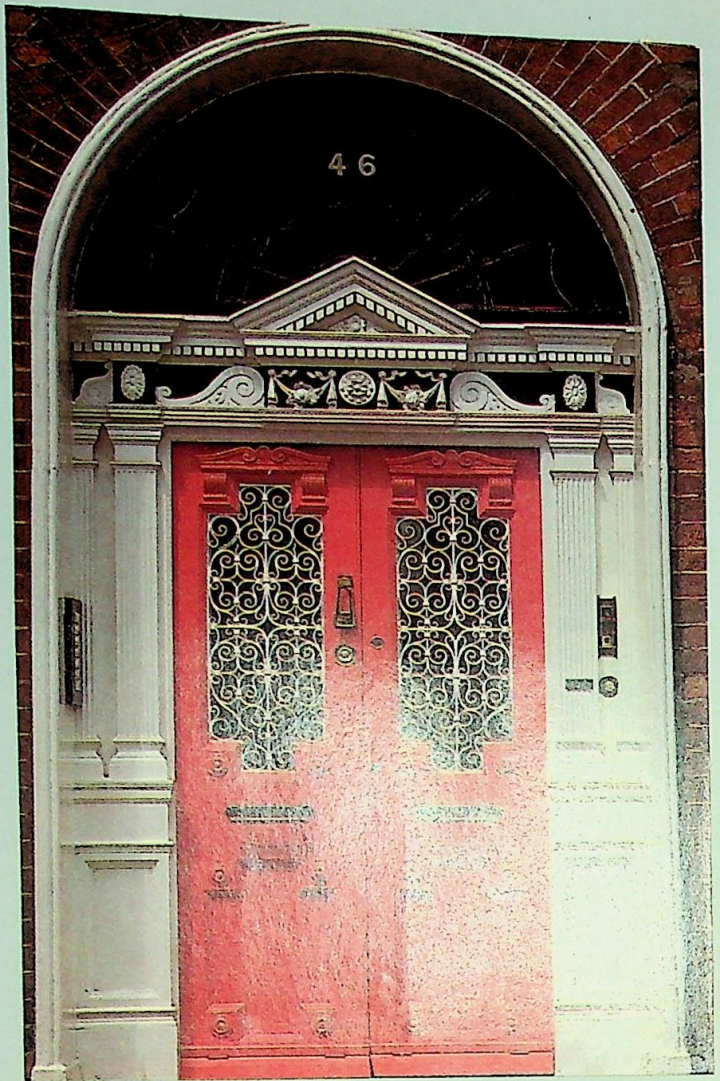
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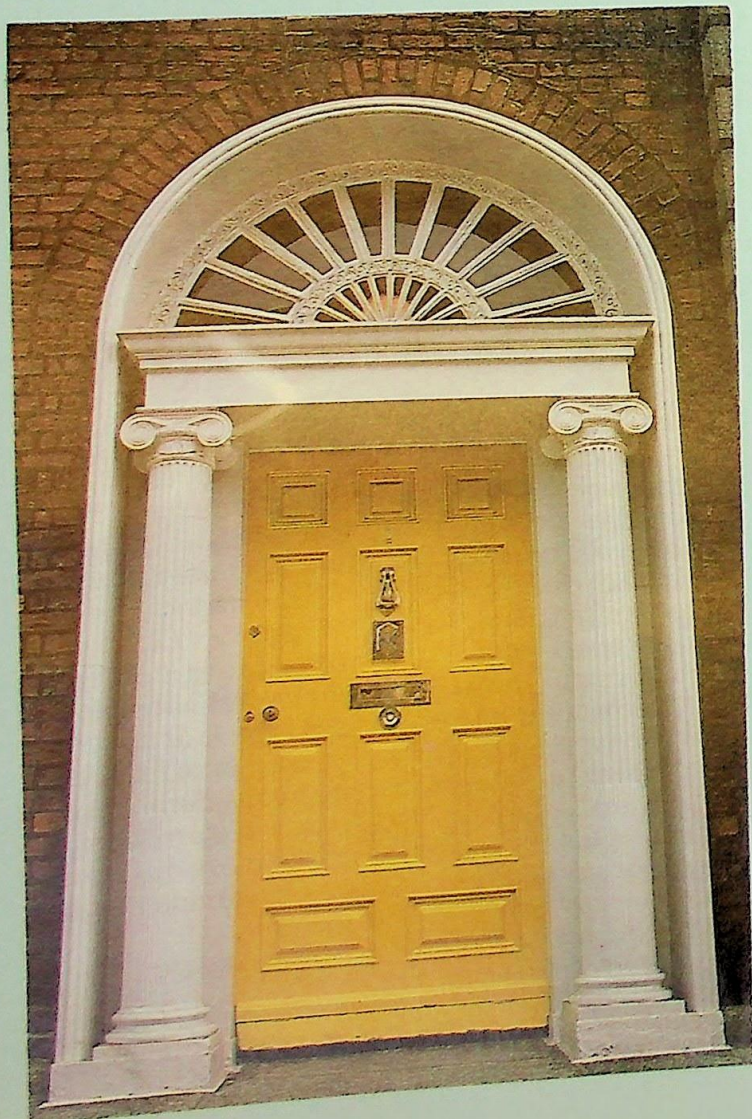
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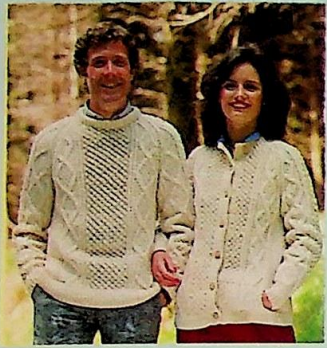
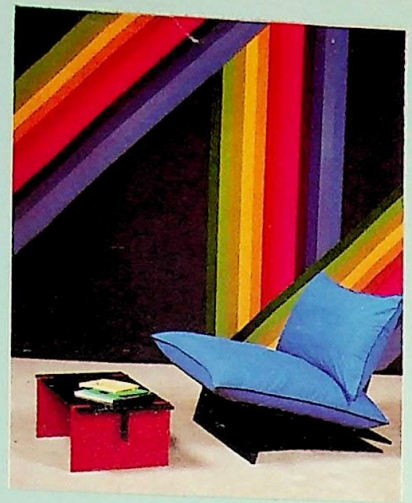
of the grandeur that 9% of the country once possessed two hundred odd years ago. Similar in many ways to the aristocratic (mass produced) Cadillac De Ville.

8 iv The Craft and Vernacular Tradition

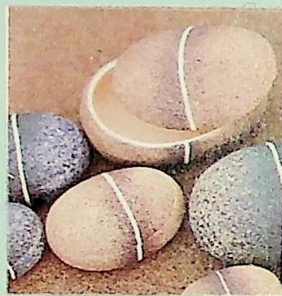
"The best designed products in Ireland were those based upon tradition craft industries successfully interpreting the Irish tradition". '

In 1960, the Irish Export Board, turned towards the Scandinavians for direction in Irish Design (with particular emphasis on product design). They invited a group of 6 eminent Designers from Finland, Denmark and Sweden, to evaluate the Irish design potential and make a report.

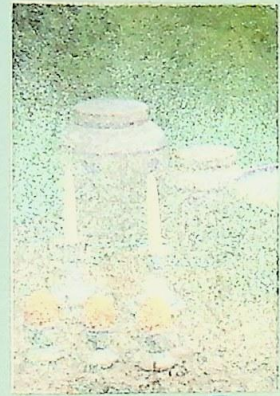
At this time the Irish Export Board said "it was natural in this situation to turn to the Scandinavians... their achievements were enviable and of recent origin". True, in 1960 Scandinavian design was at a peak in international popularity. However, C.T.T. (The Irish Export Board) felt that their "scale of industry, raw materials, patterns of their society, are similar in many respects to ours". It could be argued that our industry, and social patterns, were very different indeed and that we were closer culturally to the British (Welsh/Scottish) than to the Scandinavians. Nevertheless Scandinavian design was popular then and their share of the limelight would influence any country seeking advice at the time. The effect of their subsequent report had a very measurable effect on design development here over the following two decades, especially in the craft section. One could speculate on the effects of a choice of 6 Italians on our design development.



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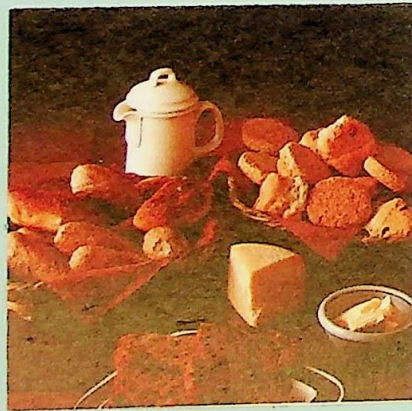


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The team were emphatic, that, "it is not our recommendation of the adoption of Scandanavian design... this would kill off what is left and could be saved and what still exists of the original value of Irish culture".

In 1960 the scale of our industry, was very suited to small industry and production of hand crafted goods. 26 years on these kinds of goods are flowering as never before, the most prominent being sold through the Kilkenny Design Shop.

Looking at the objects on this page, the influence of the Scandanavian ethic, especially in the material and form expression aspect, is very evident.

The jewellery/ring containers, (Photograph /41), are very egg like in shape and to reinforce this image is the speckled paint, bird egg colouring to them. which is very reminiscent to the treatment given to the Scandanavian Tea pot in the previous section. Likewise the Earthenware pots and Candlestick holders, (Photograph /42) have a granite like texture to them. Notice also the blown glass fruit bowl without the cutting.

The Lamp, more than anything else, resembles some Scandanavian pieces with its cream white simple cone shaped shade and the steam bent wooden handle. The Jumpers display a nice use of texture, pattern and colour. The Aran jumper, (Photograph /39), is an example of a very old Irish craft design. Notice the love of deeply relieved geometric patterns.

With the exception of the Aran jumper which stems from an older tradition which could be linked to the Georgian or Celtic tradition, it can be seen that in this aspect of our design identity, the Scandanavian ethic has made itself felt.



146

Most would concede that in Ireland, low volume, craft design, with a reliance on locally available materials, it is possible to produce products/goods reflecting our craft traditions and our "Irishness" in that identity. The question whether or not we can give mass produced goods this quality, is a difficult one.

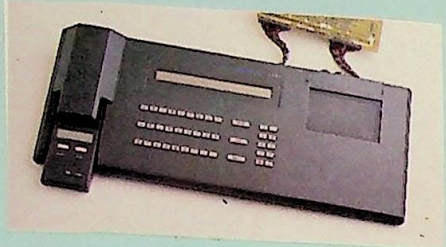
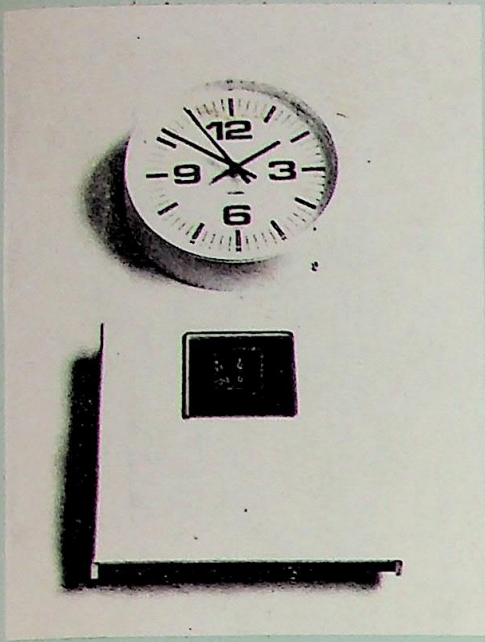
Post Box:

In today's terms in volume production, this product, (Photograph 146), would probably be classed as a batch production. The cast iron Post Box has been given a definite "Irishness". One of the reasons why is because it's an object which receives a lot of public notice. It was produced in the first decades of our independence. Under British Rule our post boxes were the same as in Britain. So, this is a small public declaration of "Irishness". To most Irish people, this is recognised as being Irish. The use of Gaelic script. That beautiful Irish "T", and the "and" is written in the old Gaelic "7" like way. In painted green it assumes patriotic colours. So we have vernacular mass produced product. It, in simple terms tells us what it is and where it comes from.

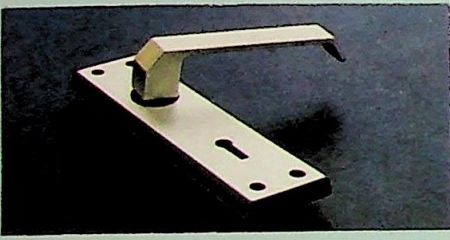
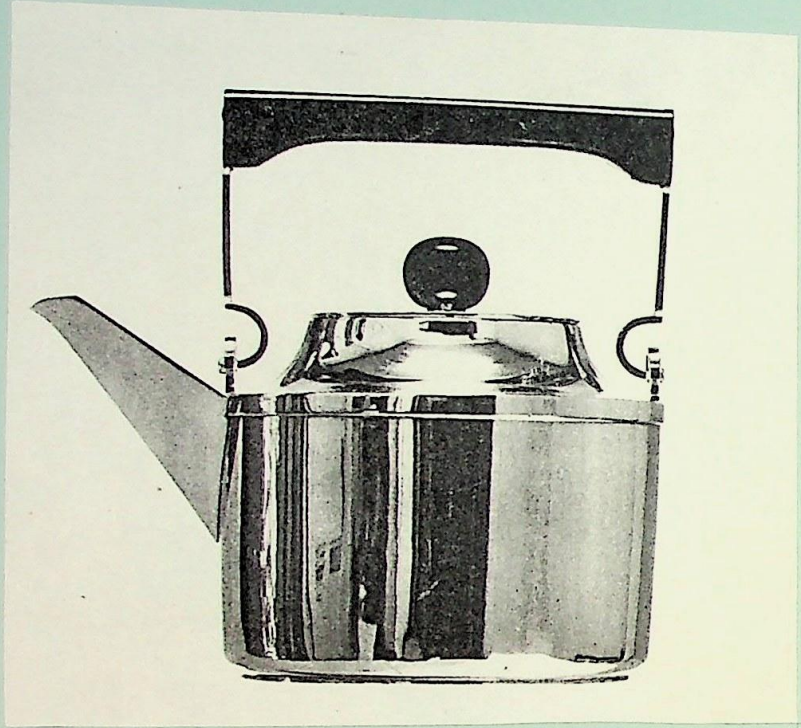
Looking at the rest of the products on these pages, (Photograph 148), we have a cross-section of products designed in Ireland over the last two decades. Few people could tell where they were designed. Some could fix dates on it. The chair for instance, (Photograph 150), is very 1970's like. But this is about as far as anyone could go. They are in many ways neutral products. Notice especially the clock, (Photograph 147).

In talking of design identity, one must admit that it is really only the cognoscenti, who set about discerning the differences.

147



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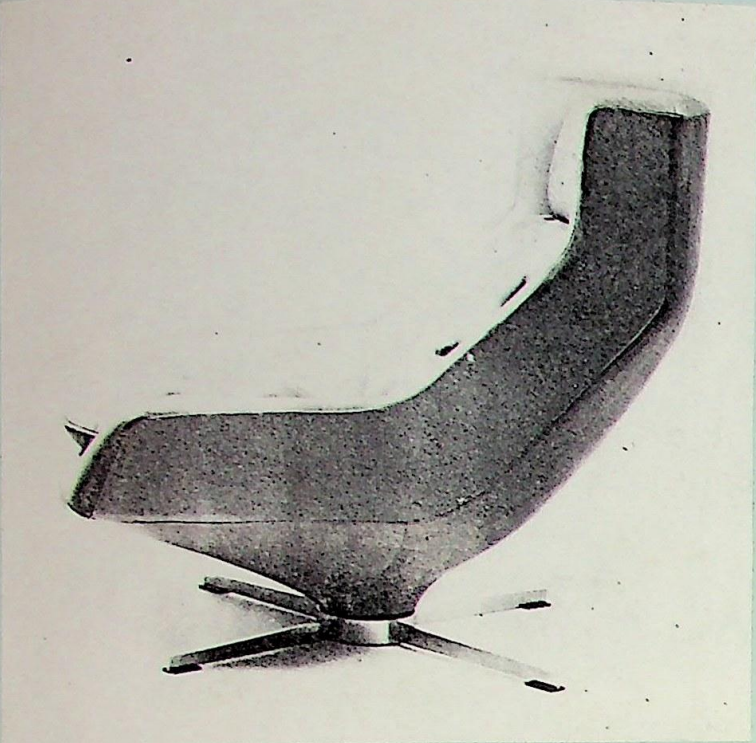


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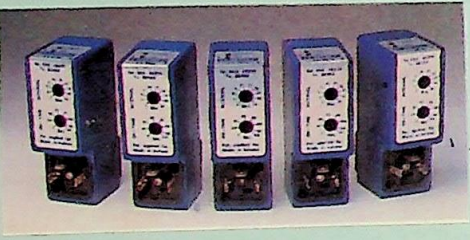
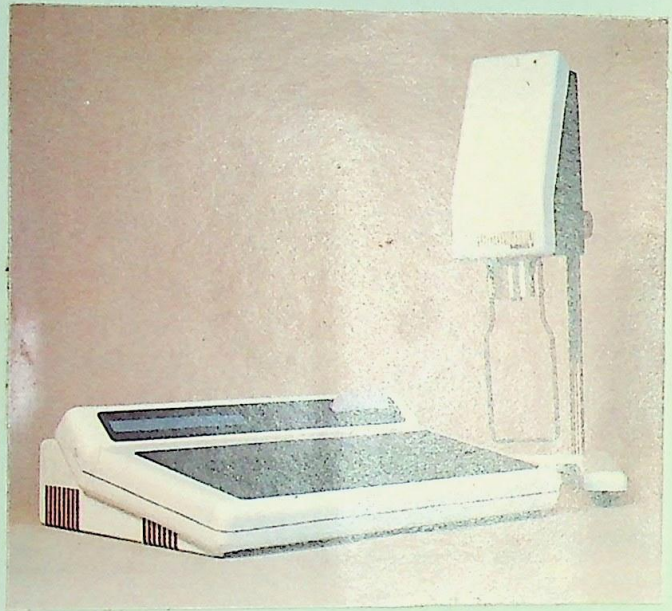


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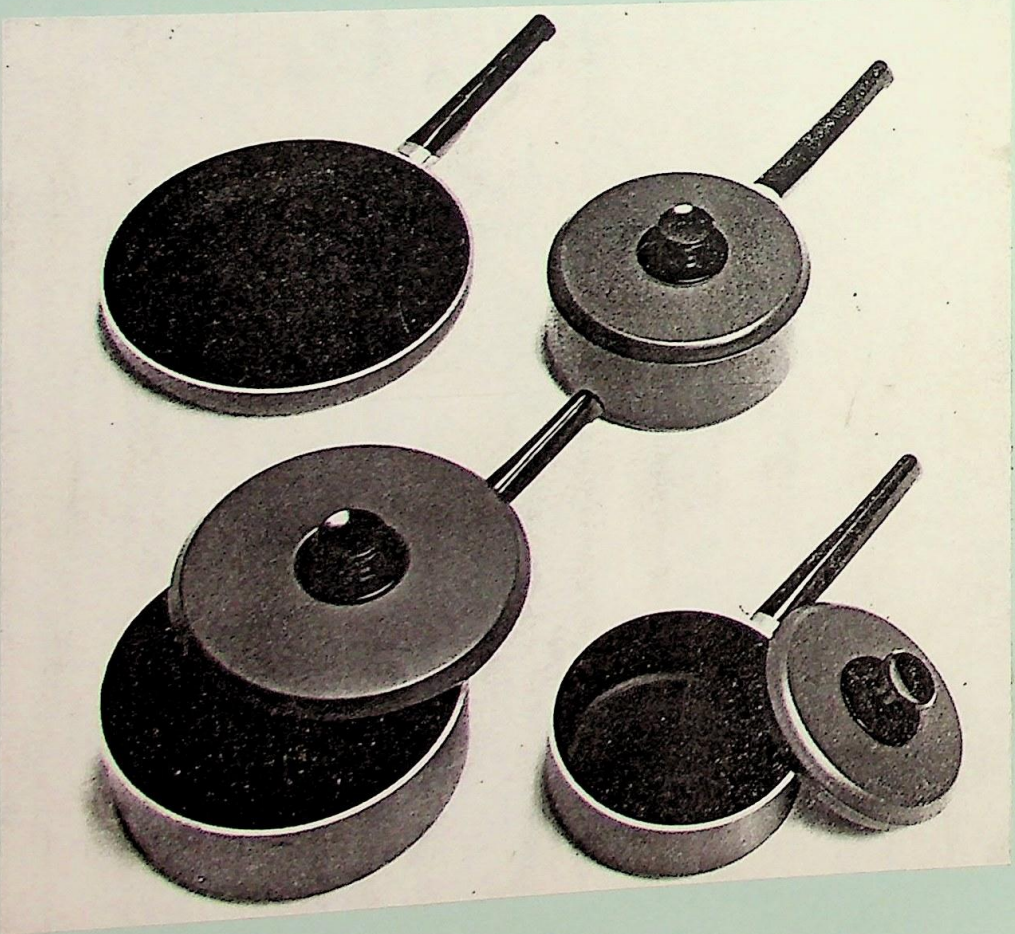


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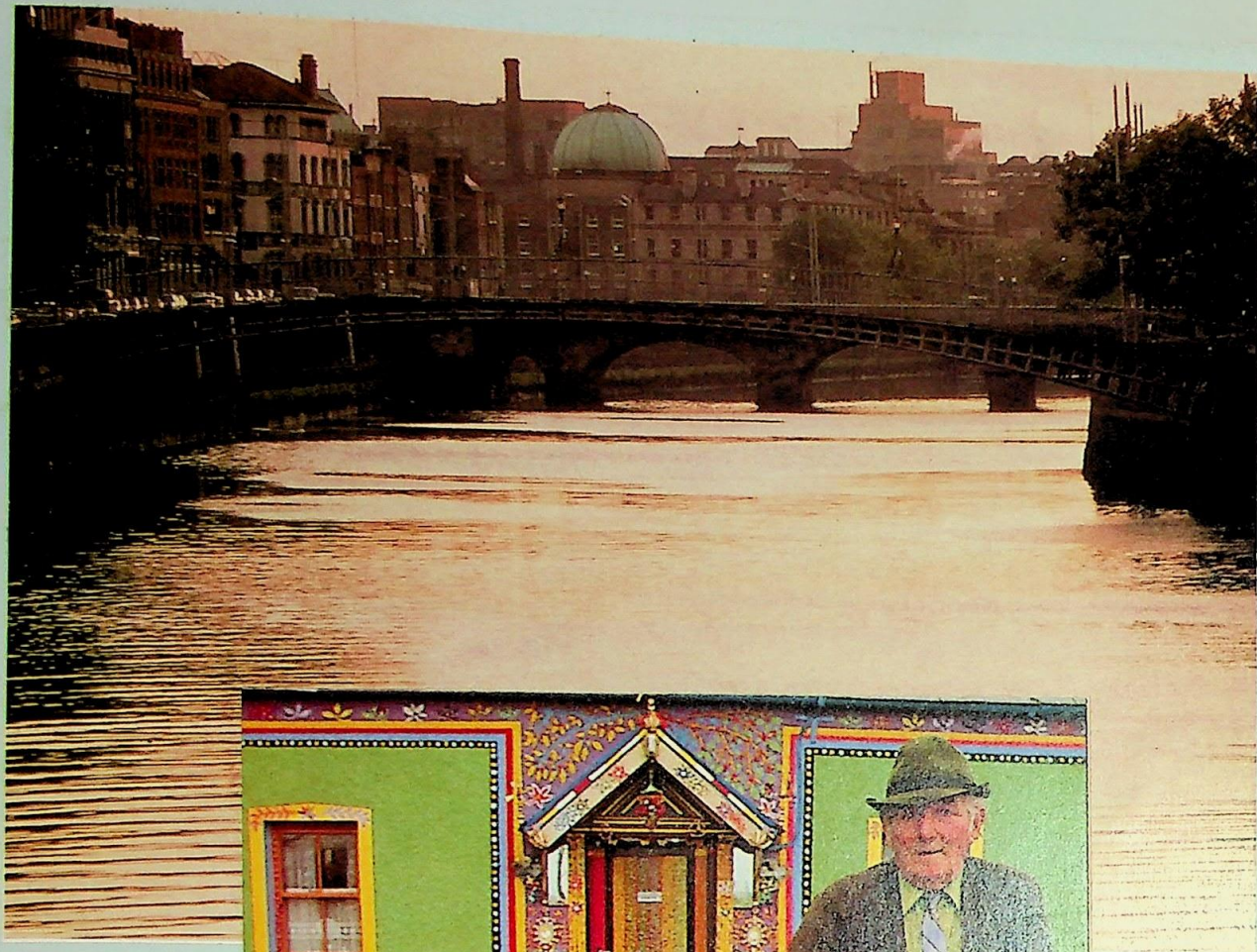


Having said that, definite cultural groups will look for definite design clues. Clients with certain preferences/markets in mind will know where to go.

In Ireland, our materialism is very evidently on the increase and as people's education, disposable income and travel increases, so will their tastes become more discerning. Brian Stevens points out that our "needs are not that different to anyone else's". A Japanese hi-fi will suit an Irishman as much as a Dutchman.

Oliver Hood, feels that our greatest obstacle is our size. No-one is going to produce mass produced goods for the Irish market, - they could not afford to, - it's too small. Bruno Zevi, argued that if one possesses an identity, one becomes stale, likening it to the classical salon of French art in the 19th Century. But a design identity is closely linked to an approach, one nation often being (unfairly or otherwise) stereotyped into one approach or attitude, which results from a certain mix of elements defining an environment. In Ireland we have a rich mix indeed, some would say complicated. Surely this would encourage a multiplicity of approaches. As it stands, design for high volume production, comes from clients primarily wishing to export, or foreign clients seeking design services here.

As previously stated, design is a bit like a person's character, moulded by its environment. Our environment consists of a whole multitude of things, from climate to national attitudes. The Irish environment is thus very diverse. This can be seen in the number of regional dialects which exist in the country. The ability of our future product designers in forging one or more Irish design identities, will probably depend upon their ability to draw upon that environment.



Irlande

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- * *Car Magazine* July 1985
- * *Life Magazine*
- * *Blue Print*, 1985
- * *Casa Vogue* 1984