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1970 ~ 1985**



BÉBHINN NICLIAM

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN, N.C.A.D.

DUBLIN, APRIL 1985



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## Introduction

This essay aims to explore domestic design of the past fifteen years, as experienced by Ireland and Britain. It is not a list of designers and their products which have been favoured by the progressive Upper-class. It is not about what today's Patrons-of-Design have purchased for their spacious architect-built houses, for the envy of their friends and other collectors. Rather it is about what ordinary people have been putting into their houses for the past decade and a half. Much of which has been abhorred as 'bad-taste' - but it all has been 'designed' at some stage before hitting the market. However, this is not a sociological discussion on buying patterns, but a look at the furniture, the kitchens, lampshades, and toilet-roll holders which adorn people's homes. It is a look at how the designs have changed over the years, what trends have been followed, and may hopefully give an insight as to the direction in which we are now travelling.

Of course, design does not work in a vacuum - it has its roots in society and how that particular society feels and thinks, its aspirations and doubts at any given time. Clothes fashion has always been a highly responsive indicator of this, and similarly product design, though it is a much slower moving elephant. What we are witnessing now is the increasingly important role of fashion in product design, and a decrease in the length of time for such products to be realized. This is taking into account the inevitable and unavoidable time-lag between a product being conceptualized and it being manufactured, compared to the swiftness with which clothes are produced in



response to certain trends. This general tendency has also meant that styles considered up-market or exclusive now progress a lot faster to mass-market level, albeit a commercial interpretation of that erstwhile high-style.

Miniaturization and lower prices have made quality consumer electronics available on the mass-market for the first time ever. The speed at which technology has been developing in this area has been phenomenal. In Design magazine of October 1967, there appears an article explaining the technology behind cassette tapes then being pioneered by Phillips, as opposed to the reel-to-reel tapes. Now the sight of people walking down the street wearing their Sony Walkmans, and probably singing along out of tune with the unheard music pounding only their eardrums, is not an uncommon one. Or even the sight of kids on the housing estates, break-dancing on a bit of old lino, with their 'ghetto-blasters' (stereo cassette players with high-powered speakers) on full volume. Perhaps the most startling example is that of the digital watch. Fifteen years ago the first one became available - retailing at \$1500. Now they have become petrol station give-aways.

Designers are part of the system in which goods are manufactured and sold to the public. Designers imbue an object with a certain symbolism that people understand, whether consciously or not: consider how the one object may be 'standard', 'de-luxe', or even 'super-de-luxe' depending on the exterior graphics and possibly a few extra features. According to Douglas and Isherwood<sup>1</sup>, two sociologists, goods are bought for several reasons; for ones material and psychic welfare, which is individual, and also display, which is social.



"Each of us", they write, "constructs a set of meanings, a visible part of our culture, with the goods we choose." In other words, whether it comes down to someone making a choice between an imitation Chipendale chair or a fold-up Habitat one, it will be a definite statement by that person about his or her life, and how he or she wishes to live.

Styles, or trends, are becoming more and more important in peoples lives. More is being spent on looking good, on ones home looking good, almost like sacrificial offerings against the world recession, and against the ravages of mass unemployment. However trends vary enormously; in the looks themselves and in their duration. Some of those discussed here have been short-lived, others have managed to survive great lengths of time.



# THE BACKGROUND - THE SIXTIES

There's a grand old dance that's rocking the nation  
Shake your money and shut your mouth  
Taking the place of copulation  
S'called the Bourgeois

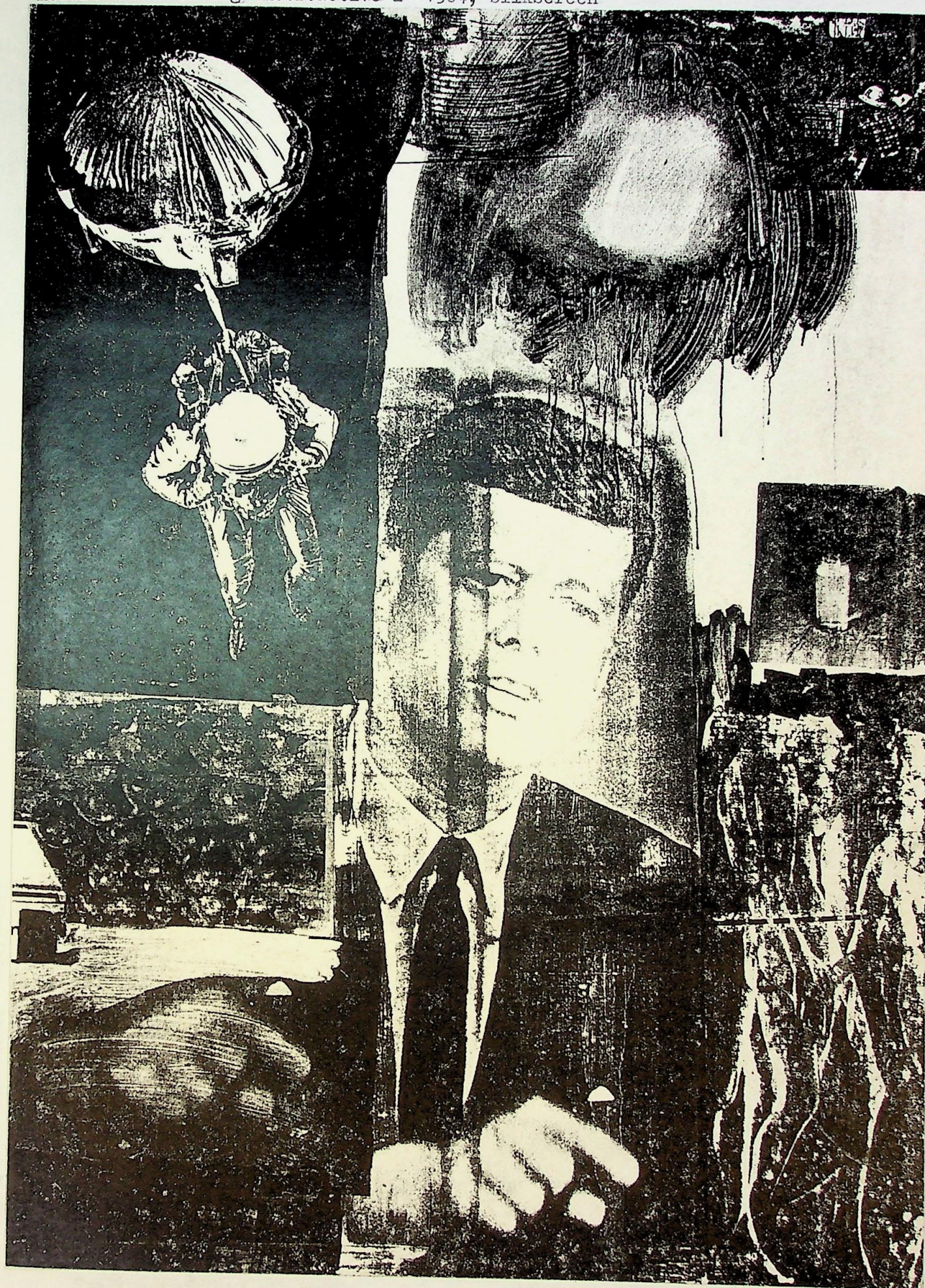
- Adrian Mitchell 'C'mon Everybody'

The postwar boom was a period of incredible economic expansion - world trade grew at the remarkable rate of 7.27% per annum, unlike anything experienced before.<sup>2</sup> During the boom, four times more goods were produced than in the entire previous history of humankind. The rate of progress itself was visibly increasing - when MacMillan said in 1959 that the British people had 'never had it so good', he was stating the obvious to most. The accelerating increase led to the situation where a 'generation gap' was opening up in a new way. It was a gap which expressed itself by different values and consumer patterns. The changes brought about the new 'consumerism', fueled by mass advertizing, based on the new media possibilities, such as T.V., then opening up. Mass advertizing was used to create a marginal (not radical!) dissatisfaction. It was a creed based on envy - the suggestion that a product can make ones life more fulfilling, and oneself more desirable, attractive, virile, feminine etc.

During the fifties and sixties the economic boom involved a massive expansion of personal credit facilities. It was due to the implementation of 'Keynesianism', whereby the economy expanded by virtue of deficit financing. The unreality of values then expounded were part and parcel of the unreality of the whole boom - which was shattered in the early seventies, with devastating results. It was the sixties which benefitted the most from this artificial boom -



Robert Rauschenberg "Retroactive 1" 1964, Silkscreen



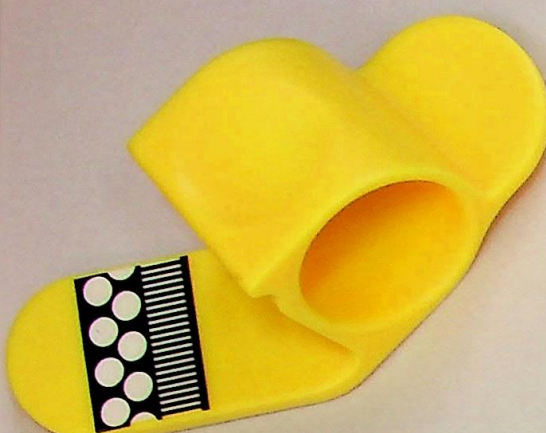




the rise of living standards generally led to a scurry of sociologists prophesizing the end of the working-class. It did not do that, but did lead to a highly confident decade, ready to explore all that seemed progressive. In retrospect, this time is often epitomized by erstwhile participants as being the age of the Beatles, of Mary Quant, of mini-skirts. Although the often-heard eulogies of the so-called 'Swinging Sixties' sound somewhat superficial to those too young to have known them, there does come out a certain sense of excitement. The new liberalism, 'permissiveness' - from Edna O'Briens banned writings to the new over-the-knee fashions, all seem to be part of that excitement. The first really effective female contraceptive, the 'Pill' was being pioneered. 'The young are bored' it was proclaimed. Pop and Op Art were the art forms, without even a pretence of having any ideals. No moralizing, just phun, phun, phun. Fun and the future - space exploration spawned many ideas. The Space Age gave birth to 2001 furnishings - all-white moulded plastic chairs - in a Barbarella soft environment of long-haired carpets. The copy of an advertisement from the late sixties ran: 'The Age of Firm, Straight Lines' - as firm and as straight as the lines of the Rank Bush Murphy television sets, all in primary coloured plastic.

The vision of a new society unhindered by economic crises, that was modern, mobile and flexible, took hold. Memories of ration-books were buried, as interest switched to disposables. Disposable shopping bags, clothes, furniture - even art was disposable in poster form. New concepts in furniture - not just disposable, but inflatable, suspended, transparent - all appeared around this time.





The bubble had to burst - discontent was just below the surface. The eruptions came in the late sixties, with worker and student unrest in virtually every part of the capitalist world. Paris was brought to a standstill, four American student protesters were shot dead by the National Guard, the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin was closed by disturbances, and in Milan the prestigious Triennale Exhibition was stormed by protesters and subsequently shut down. The Triennale was accused of exhibiting Design 'not relevant to real life'.<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King was assassinated and Czechoslovakia was invaded. The frivolity of the decade ended very suddenly and everything was questioned. Design for Need, Design for the Real World, Nearness to Need became the new slogans. The young were bored no more, they were fighting for causes. The innocent awoke and did not like what they saw.



## The Early 70s

Come Senators, Congressmen, please heed the call,  
Don't stand in the doorway, don't block up the hall,  
For he who gets hurt will be he who has stalled,  
The battle outside raging,  
Will soon shake your windows and rattle your walls,  
For the times they are a-changin'

- Bob Dylan, 'The Times They Are A-Changin'

This was the mood then, as the 1970's began. It ushered in a whole era of disillusionment and cynicism. In the U.S.A., Nixon was re-elected in 1972, the Vietnam War raged on, and the Watergate Scandal was about to break. In Britain, the Heath Government was toppled by industrial action in 1974 and succeeded by a Labour Govt. which implemented Tory policy. In 1979 it was ousted by the real thing. The Oil Crisis of 1974 had enormous repercussions on world trade; inflation spiralled upwards. In Ireland, government oscillated between Coalition and Fianna Fail, and still no solutions were found. It witnessed the massive P.A.Y.E. marches in 1979, and the phenomenon of mass youth unemployment. Just months after Carter had congratulated the Shah on how much his people loved him, revolution swept through Iran.

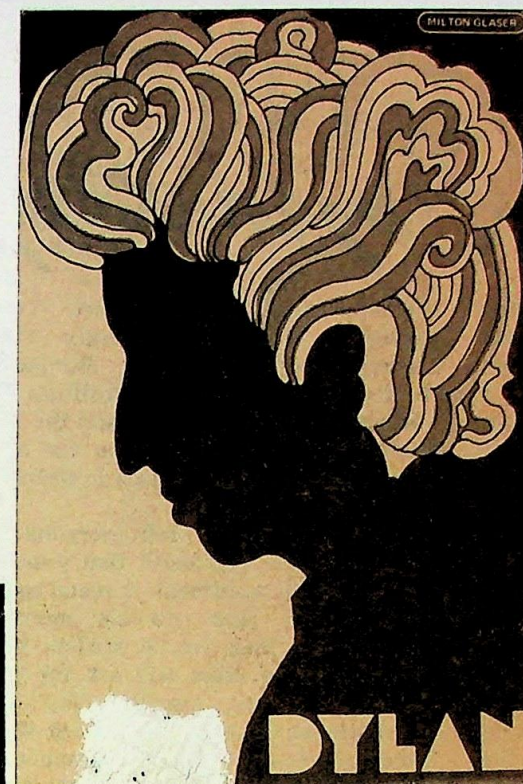
And we discovered the word 'ecology'. Designers too, it was discovered, had social responsibilities - both to the consumers they ultimately served, and to the world's natural resources. The all-plastic environment visualised in the Sixties lost its glamour when it was realized that not only were oil resources limited, but that oil prices were escalating. It was a time when 'the only real lasting values almost always meant rurality'. For those who could not physically move from the city to the newly-discovered countryside - and that meant most, as there was by no means any





2.

Poster 'Dylan' Milton Glazer



3.  
Poster "Jesus Christ Superstar"  
David Byrd, 1971  
Decca Records



**IT'S BACK!**

# JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR

**THE GREATEST  
ROCK MUSICAL OF ALL**

Presented by  
**Bill Kenwright**  
by arrangement with  
**Robert Stigwood and David Land**

Lyrics by **TIM RICE**      Music by **ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER**

Choreography **HENRY METCALFE**      Musical Director **DAVID CARTER**

Design **KATE ROBERTSON**      Lighting **STANLEY OSBOURNE-WHITE**

Directed by  
**BILL KENWRIGHT  
&  
BOB TOMSON**

Produced in association with Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch

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Parties of 20 or more: 10% off all seats (except 21 July)

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lasting values almost always meant rurality'.<sup>4</sup> For those who could not physically move from the city to the newly-discovered countryside - and that meant most, as there was by no means any mass exodus - it meant decorating their city apartments to look like country cottages. Synthetics were on their way out, natural fibres on their way in - for those who could afford them.

Psychedelia moved from the realms of hippy-dom into textiles - wallpaper, carpets, clothes, ceramic tiles, upholstery. It was possibly the first example of how a cult fashion could be made marketable, even quite respectable. There was also a revival of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, because the loose, flowing lines - of Art Nouveau especially - seemed akin to the drug-induced visions of the psychedelics. This was a very strong influence in the field of graphics, and was used to best effect in wall posters. Milton Glazer's Dylan poster captures the feeling of psychedelia very well, and the Jesus Christ Superstar example is Art Nouveau as seen through early Seventies' eyes.

If there is one word which sums up the colour schemes popular at this time, it has to be garish. Bright orange, lime-green and purple seem to have been the 'in' colours. Patterns were large, loud and intensive. This was at least the case until the Oil Crisis seriously hit home and the swing towards naturals (or at least imitation naturals!) took place around the mid-Seventies.

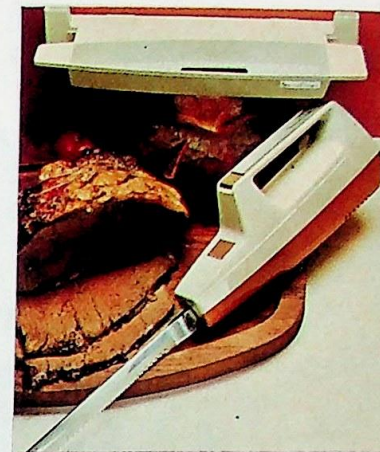
The kitchens then on the market were dominated by the colours orange and avocado, in shiny plastic laminates. Handles for the units were almost invariably of extruded aluminium running down the entire length, reinforcing the horizontal effect. Appliances were





6. Typical laminate kitchen, 1972

7. Swedish look slatted wood kitchen, 1974



4. Moulineux carver



5. Russell Hobbs coffee maker



8. Stag 'Symbol 300' fitted  
livingroom furniture



9. Typical bedroom  
of the early 70s -  
note low style bed  
and white fitted  
furniture





either in stainless steel or chromed, echoing the shiny metal of the handles, or in orange plastic offset with white. Although these kitchens are dominated by hard lines, the appliances had lost the Sixties angularity and ellipsoidal shapes and assumed more boxy shapes. They were 'softer' boxes however - curves, where present, were more fully circular, their radii more generous. Much of this was due to a better understanding of, and increased use of, moulding techniques. For more up-market kitchens, pine was a popular choice. Solarbo, a British firm, claimed to have introduced one of the first fitted pine kitchens into the country in 1970.<sup>5</sup> Kitchens made from pine were given the 'Swedish look' - slatted wood and clean lines.

Patterns seem to fall into three categories: psychedelic swirls which usually used bright, contrasting colours; the geometric patterns which were very loud and bold (with some of the geometrics utilising large, highly stylised florals as the basis for the pattern); and lastly there were the patterns which fell into the stripes category. Stripes were large, but in differing widths, and certain colour combinations were particularly popular - especially for curtains and upholstery. These consisted of warm, earthy colours, in combinations such as brown and cream, brown and beige, brown and orange. The other types of pattern, while using a lot of the brown-orange-cream combination, also explored cooler colours like indigo, dark greens, bright blue and purple. There appeared to be an overwhelming desire to cover any surface that could take it with these patterns, a desire only thwarted by a tendency to occasionally use contrasting monochrome furniture. The Stag 'Symbol 300' advertisement illustrates this quite well, with white formica wall units acting to ease the chaos





that would otherwise ensue from the eye-jarring patterns and colours.

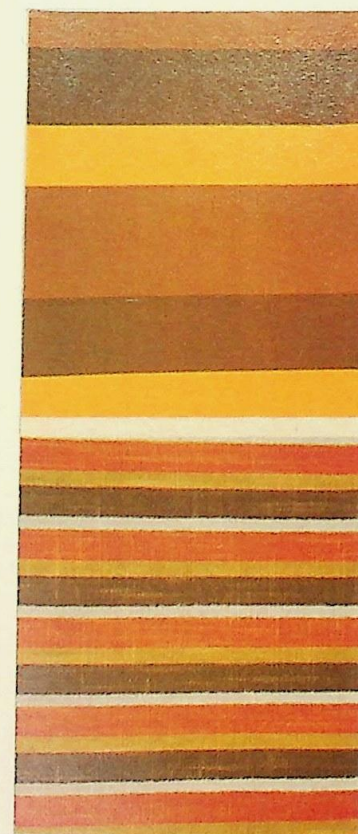
The 'modern' living room of the early Seventies was almost certain to contain some smoked glass and chrome. Marcel Breuer chairs fitted in well with this environment, as did the low glass-topped coffee tables and the new-style easy chairs and sofas. These are slightly reminiscent of the Sixties big cushion seating, but with the addition of a structure of chromed tubular steel. The ideal of the time would be to have this furniture set into very soft, white, long-haired carpet. That would have been the ultimate in modernity - although it is more likely that people would have chosen something along the lines of the Parker Knoll suite. Covered in that particular blue, very common at the time, but nevertheless in a tweedy fabric, it looks very reliable and sensible. Many manufacturers around this time began to use Polyurethane foam as the padding in chairs and sofas. It had the advantage of being cheaper than traditional materials, and allowed a greater range of people to afford the coveted matching three-piece suite. A long time was to pass before the fire hazard implications were realized.

The development of second generation nylons such as Acrilan and Courtelle, combined with new printing processes, led to a new type of carpet. The result was that it became possible to print complex, multicoloured patterns onto a synthetic, thus achieving an effect previously possible only in traditional, and much more expensive, woven carpets. Shown here are two such typical carpets from Carpets of Worth, which appeared in an advertisement in 1974; the text runs "...They all have crisp, lively colours and rich, striking designs, combined with the luxurious deep Acrilan pile of traditionally





10. 1974 Habitat advertisement, showing smoked glass and chrome look



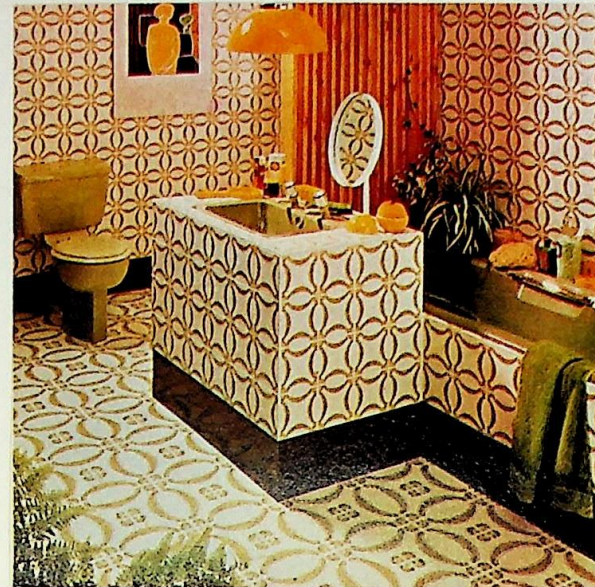
11.  
Stripes in  
vogue in early  
half of 70s



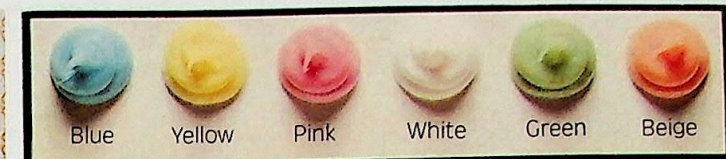
12. Parker Knoll 'Roskilde' suite in Sed-bergh Blue Tweed, 1974



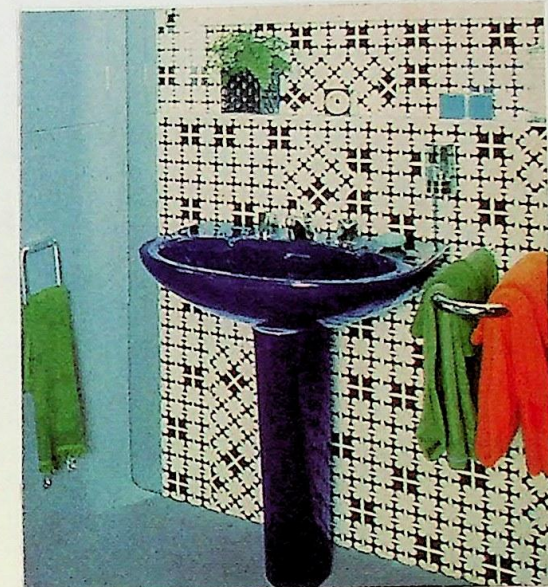




14. Bathroom suite in Avocado, with matching tiles



13. Colour swatch from Evo-stik Colour Seal



15. Sorrento Blue sink, 1972



16. Fashionable tableware, 1971

17. Carpets from 'Carpets of Worth' Acropolis range, 1974





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woven Axminster." Acrilan was at the time the synthetic which most resembled wool, although it has now been superseded by the arrival of the third-generation nylons, Antron and Trimbelle.

Bedrooms were changing too, under a continental influence. Beds were becoming lower, as little as eighteen inches off the ground in some cases, and blankets were being replaced by duvets; the 'continental quilts'. Fitted bedroom furniture became quite acceptable since it provided maximum storage space in what was often a fairly cramped space. The fitted units usually incorporated what had been separate items - the wardrobe, dressing-table, chest of drawers, bedside tables and even the headboard of the bed. Popular at the time was the all-white look, similar to that in the living room, though with some mock-Georgian adornments - fake edgings, gilt handles, and so on. This style of bedroom - whilst still finding an outlet - has by now definitely moved down-market.

Bathrooms at the start of the Seventies were nothing if not predictable, with a choice of only five colours. These were white, by far the most popular, pale blue, primrose yellow, light pink and turquoise. The colour swatch shown is from Evo-Stik's Colourseal, which "comes in six colours to match today's bathroom suites, showers and kitchen units". The sixth colour shown, beige, is likely to have been used for sealing kitchen tiles, since it was not for a few years that beige tones became available in the bathroom. Ceramics were used for all of the sanitary ware, with the exception of the bath which came in either cast iron or steel. This meant that the shape of the bath remained fairly rigid - for production purposes the shape had to be kept very simple, following either straight lines





or uninterrupted curves. Ceramics did however allow variations in the shapes of the smaller sanitary ware - they were given 'elegant' forms, which entailed the use of tapering sides and ovoid curves. Taps were of chromed steel, quite thin and spindly with 'X'-shaped handles. Gradually these were replaced by chunkier plastic-topped taps, and an 'Adapt-a-Tap' kit came on to the market to enable those who could not afford to completely change their taps to give them a modern look.

In the mid-Seventies, bathrooms began to grow more adventurous colourwise. The bathroom succumbed to the 'fashion colours' first to Avocado and Pampas, then to the brilliant Sorrento Blue, and finally to the incredibly popular Sunking - a very warm, cheerful beige tone. Sunking was very much in harmony with the prevailing taste for natural, earthy colours that were entering the home.





## The Late 70s

It was around 1975 that kitchens began to look much heavier, mostly under the influence of German imports. Dark woods dominated, and only lightened towards the end of the decade. Nostalgia was in, and not only in the kitchen - all other areas of the house began to follow suit. These 'rustic' dark-wooded kitchens were so popular, appliances had to adapt to their new surroundings. One finds at this time that both the 'large whites' (refrigerators, ovens, dishwashers etc.) and the 'small whites' (mixers, liquidizers) had in effect become browns. In fig. 18 one can see how the wall-mounted oven and the Miele dishwasher were made to blend in with the rustic Mobilia kitchen. It was in this period that appliances began to be 'built-in' - previously whilst giving that impression, they were essentially free-standing. An attempt to give a cohesive look to a rustic kitchen that contained many highly technical products, led to the use of facades. The false-fronted dishwasher was then able to give the illusion of being just another cupboard unit. The Neff oven was designed to fit in with the rustic kitchen, but in a more subtle way than simply hiding behind a facade. Ovens had separated themselves from their hobs - ovens could be anywhere, eyelevel, contained in a base unit or wall mounted - hobs could be found anywhere along the worksurface. Hobs, too, began to come in coloured versions, usually either plain or two-toned beige, to fit in with the rest of the kitchen.

Appliances in general fell in with the 'brown and beige' look, everything from carpet-sweepers to sandwich-makers. It was an all-prevailing and durable trend - some manufacturers are still using that







18. Mobilia dark-wooded rustic kitchen, mid-70s



19. Tower range of 'Slo-cookers' in brown and beige

20. Allmilmo 'Contura Edelweiss' soft white kitchen, 1979





colour scheme for their products (Goblin vacuum-cleaners are still in brown and beige, to this day), although in design terms it is very much a dead trend. There is an understandable conservatism amongst manufacturers against changing, bearing in mind just how popular the brown and beige look was and the fact that it lasted so long. In fact, for the last half of the seventies, it was the neutral look, and is only now really being replaced by light grey.

The end of the seventies witnessed the reemergence of the all-white kitchen. This kitchen was however completely different in character to its 1950s equivalent - it was a clinical white, alright, but much softer and friendlier; even the edging between the verticals and the worksurfaces was radiused. The image given is of one continuous length of worksurface, in which the sink and cooking hob appear to be moulded in. In the photograph shown (fig.20), of the Allmilmo 'Contura Edelweiss' kitchen of '79, it can be seen how the undulating surfaces of the units are used to give a much less formidable effect than would be expected from an all-white kitchen.

Livingrooms fell under the brown influence fairly early on. Modular seating units were popular for their flexibility; again different shapes were achieved through the use of Polyurethane foam - massive, sculptural forms. Brown-patterned velveteen was favoured as the upholstery material. Sideboards were of teak, dark stained oak or mahogany - all very dark woods, though usually on offer with them was a white laquered version, for those seeking less sombre furnishings.







21. Livingroom with typical dark brown colour scheme, 1975



Not surprisingly, items such as televisions, hi-fis and videos, that would be found in the livingroom environment, would be treated as furniture and given the 'dark wood' treatment. Record-players were encased in a veneer of wood, and the transparent plastic lids tinted a dark brown. T.V.s were given an all-over imitation wood effect, with metallic control buttons set into a chromed panel at the front. Radios, because they had been long-since ousted from the livingroom and put into the kitchen or bedrooms, by and large escaped being encased in fake wood. In the illustration (fig.21), it is a strange feeling to look at the Telefunken cassette player - to eyes looking back over ten years in time, the entire object seems so big and clumsy, its controls awkwardly placed, with those dated looking toggle switches, its headphones incredibly heavy and massive. And yet, only four years on in 1979, the Sony TCM 600 - a forerunner of the Walkmans - appeared on the market. The TCM 600 was a cassette-tape recorder driven with a tiny core-less motor and was just slightly larger than the actual cassette-tape itself. It retailed at ST£ 150, comparable in price to one of the more advanced turntables. In relative terms the price has since tumbled down, especially that of the non-Sony versions of the Walkman.

The living room soon began to change again, as the warm but sombre dark brown was beginning to feel too oppressive. Around 1977, there is a noticeable upsurge of interest in chinzies - they began to saturate home decorating magazines, furniture shows and shops, and soon found their way into people's homes. Delicate florals appeared on upholstery, on curtains, wallpapers, tablecloths, cushion-covers. Laura Ashley reigned supreme. It was the start of the totally coordinated look - there was no mix-and-match, just match, match, match. And





22. 'Spanish Garden' dinnerware from Midwinter, 1976, on background of Vymura wallpaper patterns, 1975

23. Victoriana in the livingroom, 1977.



24. 'Melrose' and 'Amberly' cotton fabrics from Liberty, 1977



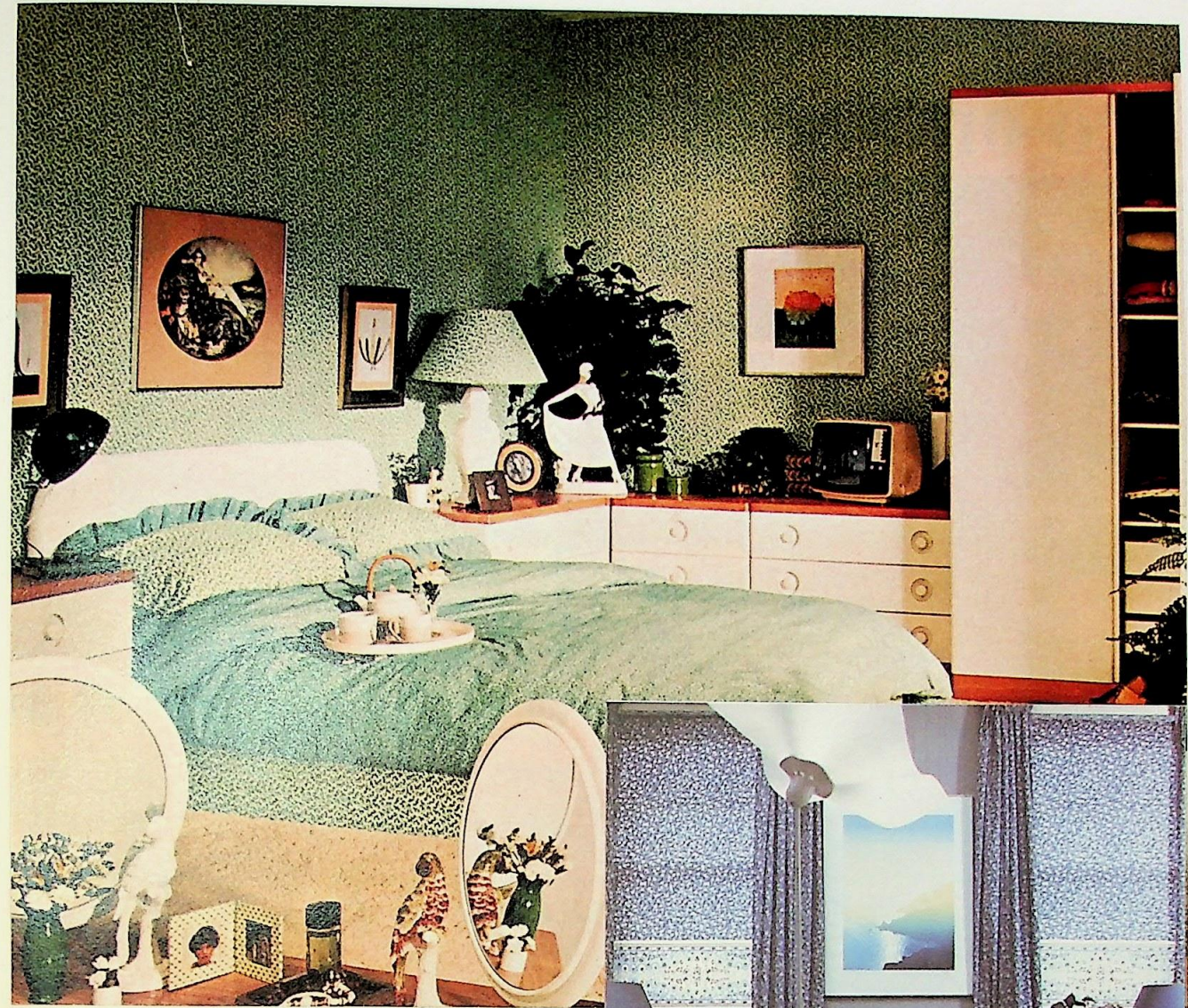


preferably with lots of frills. Everything had a whiff of Victoriana about it - so much so, that even in bedrooms there was a resurgence of brass bedsteads. If that was outside of one's financial capabilities, one could always make do with patchwork quilts and lots of lacy frills and ruffles. The coordinating look spilled out of Victoriana and into non-nostalgic designs. Dorma were to the forefront of putting these onto the mass-market, as shown in this advertisement of '78 (fig. 26). The other illustration (fig.25) is from Stag bedroom furniture, which has a similar idea in mind. Here the same pattern covers the bedwear, the mattress, the lampshade and all the walls.

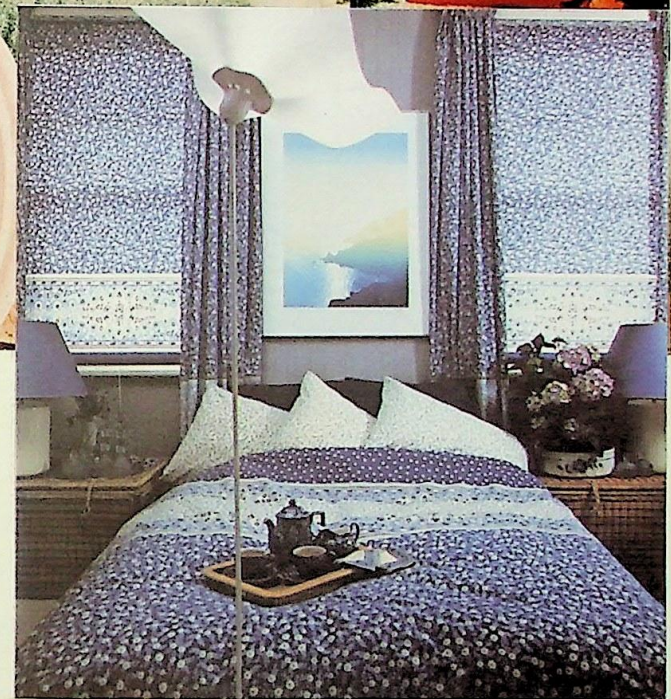
The changeover from the large, loud patterns, mentioned earlier as being typical of the early '70s, to the small, 'feminine' patterns, did not occur overnight. There was a transitional phase when the early '70s patterns toned down somewhat, retaining their basic format, but becoming smaller and more subdued. The MidWinter earthenware 'Spanish Garden' is fairly representational of this transitional phase, as is the selection of Vymura wall coverings (fig.22)

Bathrooms in the post-1975 period became more susceptible to fashion trends - the afore-mentioned 'Sunking', 'Pampas', and other colours soon became entrenched in the bathroom, and, indeed, were the main colour stories in the bathroom. However, at this time, there was the debut of the aptly named Penthouse range of colours - a very deep blue, red, and occasionally a deep green as well. Another colour which came into existence in the bathroom, although not strictly speaking part of the Penthouse range, was a very dark brown, called either 'Sepia' or 'Bali Brown'. It was only top-of-the-line bathrooms that darkened so drastically, and these were aimed at the sophisticated





25. Bedroom setting for Stag furniture advertisement, 1977



26. 'Bercy' range of bedlinen, blinds and curtains designed by Mary Quant for Dorma, 1978



27. 'Salisbury Model 110' brass bedstead in Victorian style from And So To Bed





28. Armitage Shanks bathroom suite in Pacific Blue - bath is in acrylic

29. Reproduction free-standing cast iron Victorian bath



30. 'Romana Gold' by Balterley Bathrooms, Grecian Key on Penthouse Red, 1977





buyer. The Penthouse range is still on the market, but 'Sepia' turned out to be a loser. It was simply not suited to bathroom usage, as one salesperson put it: "Sepia is so dark it's impossible to clean ... and the loo cistern shows up the slightest bit of dust!" A lesson, perhaps, that not all fashion colours are suited to the functional bathroom.

Towards the end of the '70s, Victoriana started to appear in the bathroom as well. It was a popular trend, but did not have mass-popularity. Again, it was an up-market look, aimed at the (rich) sophisticates, finding an outlet in a rekindled interest in 'period pieces' - free standing cast iron baths(fig.29), and reproduction brass brass taps complete with white ceramic handles. It is only now that this look has in any way moved down-market, with the advent of marbled wallpapers and wooden toilet seats, which allow an existing bathroom to be adapted. Victoriana in the bathroom mingled with the 'opulent' look - and opulence could also be transferred to contemporary bathrooms, as with the the 'Romana Gold Collection' by Balterley Bathrooms (fig.30) They called it the 'ultimate opulence' - the motifs applied are in 22 carat gold, with gold coloured taps to match. In many ways this was a natural progression from the Penthouse look.

Although sinks and lavatories were still made from ceramic, the bath had changed from cast iron or, more commonly, steel to acrylic. There were quite a few reasons for this change: for the distributors and the manufacturers it greatly lessened the transportation costs, as acrylic is a much lighter material than those used previously. Another reason was due to changes in house construction - new houses were not being installed with such solid floors as before, chipboard



becoming the most common type of flooring material. Chipboard is not a good load-bearing material for such heavy objects as cast iron baths, and so a lighter material was needed for the bath. Using acrylic for baths meant that many more moulded-in features could be incorporated. This could include hollows for soap, recesses for grips, and basically a more body-friendly shape could be sculpted into the bath form. It led to many experimental shapes in baths - corner baths, sit baths, and round baths were all developed using acrylic. It was an attempt to get away from the old rectangular shaped bath, though obviously, where space was at a premium, that was the most economical shape. Showers, which were becoming increasingly popular, both as an appendage to, and substitute for, the bath, could use the new material to its advantage.

To recap on the main developments of the 1970s, there was a general swing over the decade from 'modern' to nostalgia, which seems to have been part of a larger recurrent cycle. Kitchens went from plastic fronted to rustic looking, and kitchen appliances became built-in, and used a lot more sophisticated electronics. The livingroom changed from Bauhaus glass and chrome, through a 'brown velvet' phase, to rediscovered floral chinzes. The bedroom came under a strong continental influence, with low beds and duvets, and also saw the introduction of fitted bedroom furniture before the Victorian style emerged. Bathrooms went from the five standard 'bathroom colours' to explore different colours and shapes. By the end of the decade there were signs that the nostalgic revival had worn itself out. Housewares had begun to look boring after years of the 'safe' brown and beige look. Hi-tech, a design style that had been born on the other side of the Atlantic, began to make an impact over here, although confined





HI  
TECH®

THE DESIGN LOOK OF THE EIGHTIES

31. Letterpaper design from Fante,  
New York, purchased 1982

32. Front cover photograph of 'House and Garden' December 1982 issue





at first to electronic equipment. Hi-tech arose as a deliberate breaking away from the fussiness which was threatening to take over design, and as its name suggests, Hi-tech took its imagery from factories and warehouses, areas in which design by necessity was purely functional and the 'minimalist' aesthetic was merely a by-product of this.



## Into the 80s

It doesn't seem that long ago  
 When everyone was in work  
 And no one was short.  
 But now its a crime,  
 A criminal waste,  
 When friends can't turn around  
 And look into each others face.

Push the boat out and dance,  
 We're staying behind  
 And if the sea gets rough,  
 There's no second chance ...

It's Immaterial: "The Better Idea"

At the start of the '80s the recession was still gathering full steam, with no sign of it having worn itself out. Any mini-booms or predicted growths in the economy had little or no effect on the general conditions. Many well established companies, having survived the great depression of the Thirties, could not cope with that of the Eighties. The recession has had a two-fold effect on companies, because the realization that there are no easier times just around the corner is being forced on them, that they are faced with a do-or-die situation. It is brought to their attention exactly how crucial it is to have the correct product on the market at any given time. So they are faced with a choice: some choose to engage in price-wars to stay ahead of the competition, others opted for the quality market. The cheap end of the market was - and still is - highly competitive, and was constantly being under-priced by cheap labour Taiwanese or Hong Kong imports. Indeed, a lot of firms were forced to go up-market as they realized they could not hold their own in the kamakazi mass-market. Moving up-market required the manufacturer to be more responsive to fashion needs. Also, manufacturers were forced to



look for new market types all the time, and so started aiming their produce at young wage-earners, not just the established settled married couple market. Hence their designs are directed now at what will appeal to these young wage-earners: fresh, bright and different to what their parents might buy. Walking through any department store in Dublin verifies the change from just a few years ago - the everlasting brown-and-beige has been thrust completely into the background, if visible at all, and on the shelves all the newest trends are to be seen, from primaries to pastels. To a certain extent, inflation has been responsible for the change - lessened spending power means that people, once they have decided to buy something, are more likely to go for quality goods, as it is seen more as an investment than merely a purchase.

#### THE RED AND WHITE LOOK

Kitchens were one of the first areas to feel the effect of the new direction, in quite a dramatic fashion. The heavy dark-wooded kitchens of the Seventies were replaced by a totally new 'red and white' look, sparked off by Siematic introducing to Ireland and Britain the first red and white kitchen, in 1980. This colour scheme proved so popular that soon every kitchen manufacturer with even just a half-eye on the market was producing their own versions of it. Murray, Arco of Waterford, Elizabeth Ann, Rational, were a few amongst many who fell in with this trend. What it meant usually in effect a white kitchen with red decor: white worktop and door fronts, set off by red 'stiles' between units, red handles on doors, and maybe also an all-red sink and taps. The over-all look was then achieved by continuing the red/white theme onto the flooring, wall coverings, curtains





33. Red and White kitchen from Elizabeth Ann, 1983  
 INSET: 34. 'Harlequin' kitchen from Habitat, 1984

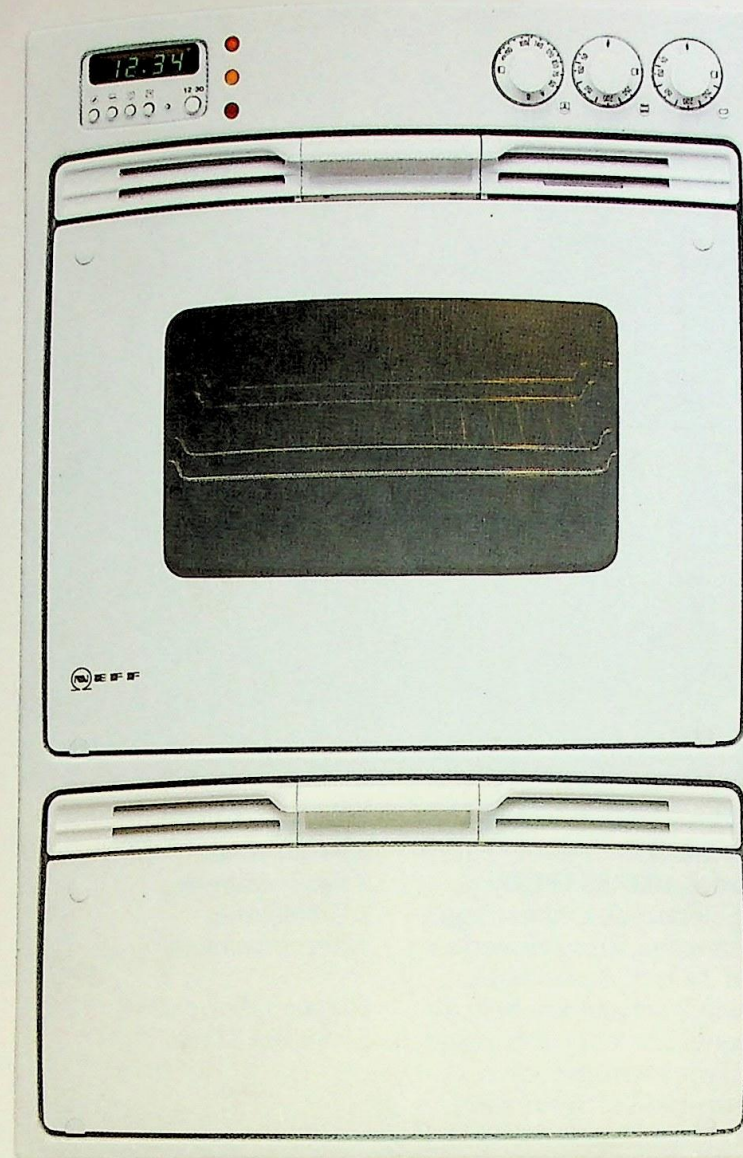


35. Redcurrant motif from  
 Habitat, 1981

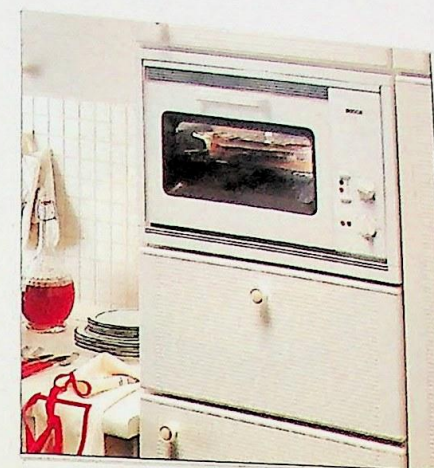


36. 'Designer' range of  
 kettles and electric  
 toasters from Swan





37. Neff all-white built in oven combining electronics with soft white contours



38. Bosch all-white Micro-wave oven

39. Alnoroy neoclassical kitchen



ALNORoy lackiert weiß-blau



and so on. Patterns were often of a red grid on white - a modified 'hi-tech' look, or simply juxtapositioning of red and white floor or wall tiles. Habitat provided a range of patterns to fit in, including a stylized redcurrant motif (fig.35). One of the main reasons the red and white look was so popular was that it was so easy to accessorize with matching products. Red plastic washing-up bowls, drainers, pot-scrubbers, all became readily available when their manufacturers saw that the orange and dark brown versions weren't going down so well in the new kitchens. Appliances changed to all-white as the dark brown no longer fitted in with the prevailing colour schemes. Amongst the first to do so were A.E.G., Neff, and Bauknecht (fig.37). Some of the appliances were given red racer stripes to integrate them even more - such as the Option Three gas cooker from TI New World. Likewise, the Swan range of enamelled cooking pots and the Sona electric kettle assumed their stripes. This red and white look was new for kitchen and tableware here, but it should be remembered that in Germany, where it originated, it had been going for quite a while - as far back as 1977, and probably even further, German department stores had been full of red and white wares. In Germany, the red heart motif was immensely popular at the time - this was where red hearts were placed polka-dot style on white, or occasionally it would be done in reverse - especially for tableware; earthenware, tablecloths, serviettes and so on.

The red and white look spilled into the other areas of the house with varying degrees of success. Ultimately it proved to be too harsh for the livingroom, although it went down very well in the bedroom, especially childrens or 'young-teen' bedrooms. In the bathroom it had also a limited success - here the look was achieved by using red



lavatory seats, toothbrush holders and towelrails, against a background of a white bathroom suite and tiles.

The red and white look was so popular and such a strong trend in the early Eighties, that it is doubtful that it will last much longer - it has such visual impact, that one can tire of it very quickly; ironically, the very impact which made it such a success in the first place. Already the typical red/white products have diversified in appearance - Sona now offer their white electric kettle with not just red stripes but also with blue, green, and (for the more conservative) bitter brown stripes. Kitchens likewise come now not only in red and white, but white-with-a-choice-of-primary-colours-plus-green. Habitat go one further, and offer a basic white kitchen called 'Harlequin', in which all the primary colours can be present according to the wishes of the purchaser (fig.35). The white-with-primaries look will have a somewhat longer timespan because it is more flexible than just red and white. It can either be a child's playroom burst of colour or a more elegant all-over white with just the edgings and small detailing in strong colour. Not all the variations have been explored.

Nostalgia has come back into the kitchen, but in a totally different way. It is now not so much rustic, as neo-classical, albeit countrified neo-classical (fig.39). Wood is laquered white, often with some panel detailing in a cool pastel blue. The start of 1985 saw Rational expand on this theme; "the fashionable 62, cathedral-arch door in white oak with blue insert, is broadened with two new insert colours, Mother of Pearl and Pastel Green."<sup>6</sup> This is, of course, in line with the more recent growth in pastel colours. Where woods are used in their natural state, they are invariably the blonde woods



such as ash and beech. The entire impression given is one of summer and lightness, quite different from the appearance of the wood kitchens of five years before.

#### TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Technically, appliances have improved quite a lot over the past decade or so. For instance, the convection oven, which was introduced by a Japanese company in 1974, has now become very common. The convection oven operates by forcing hot air to circulate, thus encouraging even heating of the food, and it was considered near-revolutionary in its time. Microwave ovens, which had actually first been brought out in the late Sixties, were radically improved upon. In the early versions, even potatoes used to explode in them. They were not very satisfactory for cooking with, and their major outlet was in the catering industry where they were used for the rapid reheating and defrosting of food. It was the development of more accurate heat and time controls that provided a greater number of cooking options, making microwaves infinitely more suitable for domestic functions. Indeed, some microwaves now on the market offer the consumer a choice of cooking methods, having a combined grill and convection oven built into them. In this way the new microwave ovens can 'brown' a roast if the user avails himself of the convection facility after the microwaving is complete - with a simple microwave one ended up with a fully-cooked roast, but without the reassuring brownness on its surface. They can now also be used to bake cakes, although pastry chefs may dispute the quality. Without any kind of sizeable market push, it was found that 6% of all British households owned a microwave. This may



seem a fairly small percentage, but considering that the equivalent figure for Video Recorders stood at 8% after enormous advertising hype, it is significant. It was the discovery of such statistics which induced the British Gas Board to begin displaying microwaves in their showrooms this year! It was also discovered that ownership of microwaves straddled the entire social spectrum - from night-shift workers and long-distance lorry drivers to the 'professional' classes.<sup>7</sup> Another interesting fact was that young couples with a limited amount of kitchen space, were often opting for microwave ovens rather than much larger conventional ovens.

Not surprisingly, the growth in the microwave market has led to a new generation of ovenware geared towards it. The best material for ovenware was found to be Polysulfone, a polymer which is virtually invisible to the microwaves. Although certain ceramics can be used they are much less efficient, since to some degree they all absorb microwave energy. In this situation, designers have had the problem of trying to make acceptable a material. Polysulfone, which in the popular mind cannot be associated with cooking, and of trying to give the containers the feeling of 'cookware'. So far the problem has been solved by making them look like white ceramic souffle dishes, complete with fluting in some cases, but it will be interesting to see future developments. Polysulfone, not the most pleasant of plastics to handle, may be accepted in time; in order to manage this texture may have to be applied. Further developments may make polysulfone capable of taking colour without it interfering with the cooking process. The need for rotating dishes inside microwave ovens, which enforced a circular shape on the ovenware, now no longer exists because of the development of more efficient



methods of directing the microwaves. This could lead to oblong and rectangular shapes which would use the space within the oven more efficiently. In addition, the spread of combination microwaves might entail the development of a new plastic which is both invisible to microwaves and resistant to direct heat, even at very high temperatures. Although the microwave ovens of 1985 are superior appliances to those of the Sixties, we can conclude that they have not yet reached a stage of near-perfection - they have only recently moved out of the realms of new technology. On the other hand they are far more than reheating devices, and from all the signs so far are about to enjoy an expanding market.

#### THE NEW NEUTRAL

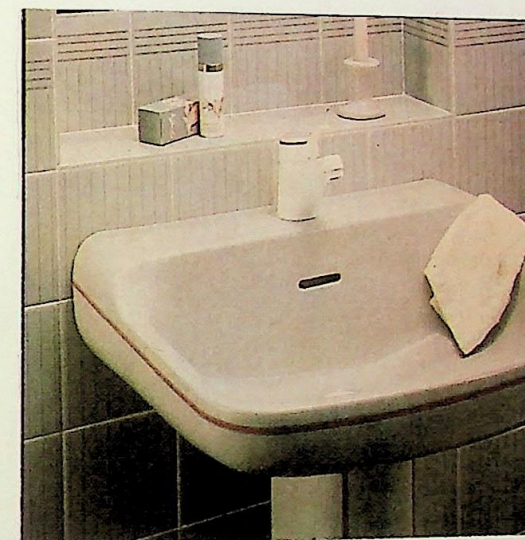
One of the main new colour stories in the home is grey. Grey was established in fashion clothing for a couple of years before being tentatively introduced on products. In clothing grey has proved to be a durable trend, and, especially in mens fashion, has more or less replaced the beiges, navy and black. In product and furniture design it is safe to say that grey is rapidly becoming the major neutral colour. The grey usually used is a cool, light grey, although earlier grey products experimented with darker tones and warm greys. The new grey is mainly used in combination with a lot of white, and often with a highlighter in a different colour. The white is needed, otherwise the product starts looking like a battleship - grey looks dead unless enlivened by white or another light or bright colour. The only exception is when an extremely pale grey - a 'pastel' grey - is used.



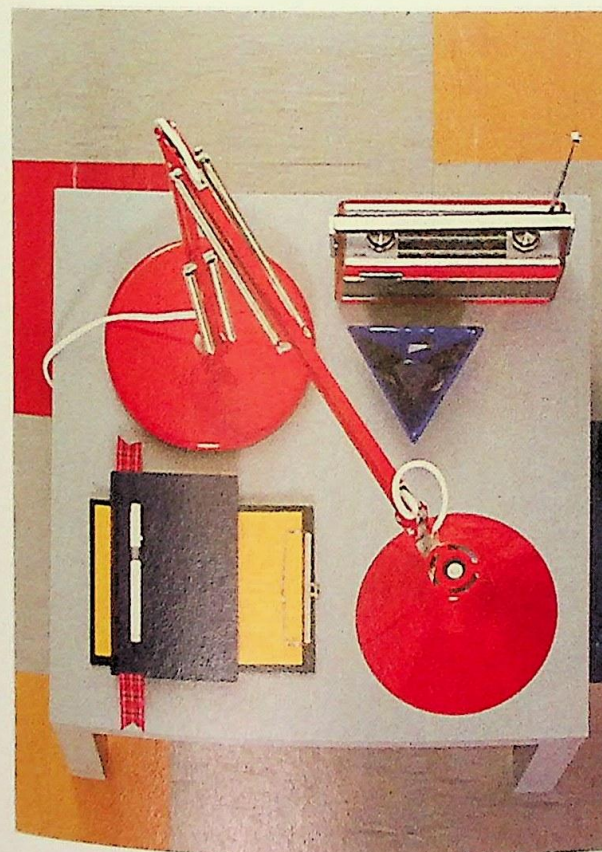


40. 'Flash' 2-seater sofa by Steiner

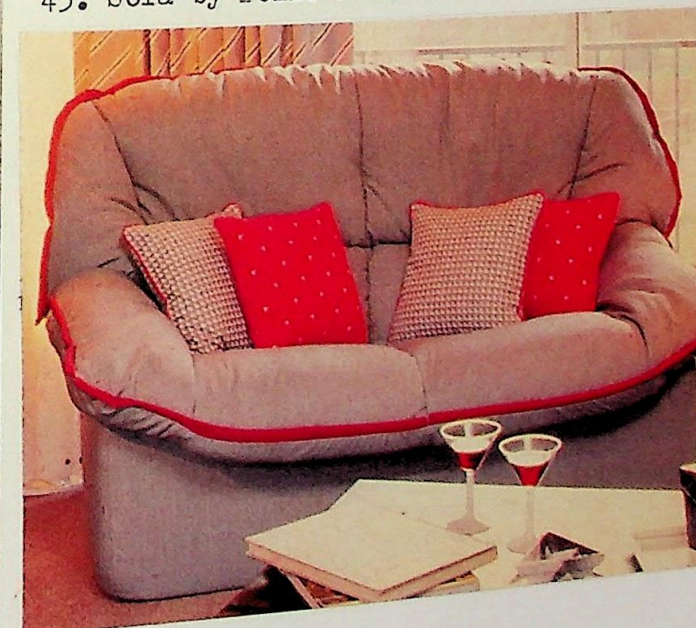
41. 'Whisper Grey' suite with rose line by Ideal Standard



42. Grey with primaries look



43. Sofa by Folio furniture





A popular combination, and one which is still being used, was grey with primary yellow. This was often in the form of stripes - the new-style stripes, unlike their early Seventies predecessors, are quite broad and regular, as shown on the 'Flash' sofa. Grey, it was discovered, worked equally well with all the primary colours. It was a way of toning down the 'young look', making it less hectic, and so could work well where a slightly more relaxed atmosphere was required, in the living-room or bedroom, for example.

Grey has moved into the kitchen as well now. In Ireland the development has been somewhat tentative: shops do have grey-fronted kitchens on display, but the experience of 'Studio A' (Allmin8 kitchen stockists) was that these were not selling - apparently people still prefer what, on the continent, would be considered the older lines. A swight timelag is only to be expected, given Ireland's less affluent economy. The fact that many manufacturers are introducing grey kitchens does not mean, therefore, that they will become more popular. A.E.G. have just added two new colours to their range of appliances - within the last two months, in fact: '...a light grey and a mid grey, to match the growing trend in grey kitchens.'<sup>8</sup> Allmin8 themselves offer eight variations on the grey kitchen, in three distinct greys - a light grey (cf. fig. 44), a pewter grey and a blue toned grey. Kambrooks upright plastic kettle has a white body with a light grey handle and lid. Swan now have a range of holloware in grey (cf. fig. 45) - they are coated in a light grey enamel, with grey handles and knobs, and a motif using a swightly darker grey with red.

Allibert, a leading manufacturer of bathroom accessories, now has







44. Almilmo's light grey 'Optima' kitchen

45. Swan range of grey cookware





a range in grey, so it would appear that no room in the average household has escaped the influence of grey - and these are early days yet.

## PASTELS

Pastels are another new colour development. They have returned to the bathroom after a noticeable absence, but have changed since the Seventies. The new pastels, as introduced by Ideal Standard, are much lighter than the old, as their name - the 'Whisper' colours - suggests. They come in the palest shades of blue, pink, green and grey (cf. fig. 52). In the bedroom the pastels tend to be much bolder, inasmuch as pastels can be 'bold'. They were very loosely-patterned, in irregular dots or more flamboyant Miro-style paint splash-and-stroke effect, but are now becoming much more formalized, more pyjama-striped looking. Obviously pastels are popular in the living room because of their 'easy-to-live-with' qualities. Often they are found in conjunction with grey - the grey stops them looking too overpoweringly sickly-sweet, and they in turn stop the grey looking too sombre. Despite the popularity of pastels in other areas of the home, however, it is somewhat surprising to see them being introduced into the kitchen. Wrighton International did advertise a pink kitchen, as long as a year ago, in the early part of 1984, but it was a very strong pink - the kitchen pastels now tend to look more washed out. It is interesting to read, in a kitchen trade journal, the following assessment of the prospects facing Rational: "...but it's not all pressure to move down-market. Counterbalancing the cheap is a trend for new products to be more design-orientated. Pastel colours and dry-look polyester are strongly featured."<sup>9</sup> Whether or not pastel kitchens will continue the success story which

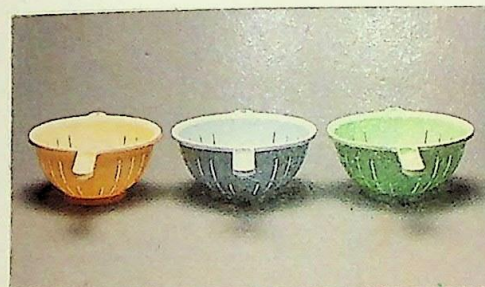




46. Pastel livingroom by Wesley Barrell



47. Sharp QT50 Radio cassette player, available in a range of pastel colours and red, 1984



48. Plysu range of pastel colanders

49. Roomset from Ideal Home, January '85 - pastels and grey





red-and-white kitchens began in the early Eighties remains to be seen - one can only note that at least one company has started manufacturing pastel coloured accessories. Plysu have brought out a range of kitchenware (cf. fig. 48), including colanders "in pretty, softer shades of blue, yellow and green".<sup>10</sup>

Of course colour was not the only aspect of home furnishing which was changing at the beginning of the Eighties. In the bathroom attempts were made to introduce fitted furniture (cf. fig. 51). The full impact of this trend has yet to be seen, since it is a completely new concept for the bathroom. It took some considerable time for the idea of the fitted kitchen to be accepted, and it was only gradually that fitted furniture found its way into bedrooms and living rooms. With bathrooms there is the obvious difficulty of adapting the fittings to take account of the plumbing which is already in position. Most people do not want the inconvenience of shifting the plumbing to accomodate later fittings. However there exists the possibility that in future fitted bathrooms could be built into new homes, along with the kitchen and other fittings - in other words, that it became standard. The bathroom, after all, is a cramped area where it is extremely difficult to adequately store the toiletry requirements of a family without the usually inadequate shelves overflowing with shampoos, deodorants, tooth-brushes, shaving equipment, and so on.

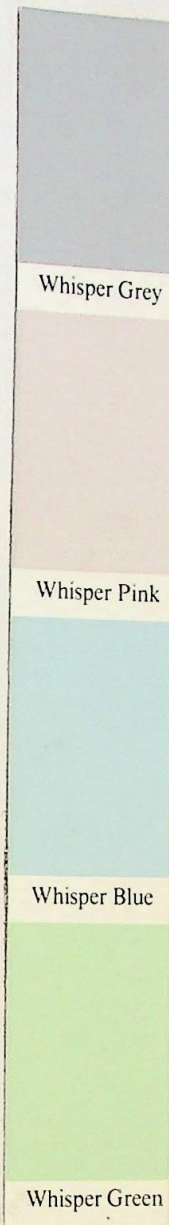
#### COLOUR TRENDS

Colours and colour appearances are mentioned constantly up to this point simply because these are the most visible changes. The





52. Ideal Standard's range of Whisper Colours



50. Ideal Standard 'Brazilia' suite and accessories in Whisper Blue

51. Bathroom units from 'LP' range from Poggenpohl's 'Bath 2000 Programme' with matt white laquer finish





shapes of products change more imperceptibly and, at the beginning of a trend, in a somewhat sporadic manner. Without the benefit of hindsight it is extremely difficult to make judgements on the new products, let alone to classify them with confidence. Without foreknowledge, one is reporting on what is now on the market, and what trends, to all intents and purposes, appear to be either receding or growing. To somebody reading this even just five years from now, it may seem all to be very obvious or superficial, but to make a statement at this point in time, is a matter of piecing together bits from an extremely complex jigsaw puzzle, of which some of the pieces are missing. It is a question of gleaning information from department stores, trade shows, consumer and trade magazines. When one product changes form radically, is it the forerunner of a new trend, or is it a mere novelty, an experiment which ended with the one-off? Without foreknowledge one cannot say for definite, but by knowing what is on, and coming on, the market one can attempt a limited judgement. As said above, the shape of a product changes very gradually, and often a definite trend can only be established after a period. The only time that products go through rapid form changes is when they are in the throes of technical development, such as in the computer area, where an aesthetic solution has yet to be fully resolved. A more domestic example is that of the electric kettle. The development of Kemetal, the trade name of a plastic which can withstand the temperature of boiling water without suffering from deformation or fatigue, led to the design of an all-plastic kettle. Because it is of a different material to the conventional stainless steel variety, it took on a totally different shape too - it became tall and cylindrical, rather than roughly semi-spherical in shape. That is a shape change that is immediately noticeable because it is



such a radical departure from what had been the conceived norm. However, it is different to the more subtle changes that are occurring; changes in the types of curves, of a particular type taper or radius happen over a longer time span. They are virtually invisible to all but the eye of an experienced designer, who has learnt to pick up on these things. Fashions or trends in form move slowly for practical reasons, but colour is an aspect of fashion which can be used in a very responsive way. After all, it is far easier to change the colour granules put into the hopper of a moulding machine, than to remachine the moulds themselves. Using different colour schemes can give new life to an older shape, until such time as the manufacturer can redesign his or her product. Not only is a product given new life, but using colours in the correct way may adapt it to a quickly changing fashion market with little more difficulty than actually predicting the changes afoot. It stands to reason then, that colour is playing an ever increasing role in domestic design, especially as that market is becoming more sophisticated and discerning.

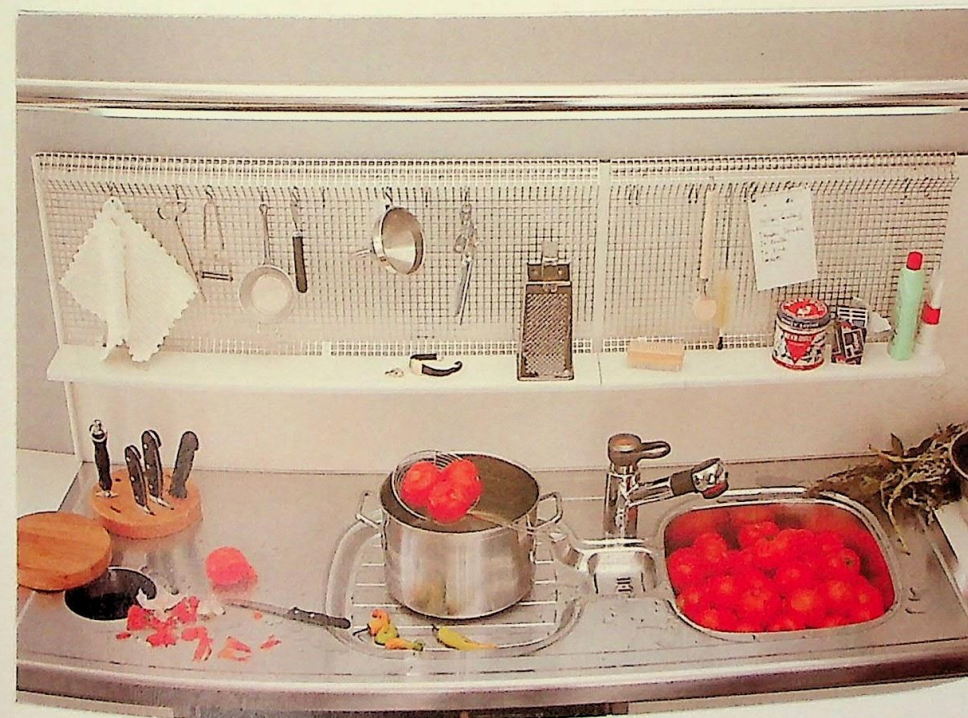
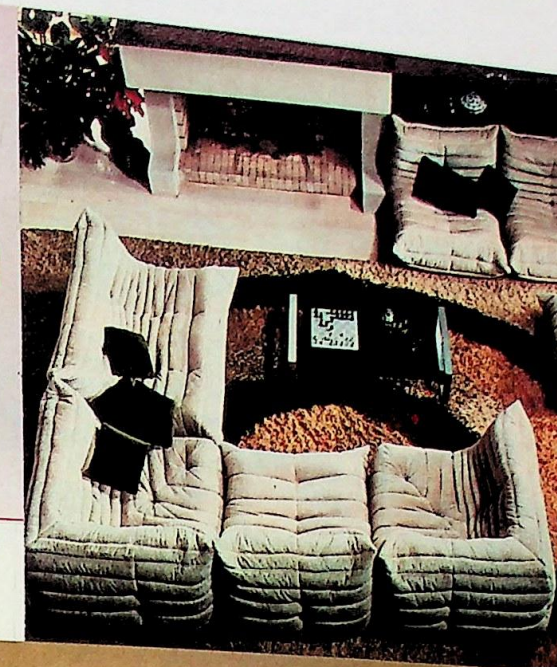
#### THE ART OF LOOKING PROFESSIONAL

It seems an era of specialization is beginning - if a bicycle is bought, it is a ten-speed racer or a tourer, if somebody goes jogging, it must be in full gear - no ordinary T-shirts and beach shorts are to be seen. There appears to be a much greater emphasis on getting all the right equipment for whatever job is in hand - nobody, it seems, wants to look like an amateur no matter what they do. This trend towards 'professionalism' has had repercussions within the house as well. It is most noticeable in the kitchen - if you



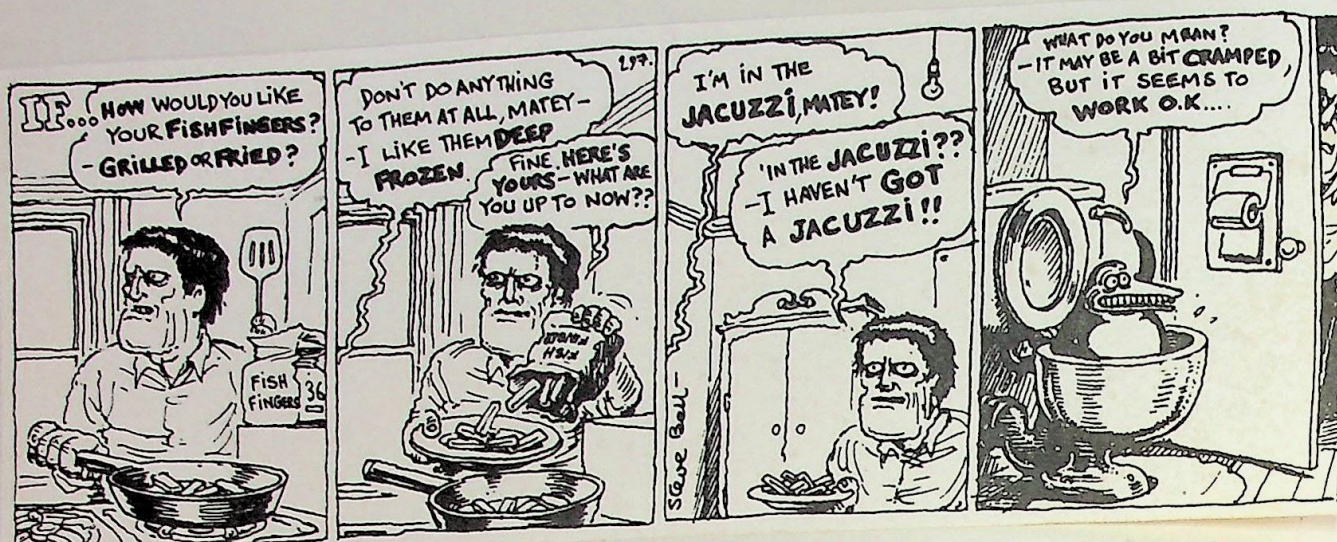


53. 'Emma' sofa from Brecon Furniture, 1983  
54. Sculpture form seats from Roset  
55. 'Flou flou' from Roset, 1983



56. 'Cuisine' look kitchen





want to cook Chinese - must have wok! Plus all necessary attachments. If you want to cook Indian dishes, you need at least a chapatti pan. There has been a tremendous upsurge in interest in specialist equipment in cooking. Some go so far as to make their kitchens look like catering centres, with all the equipment on display, copper pots hanging from racks, knives kept in wooden slots in the massive wooden table, and a steel hospital trolley sitting out in the middle, serving as an extra mobile table. This look has been modified somewhat for those with fewer pretensions, and has been reduced to lots of stainless steel, and wire racks to hang kitchen cutlery on (fig. 56). In keeping with this trend, although taking a different path, is the fashionable jacuzzi - a number of the more expensive baths offer a jacuzzi option now. Both Twyfords and Ideal Standard include 'whirlpool' baths in their current brochures.

#### THE SHAPE OF THINGS

Furniture, over the past couple of years, has become more casual in appearance - quite supportive, actually, though easy on the eye. Second to comfort comes colour, be it primaries, pastels, plain or patterned. The entire look is one of softness and comfort, an almost back-to-the-womb style of furniture. Chairs and sofas can either be completely padded or quilted, or have a visible rigid structure on which large floppy cushions are draped. Legs seem to have been ousted from favour, or at least out of sight. The base of the furniture comes straight down, touching the floor but for a thin shadow line. The absence of legs paradoxically gives furniture a very solid look. Piping has also come back in, in a big way. Piping





57. Soft line bathroom



58. Kenwood battery operated hand mixer



59. Melitta coffee maker



60. Philips shaver for women



## PUNK AND MEMPHIS, ITALY

The late Seventies witnessed the punk explosion, a youth phenomenon which shocked the staid music world. Punk was a movement full of raw energy, unlike the laid-back wistfulness of the hippies. In many ways it was not just a rebellion against the current trends in music, but also against the effects of mass unemployment, which really began to worsen in '77, reaching levels never experienced before. There is No Future they proclaimed angrily, in this sudden transition from indulgent introversion to aggressive extroversion. And they dressed to make public their disgust at the world and its complacency. They borrowed the black leather jackets from Heavy Metal, and took their fake fur trimmings, leopard-skin prints and fish-net tights from Fifties kitch, and to all of this added their own nihilistic adornments. The bondage gear - the chains and safety pins, the functionless zips and the tartan bum-flaps were the minimum dress requirements. The punks showed off their "shaved, shaped and shocking hair and their razor sharp eclecticism"<sup>11</sup> in countless towns and cities. It was a fashion which originated on the streets, and all couturiers rejected it, in its awfulness. However, after a safe wait, some of the fashion houses realized that maybe this pre-meditated bad taste could be modified to serve the youthful market. 'Punk' offerings were cautiously brought out, such as Fiorrucci's fluorescent patterned T-shirts. Pre-torn clothes, layers of netting, and punk motifs all began to make commercial sense, and soon found their way into ordinary department stores.

Fiona MacCarthy, a design historian, writes "Good design is still ... an almost wholly middle-class preserve: the upper class



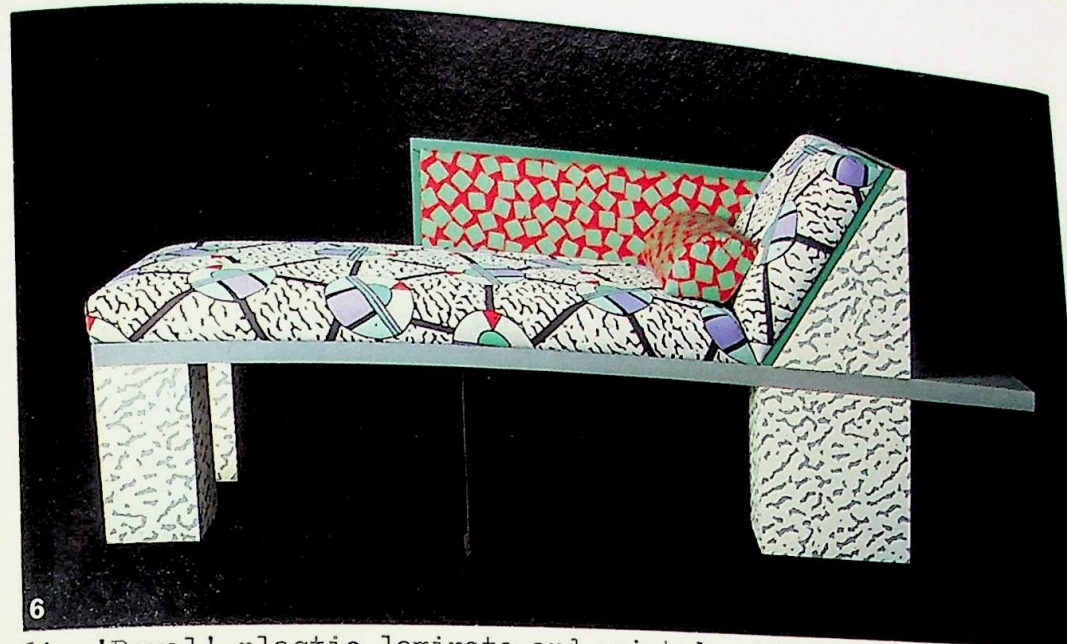


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ignores it; the working man rejects it."<sup>12</sup> She goes on to bemoan that the economic crisis does not allow any experimental leeway for designers, and that there is no rapprochement between the purists and the taste of the mass market, as there had been in the period surrounding the Festival of Britain. "But those days of hope are now over and the purists now left stranded, the tucket sounding faintly. There is only Habitat." What MacCarthy is of course implying is that there is only Habitat standing between us and the Abyss of Bad Taste. What she does not seem to understand is that her very worship of Habitat - that 'shrine to pre-packed mediocre good taste, Ready-made Lifestyles and Philosophies'<sup>13</sup> - is an exclusive middle class one. Someone of her ilk probably would have dismissed punk as an irrelevant youth cult, and its fashions accordingly, precisely because it did not originate amongst the middle classes, and so was uncomfortably unpredictable and uncontrollable.

In very much the same way, there seems to be a deliberate blindness as far as Memphis, the 'punk' of design, is concerned. Memphis did not originate on the streets, as did punk, but it certainly drew inspiration from it. Where Memphis was mentioned, it was with the understanding that it was a 'transient aesthetic',<sup>14</sup> that was being dealt with. After all, no serious designer could possibly take this revamped Fifties kitsch seriously, no less propagate it. Memphis was thought of as a joke in the design world - unlike established design criteria, Memphis did not adhere to the 'Form follows Function' approach, but rather struck out into new ground, where 'Form follows Fantasy'. Memphis has not only survived, but has grown in strength.





6

61. 'Royal' plastic laminate and printed cotton chaise-longue from Memphis

62. Selection of Memphis designed furniture and ceramics





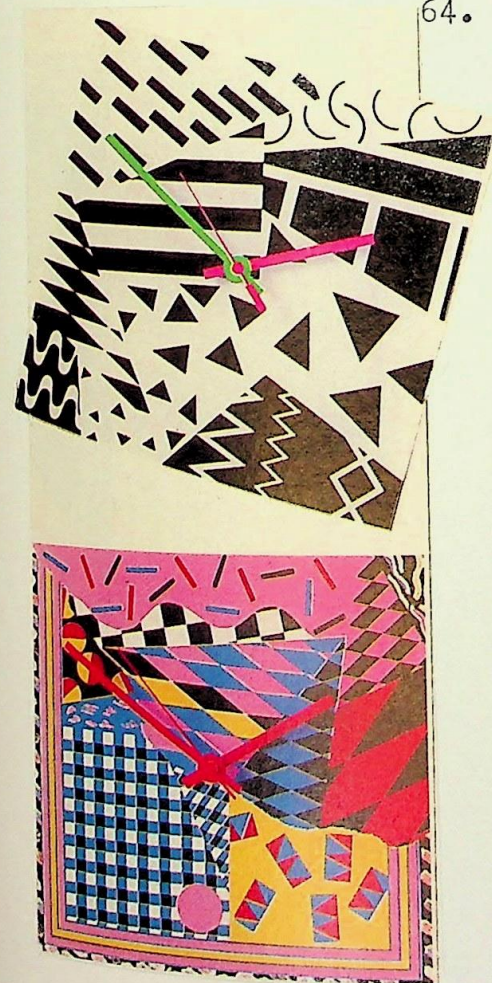
Memphis, like punk, borrows from 1950s bad taste, especially regards fabric design - the use of textures and random scatterings of geometrical shapes. The overall effect of a Memphis type design is irrational and asymmetric. It has mismatched patterns in close proximity, or has two colours aligned in a most unhappy pairing - strong pink with orange, and perhaps some lime green thrown in as well. Who could have foreseen that this development of the absurd could evolve into some rather beautiful products, at the time? Maybe our perception of them has changed, in the same way that the all shocking punk is now quite acceptable.

Memphis, the Milan based design company, is concerned with extremely expensive items of furniture, well out of the reach of the ordinary householder. The chaise-longue (cf.fig.61) shown retails at about ST£ 3,250 - obviously aimed at a pretty affluent section of the market. Memphis, as a design trend, is poised to make a tremendous impact on a much wider market. Womens interest magazines now feature Memphis-style furnishings - those top-heavy structures on spindly legs ended with disc shaped feet - something which was totally unheard of a year ago. It is also extremely interesting to see that in February of 1985, a down-market weekly womans magazine, 'Woman', carries an article on what is essentially a form of do-it-yourself Memphis(cf.fig.67). It is of course highly modified to suit, but contains the basic recognisable elements of Memphis. What makes it so interesting is that it is in D-I-Y form, which seems to indicate that, whilst the products have not yet been created, the interest for them in that section of the market already exists.





63. Childs roomset shown in Ideal Home, March '85, "Jazz" fabrics and wallpaper from Men Only range by Coloroll



64. 'Abstract Clocks' by Clockwork Designs, 1985

65. Cactus print pouffe from Practical Styling







66. Speckled china from Practical Styling

67. D-I-Y textured furniture from 'Woman' magazine, February 1985





## Conclusion

Halfway through the Eighties, it is not the ideal time to comment on design trends currently in vogue. However certain conclusions can be drawn already, as design trends do not exist in tidy five or ten year modules. Their progression and fading move along much more organic lines, often changing and modifying. In the kitchen it can be seen that the red and white look is now truly dead, although those kitchens will continue to be sold by down-market retailers such as M.F.I. for quite a while yet. Pastels and grey look kitchens are still coming to the fore as the fashion colours. White kitchens, which have had a consistent 30% of the market, will continue to be popular in their new soft-white format. Surfaces of the carcasses are diverging between a high-gloss finish and one that is either dry-look or semi-matt in appearance. Texture, both visual and tactile will play a larger part in kitchen design. Appliance manufacturers are gearing their products increasingly towards the new fashion colours and graphics, and one appliance, the microwave oven seems ready to become a standard feature in many more kitchens.

The livingroom has gone over to a soft, light, comfortable look with the new soft-sculpture armchairs and sofas. Tweed and velvet-  
 een have fallen totally out of favour as upholstery materials, and have been replaced in the main by cotton, both glazed and plain. As cotton has a tendency to show up dirt and stains, a lot of this type of furniture now comes with removable and washable covers. Carpets are not so full of the lavish swirls of those five or six years ago,



but tend to be much plainer - either monochrome or with a simple geometric pattern on them. Counterbalancing the trend for the simple is the popularity of rugs; these are used to give a splash of erratic colour to the livingroom. The bedroom has developed along much the same lines, with its soft quilts and use of primaries and pastels to achieve either a bold or a subdued young look. Grey as the new neutral, is becoming increasingly common in both livingroom and bedroom. The bathroom has moved from the dark Penthouse colours to the rediscovered pastels, though as said earlier, they were the new pastels, much more saturated with white. The shape of the bathroom suite changed also, from tapering and angular shapes, to more 'solid' looking pieces, with full curves and boxy shapes. For the upmarket scene, jacuzzis or whirlpool baths have become de rigueur.

The main emerging trends are the Grey, Pastels and Soft-White, but counteracting the move towards the sensible, the easy to live with, the inoffensive, is the Memphis look. Memphis exposed the fetish of 'Good Design' in the same way as we now see through the Victorian concept of 'Good Works'. Habitat-style Good Design fulfils a need, but cannot claim to be the be-all-and-end-all of design. It could well be that the workings of that cycle between 'modern' and 'nostalgic' will mean that the next nostalgia binge will not be Victorian, Classical or Rustic, but 1950's a la Memphis.

There is a certain disillusionment with 'Good Design' because it is being advanced as the answer to problems which it cannot solve. Well designed products may aid an economy, but cannot in any way reverse the effects of a worldwide economic crisis. As an article



in 'New Society' says: "'Bad Design' has replaced Japanese theivery and lazy unionists as the fashionable explanation for Britain's industrial failure."<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, good design can instil a sense of confidence and pride, as Robert Elms writes: "The image of a resolutely stylish people is the only way of countering the relentless picture of depression and decay that poor old England otherwise projects."<sup>16</sup> He substantiates this view by pointing to the fact that since 1977, when inflation worsened again, the percentage of surplus income spent on clothes has increased every single year. Although Britain is different, in that its status has fallen from that of the Workshop of the World to that of Warehouse of the World, much of this is also applicable to Ireland.

The article in 'New Society' was concerned with the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition of 'The 100 Best Designed Products of All Times'. It goes on to describe an incident from the exhibition which illustrates the mixture of awe and bafflement which have attended the rise of the Gospel of Good Design:

In a white-tiled, red-grouted basement, full of taped Mozart, baffled visitors gaze at exquisitely-mounted breathlessly-labelled examples of the commonplace. "What's that toilet doing on a shelf, mum?", asks an infant, foolishly mistaking the Castiglioni designed, close-coupled, siphonic action domestic ceramic sculpture for a humble crapper. "It's well designed, dear," says mum, dubiously.<sup>17</sup>

It is undoubtedly the self-righteousness of Good Design and its Apostles which has led to the backlash of bad taste and fun design, albeit on a small scale at present.







1. Open University booklet on Design
2. Paul Johnston : "A History of the Modern World", (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London 1983), p660
3. Design, Issue 235, July 1968, p20
4. Fiona MacCarthy : "British Design Since 1880" (Lund Humphries, London 1982), p170
5. Uncredited : "Manufacturer's Profile - Solarbo", In Store, Issue 1, April 1985, p154
6. Richard Crisp : "Rational : taking success seriously", Kitchens, January 1985, p11
7. Marjorie Cambell : "On Top of the Wave", Electrical Retailing, July 1984, p31
8. Uncredited : "A.E.G. puts fashion into the kitchen", Kitchens, January 1985, op cit, p11
9. R. Crisp : "Rational : taking success seriously", op cit, p11
10. Uncredited : "Shopping", Ideal Home, March 1985, p24
11. Robert Elms : "Only a fool doesn't judge by appearances", Cosmopolitan January 1985, p52
12. F. MacCarthy : op cit, p188
13. Alexei Sayle : "Train To Hell" (Methuen, London 1984), p138
14. Ed. Kathryn Hiessiger & George Marens : "Design Since 1945" (Thames & Hudson, London 1983)
15. Uncredited : "Observations - Orgy by Design", New Society, February 1985, p164
16. R. Elms : "Only a fool doesn't judge by appearances", op cit
17. Uncredited : "Observations - Orgy by Design" op cit

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