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EDITORIAL

The objects around us are rarely just objects. They carry memories, values, habits and expectations, and their meaning can change dramatically over time. This ninth edition of Design Magazine explores that changing relationship between people and things, asking how design acquires meaning, how it preserves it, and how it can be transformed without losing its identity.

In this issue, we revisit iconic objects through a selection of re-editions that bring established designs back into the present. We also continue the creative parallels introduced in our previous edition, bringing together seemingly distant fields, ideas and references in thought-provoking combinations.

This leads us nicely into our cover-story, an exclusive interview with Stephen Bayley, who provocatively questions the very place objects occupy in our lives today, suggesting that the analogue era of Design with a capital D may be drawing to a close, while also anticipating a return to tangible things as virtual culture loses some of its appeal.

Martino Gamper is next. In projects such as 100 Chairs in 100 Days, discarded chairs are dismantled, recombined and given new life. What interests Gamper is not perfection, but the traces left by use, repair and transformation, and the new stories materials can continue to generate. For him, furniture becomes meaningful through the way people occupy, move and share it.

Vipp tells a very different story of continuity. A pedal bin created in 1939 as a practical solution gradually became the foundation of an entire design language extending into kitchens, furniture, lighting, architecture and hospitality. What remained constant was the emphasis on function, quality, materials and longevity, showing how an everyday object can acquire lasting cultural value without surrendering its original purpose.

With Nina Yashar, the object becomes a vehicle for thought and personal expression. Her approach to collectible design brings different periods, cultures and sensibilities into conversation, while her vision for Nilufar Depot turns display into experience. She sees growing value in objects with identity, depth, authorship and history.

In Barcelona, Casa Batlló's restoration becomes an exercise in understanding rather than reinvention. Xavier Villanueva reveals how Gaudí's original architecture has emerged from beneath layers of later alterations, bringing its remarkable intelligence back into view, from natural light and ventilation to the creative reuse of materials. Traditional craftsmanship and modern technology come together to recover what survives, while Paola Navone's contemporary interiors add a clearly distinct new layer without imitating or competing with the original.

The Vespa offers another remarkable journey. Born from post-war necessity and engineering ingenuity, it evolved through cinema, advertising and international culture into a symbol of freedom, identity and the Italian way of life.

Finally, the conversation extends naturally to gastronomy. Himanshu Saini starts from history, geography and culture, using design to communicate those stories through food, materials, tableware, space and hospitality.

If these pages leave us looking a little differently at a chair, a bin, a scooter, a meal or any other apparently ordinary thing, then perhaps they have done exactly what design should do.

Michael Yao
CEO
Homa Appliances



INDEX

6 **The Future Lies
in the Archive**

18 **Unwitting
Geometries**
*Four dialogues between design,
form and nature*

28 ***Stephen Bayley:
interrogating the
ordinary world***
England

34 **MARTINO GAMPER:
THE GENTLE ANARCHY
OF MATERIALS**
Italy / England

42 **VIPP, VERY IMPORTANT PIECES:
*The Art of Long-Lasting Design***
Denmark

50 **NINA YASHAR:
THE INTUITIVE EYE**
Iran / Italy

56 **GAUDÍSSIMO!**
Casa Batlló, or the Future Restored
Spain

62 **Piaggio:
the Dream Factory**

68 **Himanshu Saini:
Heritage Reframed**
United Arab Emirates

74 **Glossary**

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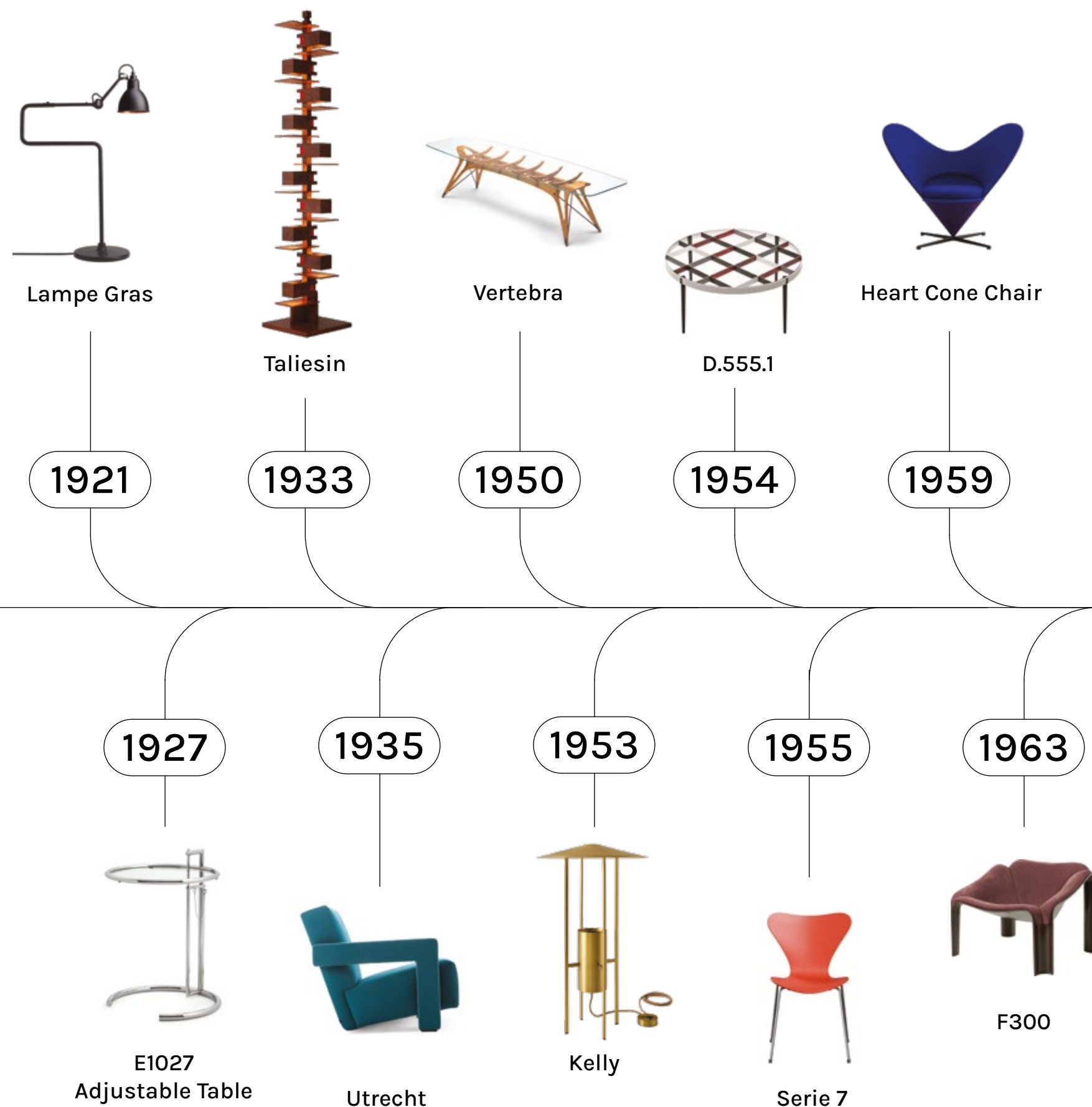
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Egg Chair, designed by Arne Jacobsen
for Fritz Hansen

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The Future Lies in the Archive

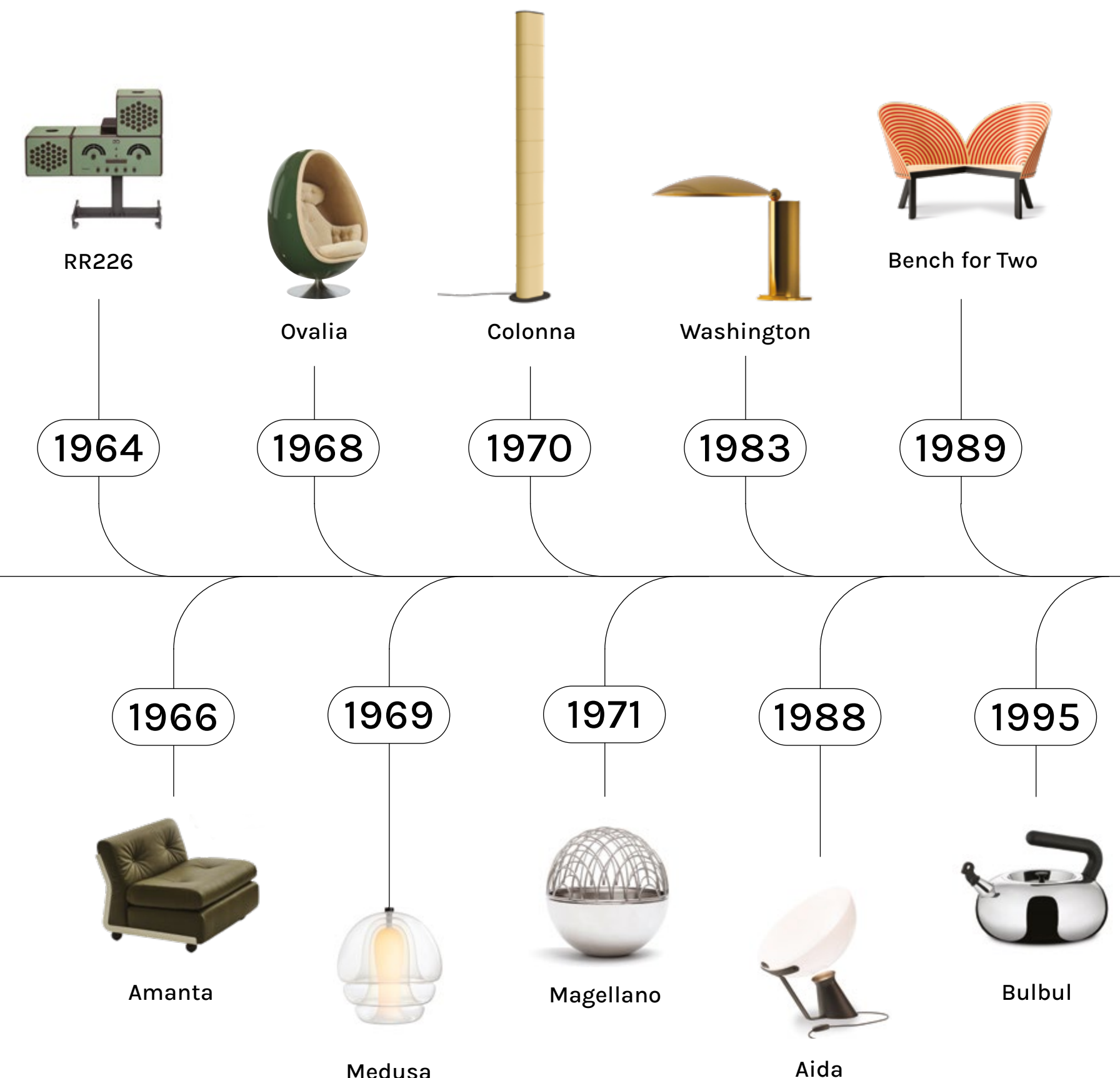
Over the past decade, archival reissues have emerged as one of the most powerful global trends across major design catalogues. This widespread success should be understood primarily as a reaction against the unchecked proliferation of disposable objects.



As British critic Alice Rawsthorn notes in her seminal essay *Design as an Attitude*, today's public suffers from a distinct fatigue with mass-market products. For Rawsthorn, when design is reduced to superficial consumption, it loses its ethical purpose; conversely, the thoughtful revival of archival icons represents an act of both ecological and aesthetic responsibility. Choosing an authentic reissue means relying on a form of proven enduring value, stepping outside planned obsolescence to embrace the status of a classic. In *The Language of Things*, historian and former director of London's Design Museum Deyan Sudjic offers a complementary socio-cultural view, describing the appeal of the archives as a counter-reaction to the "syndrome of the ephemeral object".

According to Sudjic, reissued masterworks are far more than mere furnishings; they act as emotional and identity-driven anchors. They carry a distinct archival pedigree: a verified lineage and a depth of meaning that no newly minted product can replicate. If the 20th century addressed the question "what new form can we invent?", the 21st century asks instead: "what value and responsibility can we bring to the forms we have inherited?"

Compared to vintage originals, contemporary reissues also take sustainability a step further. The integration of low-impact biopolymers, certified timber, and cleaner production processes allows manufacturers to transcend historical technical limitations, delivering significantly higher performance. Looking ahead, design innovation will likely centre less on the pursuit of novelty for its own sake and more on our ability to re-signify what has already been created. In this evolving landscape, any entirely new object will need to demonstrate a genuine functional necessity, while the archive will continue to provide the ultimate quality in design: timelessness.





From the workshop to architectural icons: the historic Lampe Gras by Bernard-Albin Gras, reissued today by DCWéditions.



DCWÉDITIONS, LAMPE GRAS

In 1921, Bernard-Albin Gras designed a series of industrial lamps defined by austere simplicity. Engineered without a single screw or weld, the Lampe Gras was virtually indestructible. Yet Gras was far more than a technical innovator: he brought a distinct functional elegance to every component, from the articulated joints to the weighted bases.

Le Corbusier was so taken with the design that he specified it for his own studio and his most iconic residential projects. Fellow modernists - including Eileen Gray, Robert Mallet-Stevens, and Sonia Delaunay - soon adopted the fixture, cementing its place within the 20th-century avant-garde. A new chapter began in 2008 when Philippe Cazer and Frédéric Winkler founded DCWéditions. Acquiring the original patents, they set out to reissue Gras's masterpiece, preserving its founding mechanics and timeless craftsmanship.



© Elias Hassos

1927

CLASSICON, E1027 ADJUSTABLE TABLE

In 1927, Eileen Gray conceived the legendary E1027 Adjustable Table for her modernist sanctuary in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, along the Côte d'Azur. A cornerstone of modern design, the piece stemmed from a ritual as intimate as it was practical: enjoying breakfast in bed with absolute ease. Its brilliant design incorporates an intuitive height-adjustment mechanism, while the signature tubular steel frame and C-shaped base slot seamlessly beneath chairs or beds. This allows the tabletop to hover directly over the lap or linens - a level of ergonomic foresight far ahead of its time.

Now a crown jewel in the permanent collection at New York's MoMA, this iconic design is reissued by ClassiCon, preserving its legacy through flawless craftsmanship that honours Gray's original vision.



A timeless silhouette: Eileen Gray's E1027 Adjustable Table remains a masterclass in modern ergonomics.

1921



Wright wanted to replicate the effect of sunlight filtering through leaves; hence the choice to conceal the light bulbs inside wooden blocks. © 2026, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. All Rights Reserved.

YAMAGIWA, TALIESIN

Designed in 1933 for his estate in Wisconsin, the Taliesin floor lamp by Frank Lloyd Wright transforms illumination into pure architecture. A vertical totem of stacked wooden boxes and angled deflectors diffuses a warm glow, conceived to evoke sunlight filtering through the canopy of trees. Faithful to the radical pragmatism of Frank Lloyd Wright, even the power cord remains fully exposed, running down the spine like a distinct graphic detail rather than an element to conceal.

Today, the legendary Japanese manufacturer Yamagiwa produces the lamp under official licence from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. Crafted from fine woods with remarkable joinery precision, this reissue of the Taliesin captures the flawless balance between geometry, craftsmanship, and light, honouring the authentic essence of Wright's spatial vision.



1935



Rietveld named the armchair Utrecht as a tribute to his hometown, where he lived and worked throughout his entire life. Photo credit Christoffer Regild.

CASSINA, UTRECHT

In 1935, Gerrit T. Rietveld radically deconstructed the traditional armchair. With the Utrecht, the Dutch architect reduced the seating structure to four orthogonal geometric elements: an inclined backrest and seat touching the floor, embraced by cantilevered armrests that double as front supports. The intent was as radical as it was industrial: to make avant-garde design accessible and conceived for mass production. Since 1988, the armchair has been reissued by Cassina within its prestigious I Maestri collection. The Italian company preserves its structural rigour while enhancing ergonomic comfort. Today, the steel and solid poplar frame is defined by iconic exposed stitching - available in blanket stitch or zig-zag - highlighting the unmistakable silhouette of a timeless masterpiece of modern furniture design.



© Anders Schønnemann

1950



Vertebra merges structural rigour and fluid motion, expressing the architect's vision of furniture as a living organism.

ZANOTTA, VERTEBRA

Designed by Carlo Mollino in the 1950s and brought to industrial scale for the first time by Zanotta, the Vertebra table takes its name from a load-bearing structure that recalls the human spine. Crafted from oak-veneered plywood, it features solid oak vertebrae - available in natural or black stain - that support the tempered glass top. Satin-finish black steel tie-rods and feet complete the assembly, anchoring the composition. The sophisticated equilibrium between structural tension and visual lightness directly reflects Mollino's vision of furniture as a living organism. Faithful to the bold mechanics of the original prototype, Zanotta captures the architect's signature fluid motion and dynamic sweep, merging structural rigour with the refined craftsmanship of Italian design.

BASSAMFELLOWS, KELLY

Designed in 1953 for Philip Johnson's iconic Glass House in New Canaan, the Kelly floor lamp was born to solve a unique architectural challenge: illuminating a space bounded entirely by glass without creating harsh nocturnal reflections. Designers Richard Kelly and Philip Johnson upended traditional lighting mechanics by sinking the light source into a low cylinder near the floor. Throwing its beam upward onto a conical shade, the lamp diffuses a soft, glare-free canopy of light back downward into the room.

Designed in 1953 by Richard Kelly and Philip Johnson, the Kelly lamp uses indirect light to turn architectural precision into a quiet sculpture of light.

After going out of production in 1967, this design landmark returns through a meticulous reissue by BassamFellows. Precision-engineered in stainless steel, the resurrected piece brings a quiet, dramatic sculpture of light back to contemporary living.

1953



MOLTENI&C, D.555.1

Forget the conventional coffee table. Steel grid, hand-lacquered panels, and zero visual weight: the essence of modernism, reinterpreted for contemporary interiors. Conceived in 1954 for his own Milanese home, Gio Ponti's D.555.1 coffee table possesses a timeless modernity. Its entirely exposed superstructure highlights geometric fields of colour beneath a clear glass top. The genius detail lies below: Ponti engineered the under-glass grid not merely to support the top, but to cast dynamic shadows across the floor as daylight shifts throughout the day.

Remaining a rare prototype for decades, the design is now brought to life by Molteni&C as part of the Heritage Gio Ponti Collection.



1954



Designed in 1954 by Gio Ponti and now reissued by Molteni&C, the D.555.1 coffee table fuses structural transparency with dynamic geometric colour.

1955



The Series 7 - Verner Panton 100 for Fritz Hansen merges Scandinavian minimalism with vibrant chromatic audacity.

FRITZ HANSEN, SERIE 7 - VERNER PANTON 100

Designed in 1955 by Arne Jacobsen, Fritz Hansen's Series 7 stands as the most iconic and best-selling seat in Scandinavian design history. Its distinctive hourglass silhouette is crafted by steam-bending nine layers of pressure-moulded veneer, sculpting a shell that cradles the body with effortless ergonomics. In the early 1970s, Fritz Hansen invited Verner Panton - Jacobsen's former protege - to reimagine his mentor's masterpiece. Panton wrapped the pristine form in a saturated palette of warm tones, proving that even the most disciplined geometry could be transformed through bold chromatic audacity.

To celebrate Panton's centenary, Fritz Hansen revives those archival 1970s hues - yellow, orange, red and deep brown - recasting the Series 7 through a vibrant, pop-infused lens with the commemorative Series 7 - Verner Panton 100 edition.



1959

VITRA, HEART CONE CHAIR

Designed immediately following the famous Cone Chair, Verner Panton's Heart Cone Chair reimagines the traditional upholstered armchair by extending its backrest into an unmistakable, oversized stylised heart, poised upon a brushed stainless-steel cross base.

To mark the centenary of Panton's birth, Vitra and Verner Panton Design AG present a distinguished limited edition that accentuates its sculptural presence. The Heart Cone Chair Anniversary Edition comes alive in a striking two-tone blue palette, where contrasting front and back upholstery highlights the dynamic contours and theatrical presence of its silhouette. Masterfully crafted by Vitra, this special release honours Panton's visionary spirit, affirming how his seamless fusion of comfort, geometry, and raw emotional resonance remains one of the boldest chapters in design history.



The Heart Cone Chair Anniversary Edition celebrates the designer's centenary with a bold two-tone blue palette that elevates its iconic sculptural silhouette.



1964

BRIONVEGA, RR226

Designed by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, the RR126 radiogramophone (now RR226) has endured through the decades, preserving its iconic silhouette while continuously evolving its internal electronics.

To mark the sixtieth anniversary of this masterpiece of Italian design and engineering, Brionvega commissioned Elena Salmistraro to reimagine the legend through a contemporary lens. Leaving its original form and function untouched, the designer focused on a sophisticated chromatic overhaul: dressing the main body for the first time in a matte green finish, paired with tobacco-coloured knobs and grilles, a monolithic black base, and a smoked-glass turntable cover. Handcrafted in Italy as a limited run of just 60 numbered pieces, Salmistraro's edition infuses a vibrant, tactile energy into the world's most celebrated "musical furniture."



Reinterpreted by Elena Salmistraro for Brionvega, the RR226 Anniversary Edition pairs a matte green and tobacco palette with the iconic 1960s silhouette.



The name Amanta is an affectionate tribute from Mario Bellini to his wife, Anna.

1966

HAY, AMANTA

Designed in 1966 by Mario Bellini for C&B Italia (now B&B Italia), Amanta was conceived as a modular seating system of independent elements, meant to be arranged together or used as solitary armchairs. The groundbreaking intuition lay in using an external, load-bearing moulded plastic shell to cradle the cushions, decoupling the structure from the upholstery and allowing for endless configurations. To overcome the natural rigidity of fibreglass, Bellini introduced a deep central slit down the back of the shell, creating an unmistakable silhouette.

Today, Hay reissues this masterpiece with a decidedly sustainable soul. The modern edition replaces the original plastic with a shell moulded from 99% post-consumer recycled ABS, paired with bio-compatible cushioning.



1963

GUBI, F300

Designed in 1963 by Pierre Paulin and recently reissued by Gubi, the F300 lounge chair stands as a pure expression of Space Age hedonism. Unfurling like a blooming flower, its organic shell features four symmetrical petals sculpted to cradle the body in a relaxed, almost weightless comfort.

GUBI elevates the original icon for the contemporary era, swapping period fibreglass and injected polyurethane for HiREK polymer, a high-durability, recycled Italian industrial plastic. This glossy, eco-conscious shell contrasts beautifully with tactile upholstery in rich fabric or leather, reinventing a piece of pop futurism as a manifesto for sustainable design. A timeless classic of French modernism, the F300 reimagines the lounge chair as a fluid, sculptural experience.



Reissued by GUBI in recycled HiREK polymer, the F300 lounge chair fuses Space Age organic form with contemporary sustainable design.



1968



Each piece is authenticated by an exclusive seal bearing the designer's name and the date of this new edition.

ROCHE BOBOIS, OVALIA

Unveiled at the 1968 Scandinavian Furniture Fair by Danish designer Henrik Thor-Larsen, the Ovalia egg chair was conceived as an enveloping cocoon, engineered to isolate the sitter from surrounding noise. Its striking, retro-futuristic silhouette quickly captured Hollywood's imagination, earning an iconic place in pop culture on the posters for Men in Black II.

Nearly sixty years later, Roche Bobois resurrects Ovalia in a fresh edition that safeguards its original spirit while refining its comfort and versatility. The reissue features six exclusive shell colours, an optimised backrest incline, and an integrated headrest for an even more immersive seating experience, complemented by a matching ottoman and side table.



1969

ESTABLISHED & SONS, MEDUSA

Conceived by Carlo Nason between the 1960s and 1970s, Medusa demonstrates how Italy's great glassmaking tradition dialogues with modern artistic experimentation. Born from observing marine life, the lamp transforms mouth-blown, cased opaline glass into a luminous sculpture that echoes the fluid, undulating silhouette of a jellyfish.

British brand Established & Sons revives this archival classic in table, wall, and pendant editions. Featuring a signature gradient finish, the multilayered glass diffuser safeguards Venetian artisan mastery while integrating state-of-the-art LED technology inside. A reissue that rejects nostalgia to restore the piece's poetic, visionary energy.



Crafted from multiple fused layers of mouth-blown glass, Medusa captures the weightless, translucent essence of marine life.

1970

STILNOVO COLONNA

Designed by Gae Aulenti, Colonna stems from the desire to translate the simplicity of the cylinder into a sculptural lighting object, grounded in structural rigour, yet softened by fluid, balanced lines.

Now reissued by Stilnovo in both wall/ceiling and suspension editions, the lamp retains its original smooth-edged aluminium structure while evolving its inner core. The updated illumination system features a dual-chamber optical diffuser and a dimmable LED source, engineered to deliver uniform, glare-free, high-performance light distribution.

Its name, Colonna, is a conceptual statement: Aulenti takes the quintessential load-bearing element of classical architecture and turns it on its head, transforming it into a lightweight, hollow micro-volume crafted to encapsulate light and engage fluidly with space in both vertical and horizontal orientations.



The Colonna lamp transforms the classical architectural cylinder into a hollow, sculptural volume of light.



© Consiglio Manni, AD Russo Sgarbossa

1971



Inspired by the celebrated navigator, the vase is an abstract geographic map, a small "domestic globe" that explores and reflects its surrounding space.

EDITIONS MILANO, MAGELLANO

Designed in 1971 by Vico Magistretti, Magellano encapsulates the Milanese master's celebrated maxim: "Simplicity is the most difficult thing in the world." The design springs from pure geometric intuition, bringing together two identical hemispheres to form a perfect brass sphere coated in precious palladium plating.

Reissued by Editions Milano, the vase takes its name from a network of hand-engraved meridians and parallels spanning its surface, transforming it into a micro-terrestrial globe. Far more than a floral vessel, the fine line work breaks up the polished mirror finish to yield a dynamic optical sculpture that reflects and multiplies surrounding space even when empty. Each piece stands as a polished sculptural statement, finished with the designer's signature engraved at the base.



1983



The “poised” shade casts light directly over the workspace without taking up valuable desk space.

LUMEN CENTRE, WASHINGTON

Conceived in 1983 by celebrated French architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte, Washington was created for a prestigious setting: lighting the desks of the French Embassy in Washington D.C. Wilmotte designed the lamp with diplomats’ long reading and writing sessions in mind. The spherical joint connecting the cylindrical base to the tapered, convex reflector draws inspiration from audio jacks of the era - a clever, subtle mechanism that allows the shade to rotate fluidly through 360 degrees without visible mechanical joints, pairing high functionality with visual minimalism. Produced by Lumen Centre in satin black nickel and brushed copper, it is now updated with high-CRI LED technology while preserving the rationalist silhouette that made it an icon of diplomatic design.

FREDERICIA, BENCH FOR TWO

Designed in 1989 by the “grand dame” of Danish design Nanna Ditzel, Bench for Two is a sculptural seat that redefines the very concept of conviviality. Moving beyond the rigid canons of Nordic functionalism, Ditzel turns plywood into a poetic form, featuring two majestic winged backrests adorned with screen-printed concentric circles that suggest butterfly wings or radar sweeps. A small triangular space carved precisely into the centre of the seat seamlessly integrates a matching side table, giving life to an intimate conversational enclave. Historically produced by Fredericia, this iconic piece achieves a flawless harmony of fine cabinetmaking, visual lightness, and profound expressive power.



Ditzel hand-drew the concentric circles and central red dot straight on the prototype.

1988



KARAKTER, AIDA

Angelo Mangiarotti drew direct inspiration for Aida from his celebrated concrete architecture, where slender columns support massive floor plates to convey a weightless, floating quality. On a micro scale, the lamp echoes these structural dynamics: a delicate metal stem and base anchor a generous dome in opalescent acrylic, creating a captivating sense of spatial detachment.

Reissued by Danish brand Karakter for Cassina, Aida emits a soft, enveloping ambient glow. Its expansive curved shade appears to hover effortlessly in midair, suspended by a stripped-back structure to form a striking, rigorous sculpture of light.



Angelo Mangiarotti was obsessed with gravity-based, screwless joints, applying this principle across all his designs.

1995



The name Bulbul is a witty nod to the sound of boiling water.

ALESSI, BULBUL

Designed in 1995 by the genius of Achille Castiglioni, Bulbul is the ultimate expression of the Italian master’s creative methodology: taking an object’s core function and reimagining it through play, irony, and semantic displacement. Its smooth stainless-steel silhouette elevates the kettle into a delightfully irreverent domestic presence, drawing inspiration from the granite stones used in curling.

Conceived in the mid-1990s but long kept as a prototype, the kettle was finally brought to life by Alessi in 2021 to mark the company’s centenary. Featuring an induction-compatible base, a slender handle, and an iconic matching whistle, Bulbul brings the wit, lightness, and intelligence of a contemporary design masterpiece straight to the stovetop.

Unwitting Geometries

Four dialogues between design, form and nature

Across four chapters, this series explores the subtle creative affinities linking design with haute couture, science, engineering, and gastronomy. The overarching goal is to reveal how breakthroughs from seemingly distant disciplines can be driven by the same radical intuition.

The series opens with a dialogue between Alvar Aalto's 1936 Savoy vase and chef Michel Bras's legendary 1980 dish, the Gargouillou de jeunes légumes. Through the fluid contours of hand-blown glass and the spontaneous arrangement of wild botanicals, design and haute cuisine shatter the orthodoxies of classical symmetry, surrendering, with both grace and discipline, to the unpredictable rhythms of nature.

The second chapter examines the genesis of Arne Jacobsen's 1958 masterpiece, the Egg chair, alongside Cristóbal Balenciaga's sculptural 1967 Chou cape. Using pioneering lightweight materials, both masters succeeded in moulding an intimate, protective architecture around the human body.

Chapter three analyses the creative affinity between Marcel Breuer's Wassily chair and Man-Chung Tang's monumental Dongshuimen Bridge in Chongqing. Across vastly different scales, both works lay bare their structural logic to reveal a perfect balance of form and function.

Closing the series is an unexpected parallel between the double-helix staircase of the Vatican Museums and Watson and Crick's discovery of the molecular structure of DNA. A compelling interplay between crowd-flow engineering and molecular biology, this final study reveals how architecture and nature arrived at the same geometry to safeguard the codes of life and art.

1.



Chef Michel Bras cuisine

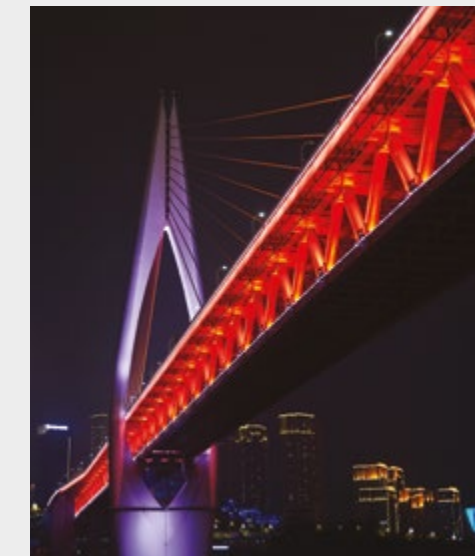


Alvar Aalto, Savoy vase

3.



Marcel Breuer,
Wassily chair



China's Dongshuimen
Bridge

2.

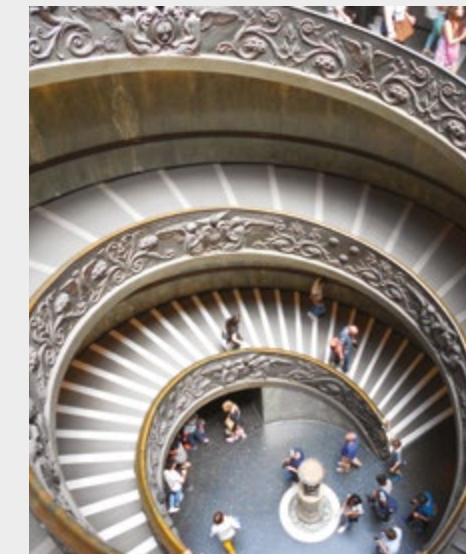


Cristóbal Balenciaga,
Chou cape

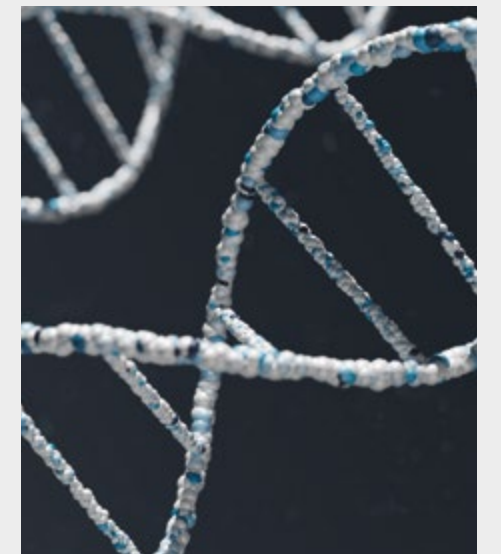


Arne Jacobsen, Egg chair

4.



Giuseppe Momo, staircase
for the Vatican Museums



Molecular structure
of DNA

«Nature is never rigid, because beauty demands freedom»

Alvar Aalto

A botanical symphony: Michel Bras's Gargouillou brings together dozens of plants, herbs, and micro-sprouts in an asymmetrical architecture where nature dictates its own form.
© Joann-Pai, courtesy Maison Bras



In 1936, Alvar Aalto revolutionised the classical vase, moving away from rigid, monumental arrangements where stems were strictly bound to the centre. With his iconic Savoy vase, Aalto sculpted glass into fluid curves that echo the sinuous contours of Finland's lakes. This undulating silhouette naturally nudges stems toward the perimeter - allowing each bloom to find its own posture while turning empty space into an active, choreographic element. As Aalto observed: "Nature is never rigid, because beauty demands freedom".

In 1980, high in the pastures of France's Aubrac region, chef Michel Bras - whose legacy is carried forward today by his son Sébastien - ignited a remarkably parallel revolution in haute cuisine. Until then, classical French fine dining adhered to unyielding geometric dogmas: the main course anchored at the centre, flanked by uniformly diced vegetables in immaculate symmetry. Bras shattered this template with his legendary Gargouillou de jeunes légumes, a masterpiece that redefined modern gastronomy forever. The dish unfolded as a living, asymmetrical composition bringing together 40 to 60 distinct varieties of young vegetables, micro-sprouts, wild herbs, and edible flowers. Every single botanical was crafted independently - flash-blanché for mere seconds, roasted, braised, or left raw to safeguard its distinct character. "The plate shouldn't be static architecture," Bras explained, "but a snapshot of life".



Each botanical ingredient preserves its distinct identity and flavour, composing an ever-changing portrait of the soil and season.
© Anne-Claire Héraud

Flawless Imperfection

From blown glass in the Finnish wilderness to wild botanicals plated on the Aubrac plateau: how two aesthetic revolutions taught design and haute cuisine to shatter rigid symmetry and surrender to the spontaneous rhythms of nature.

Blown glass capturing the fluid contours of Finnish lakes: the Savoy vase rejects traditional symmetry, allowing stems to find their posture freely.



Aalto and Bras operated under the exact same insight: raw materials must never be forced into a vessel; the vessel must yield to nature. Aalto's unpredictable curves embrace the crooked stem of a tulip, elevating it into a statement of pure grace - just as Bras's plates shift in form, colour, and flavour with every subtle turn of the season. Yet this effortless freedom masks an intense technical discipline. To this day, crafting a single Savoy vase demands the synchronised artistry of seven master glassblowers, 12 manual steps, and 30 hours of controlled cooling. The exact same rigour governs Bras's kitchen: trained in the mathematical precision of classical cuisine, young cooks initially floundered under the freedom of his plating, needing extensive practice to unlearn symmetry and hone their intuition. In both worlds, the essential lesson remains the same: true elegance is not about absolute mastery over material, but having the courage to give nature the final word.

The apparent spontaneity of the Savoy vase conceals rigorous craftsmanship: creating a single vase requires the synchronised mastery of seven glassblowers.



«A couturier must be an architect for design, a sculptor for shape, a painter for colour, a musician for harmony, and a philosopher for temperance»

Cristóbal Balenciaga

Irving Penn, Balenciaga Roses Dress, Paris, 1967
© Condé Nast / Nicola Erni Collection. The iconic photograph is part of the exhibition Penn & Fashion hosted at the MEP in Paris through January 2027.

The Cocoon Effect

«If a shape is organic, there must be a precise reason for it: nature never wastes a line»

Arne Jacobsen

The spherical and fluid lines of the Egg chair, produced by Fritz Hansen, derive from the observation of organic forms in nature.



In 1958, Arne Jacobsen designed the Egg chair for the lobby of Copenhagen's Royal Hotel. Nearly a decade later, in 1967, Cristóbal Balenciaga unveiled his iconic Chou cape for his autumn/winter collection. Two completely different worlds, bound by the exact same radical geometric intuition.

In 1956, Jacobsen was granted an extraordinary opportunity: to design the SAS Royal Hotel - Copenhagen's very first skyscraper - and shape every single interior detail, from door handles and cutlery to lamps, textiles, and the furnishings for the grand lobby. Specifically for this space, he envisioned a shell-like armchair, creating an acoustic refuge for the jet-set era's first global travellers. A remarkably similar impulse would guide Cristóbal Balenciaga's vision in haute couture nearly a decade later.

By 1967, Balenciaga was at the apex of his career, yet on the precipice of retirement (he would shutter his couture house just months later, in May 1968). Seizing this moment of absolute creative freedom, he pushed formal research to its extreme limit, designing the Chou evening cape, which enveloped the head and shoulders in a self-supporting volume.

Both creators rejected the rigid frameworks of the past in favour of advanced, lightweight materials and unprecedented forms. Moulded foam for the chair, silk gazar for the cape: high-tech solutions engineered for a modern era that demanded agility and distillation.

To achieve the Egg chair's spherical silhouette, Jacobsen spent months in his garage shaping full-scale clay models, refining the curve until the line reached perfection. The use of a moulded foam shell allowed him to yield a continuous, fluid structure that moved beyond traditional upholstery techniques.

Balenciaga made a remarkably parallel move in haute couture, tapping Swiss textile producer Abraham to engineer silk gazar, a fabric endowed with architectural memory. Stripping away all corsetry, boning, and wire structures, the couturier sculpted the cape as a free-standing bubble held upright solely by the internal tension of the weave.

At the core of both works lies a visceral desire to create distance from the outside world. Within the vast, transparent expanse of the SAS Hotel lobby, the Egg chair forms a sound-dampening haven for guests seeking privacy. In the exact same spirit, the Chou cape's ovoid shape wraps around the upper body, framing the face inside a private textile dome.



Designed for the lobby of the SAS Royal Hotel in Copenhagen, the shell of the Egg Chair creates a protective acoustic nest that envelops the body.

The Danish architect and the Spanish couturier were further united by a shared obsession with the botanical world. An avid gardener and collector of exotic flora, Jacobsen studied the organic contours of seeds and walnut shells to calibrate the chair's recline. Balenciaga applied the same logic, translating the dense, layered architecture of cabbage leaves (chou) into a deep, three-dimensional form.

While Jacobsen recalculated ergonomics to create an enveloping, protective shell around the body, Balenciaga took a more radical path, subsuming the human form entirely within a geometric abstraction. Yet, through the use of innovative materials, both masters succeeded in constructing a private architecture around the individual, gifting design history two immortal icons of pure spatial vision.

Steel Balance

Stripping away matter to reach its bare essence: this was the ethos driving Marcel Breuer when he conceived the Wassily chair in 1925, turning the natural flexibility of steel into a tool of design. Nearly a century later, China's Dongshuimen Bridge engages in a quiet, timeless dialogue with Breuer's masterpiece, proving that elegance is never about structural excess, but rather a flawless balance between opposing forces. Two projects operating on entirely different scales, yet anchored by the exact same principle: raw structural honesty.



Marcel Breuer, Wassily Chair, 1925, produced by Knoll International.



Man-Chung Tang, Dongshuimen Bridge, Chongqing, China. Photo by Zz/Pexels



A Bauhaus icon that reduces the chair to its bare essence, Casa MRGT, © Alessandro Saletta/DSL Studio, courtesy lamatilde studio

Guided by the Bauhaus dream of bridging high design and mass manufacturing, Hungarian architect Marcel Breuer found his spark while looking at the handlebars of an Adler bicycle. Recognising the untapped potential of tubular steel, he cold-bent the metal, bypassing traditional upholstery altogether to form a continuous load-bearing frame tailored for factory production. The painter Wassily Kandinsky was so taken by the prototype's unyielding logic that he asked Breuer for a second build for his studio, forever tying his name to a benchmark of industrial rationalism.

Fast forward nearly a century, and structural engineer Man-Chung Tang faced a mirroring challenge on a regional scale, spanning Chongqing's treacherous Yangtze River with the colossal Dongshuimen Bridge. Asked to deliver a grand, monumental landmark, Tang responded instead with structural optimisation and formal restraint. By stripping the visual footprint down to just two spindle-shaped concrete pylons, the bridge sheds all decorative noise, pushing material efficiency to its absolute limit.

The bridge relies on an asymmetric, double-deck design: upper lanes carry vehicular traffic, while the lower level cradles city subway lines inside an exposed steel truss box girder. Rather than resting on intermediate piers sunk into the riverbed, this immense dynamic weight hangs entirely suspended, counterbalanced by a single plane of 36 steel cables that channel the tension straight back to the central towers.

«I am as much interested in the smallest detail as in the whole structure»

Marcel Breuer

It is precisely this unmasked physical logic that reveals the deep kinship between the two works. In the Wassily chair, the steel frame outlines the silhouette and bears the compression, while taut leather straps cushion the body and distribute the load. In the Dongshuimen Bridge, that same principle governs a record-breaking 445-metre main span built to withstand massive dynamic stresses.

Much like Breuer bent steel to tune the tension of his leather webbing, Tang shaped his pylons to evoke the weaver's shuttles of traditional Chinese textile mills. The massive steel cables read as taut threads reaching out to stitch the opposite banks of the Yangtze together. In both creations, the flow of physical forces is instantly legible. Marcel Breuer and Man-Chung Tang prove that true elegance is never an added ornament, but the inevitable outcome of a structure that has arrived at its own ruthless equilibrium.



Panoramic view of the Dongshuimen Bridge. Photo by Liuuu_61/Pexels



Giuseppe Momo, double-helix staircase for the Vatican Museums, 1932. Photo by Jad Limcaco/Unsplash

The Great Beauty

In 1932, Giuseppe Momo designed the double-helix staircase for the Vatican Museums. Twenty-one years later, in 1953, James Watson and Francis Crick unlocked the molecular structure of DNA. What connects these two seemingly distant worlds? The deep and unconscious convergence between geometry and function.



Molecular model of the DNA double helix, discovered in 1953 by James Watson and Francis Crick. Photo by Warren Umoh/Unsplash

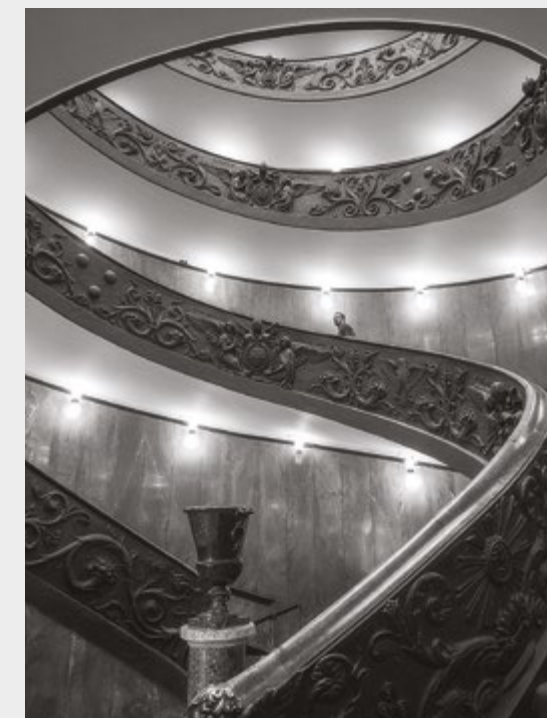
«This structure has novel features which are of considerable biological interest: its very geometry immediately suggests its function»

James Watson and Francis Crick

The story begins in 1929, when Pope Pius XI decided to overhaul the entrance to the Vatican Museums and commissioned architect Giuseppe Momo for the project. Faced with an initial blueprint for an external ramp, the Pope personally vetoed the design, ordering instead that a massive vertical shaft be excavated directly into the city's ancient ramparts. To line the cavity walls, Momo salvaged and cut marble from the surviving columns of the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, which had been devastated by a catastrophic fire.

Inaugurated on December 7, 1932, this monumental engineering feat masterfully resolved a practical challenge: managing massive crowds within a confined space without causing gridlock. Momo's solution was to weave two separate, stacked ramps through the exact same spatial footprint: incoming and outgoing visitors flow along parallel tracks without ever crossing paths, ensuring a completely frictionless flow.

In June 1951, Frank Lloyd Wright visited Rome and was captivated by Momo's double helix and its overhead glass-and-iron skylight. This dynamic verticality provided direct inspiration for the continuous spiralling ramp of his crowning masterpiece, the Guggenheim Museum in New York, which opened in 1959.



Detail of the decorated bronze balustrades and railings. Magdalena Roeseler/Wikimedia Commons



Perspective view from the top of the helical ramp. Photo by Ank Kumar/Wikimedia Commons

Just two years after Wright's visit, science revealed that this very geometry belonged to the fundamental code of matter itself. In Cambridge, Watson and Crick discovered that to make life work, nature chose the exact same engineering principle as the Vatican staircase: a three-dimensional double helix twisting around an invisible central axis. In DNA, two antiparallel strands run in opposite directions, linked by atomic bonds yet chemically independent. Much like Momo's ramps, this biological helix separates information tracks to prevent cellular chaos and errors during the duplication of life.

This connection becomes even more striking in the way both structures reveal their form. Watson and Crick deduced the molecule's exact geometry after surreptitiously viewing the famous "Photo 51" - the iconic X-ray diffraction image captured by Rosalind Franklin that flattened the structure into two dimensions. Yet, it was precisely this flat, geometric projection that revealed the secret of its three-dimensional structure. The same holds true for visitors at the Vatican: to truly grasp the harmony and complexity of Momo's twin ramps, one cannot simply walk them. You must look down from the very top, capturing the entire system in a single perspective.

Ultimately, both human architecture and nature answer the same fundamental urge: to safeguard an eternal archive. One synthesises the evolution of the human spirit through art history; the other protects the biological blueprint of life. Two helices born in entirely different realms, both guarding the exact same architecture of memory.

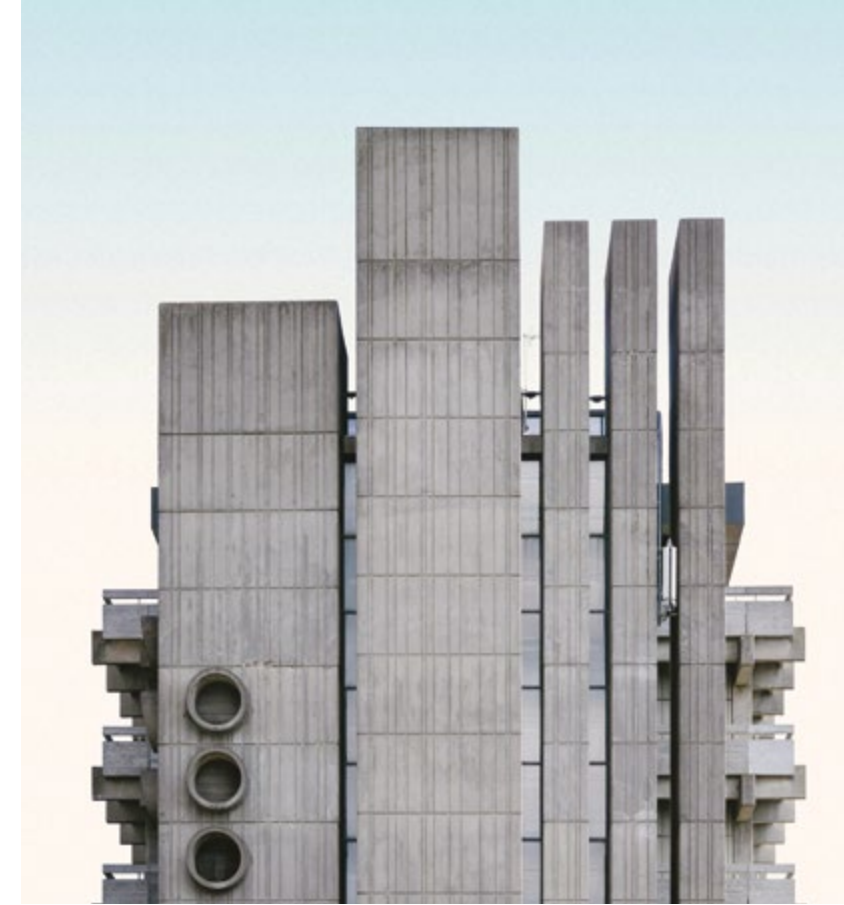
Interrogating the ordinary world



Photo by Philip Sinden

Stephen Bayley on the end of an era, the return of the analogue and why good design should behave like an English butler

We spoke to Stephen Bayley, one of Britain's most influential and provocative voices on design, about a discipline he has spent nearly half a century observing, questioning and challenging. From the fading supremacy of objects to the return of analogue pleasures, from beauty and Brutalism to AI, luxury and the virtues of simplicity, Bayley revealed why he believes Design with a capital D may have reached the end of the road, why that might not be such a bad thing, and why the world around us is still worth interrogating.



Detail of a Brutalist building in Copenhagen. Photo by Pierre Chatel Innocenti/Unsplash

Your first book was *In Good Shape*, in 1979. You were teaching Design and there were no textbooks around, so you decided to write one.

That's right. I was actually a student at Manchester myself, but I was teaching then at the University of Kent, and I started the history of art degree at the University of Kent. I was stupidly young. I wanted to do a course on the history of design.

Whether it was a cause or an effect of the design fetishism of the 1980s, it was certainly one of the first books in England to make a case for simple things. People got absolutely enchanted if you held up an object and said, "Do you know, somebody actually designed that? Somebody made decisions about this?" That sounds a commonplace now, but forty or more years ago people were actually astonished to learn that, my God, someone designed my pen.

And it led to the creation of something called the Boiler House Project at the Victoria and Albert Museum. We put on lots of exhibitions there in the '80s about design, exhibitions which shocked at the time, like the design of the Coca-Cola bottle, the new Ford Sierra, and Sony of Japan. And that in turn led to the creation of London's Design Museum. Ten years after the publication of *In Good Shape*, the Design Museum opened in 1989.

Nearly fifty years later, would you say design itself is still in good shape?

Yes and no. I'm absolutely impassioned by design. Almost nothing interests me more than the nature of objects and why we invest meaning and value in them. That will never change. But the more I think about it, the more I believe the era of Design with a capital D is almost over. We can now see with historical perspective that the whole design era in Europe and the United States was a movement almost as historically precise as the Baroque or the Rococo or Neoclassicism. It had a beginning and an end. One of the reasons I say that is because we're

"We now live in a culture about experiences rather than tangible things."

now ending the analogue era. We all know we're moving into a virtual era. People no longer place great value in things. Young people today are unlikely to buy a house, and so they're unlikely to buy furniture. They're less and less likely to want to buy a car.

Design was the last expression of the analogue era. It was the last great movement in the history of art. That doesn't make it irrelevant. There's masses we can learn from it, and nothing inspires me more than trying to explain to people why there is genuine value in an industrial artefact.

I think that while we're in the virtual age, the analogue era is going to return. I think very soon we're all going to be very disenchanted with virtual culture. Everything comes back, but for the moment design is a closed book. It's the end of an era.



Little Island, the floating public park designed by Heatherwick Studio in New York, glows in autumn colours. Photo by Danny Policarpo/Unsplash



The Design Museum in London, relocated in 2016 to its current Kensington home designed by John Pawson. © Hufton+Crow

If that is true, what has taken its place?

Nothing. We don't value tangible things any more. Who, for instance, is the world's greatest architect? Stupid question, but a generation ago I could give you quite a lot of names. Now I know the names of the well-known architects, but I don't think there are any great leaders of that profession.

There are no great product designers now because no one really wants products. One of the extraordinary things about what Jony Ive did (Ed. British industrial designer and former Chief Design Officer at Apple), this artefact which we all have, aesthetically it was so perfect. There was no further development possible. End of the road. So for the moment, nothing has replaced it. It's often said we now live in a culture about experiences rather than tangible things.

If you were creating the Design Museum today, what would you put in it?

I'm not trying to sound like an antique museum artefact myself, but the thinking behind the Design Museum was based in history, in what I learned as a youth and about the objects I admired and was fascinated by. I'm still interested in educating people and stimulating thought about design, but I wouldn't build a museum for it.

Nowadays, you don't really need a museum any more, do you? Margaret Thatcher opened the Design Museum for us. She wagged her finger at me and said, "You mustn't call it a museum, because museums are things of the past." I think that's true. They are of the past. And I think, in a sense, design is a thing of the past.

You have said that Chinese cars have no more character than a fridge. Is character something that can still be designed? And how would you build character into a refrigerator?

I'm not even sure you do want character in a refrigerator, really. I quite like ordinary things. Dieter Rams (Ed. German industrial designer, best known for his work for Braun) told me once, when one of the first exhibitions we did in the Boiler House was about Rams, that design should be like a good English butler. It should be something in the background. I want the fridge to be in the background. I want it to be efficient and handsome, but I don't want a statement fridge.

To get back to Chinese cars, I think Chinese car designers will develop an aesthetic of their own, but at the moment they're just having to borrow it from European and American examples. It will come. They will evolve, I'm certain, a language of their own, but they haven't got it yet. They haven't found the words to express that language.

You have quoted Picasso's line that great artists don't borrow, they steal. Is originality less about invention than about judgement?

Picasso was being, I think, ironic when he said that. Picasso was a mischievous individual. Genuine novelty is very, very rare. Everything has been borrowed from or inspired by something else. The process is continuous. I think originality and novelty are, up to a point, a chimera. It's probably best to understand what was excellent in the past. That was part of the purpose of building our Design Museum, to collect together the objects and stuff which were felt to be excellent.

Yes, judgement is a huge part of it. But for me, what design means is having an aestheticised view of the world.

I was a student in Manchester and did a very conventional course in the history of art. I'll never forget the day when I was in wet Manchester. Manchester is a romantic place, but it is very wet. I was being taught about the Carracci family (Ed. influential family of Bolognese Baroque painters) and the Baroque style in Bologna, which I love. But I was looking out of the window at the Manchester street scene and kept wondering: why is no one telling me why Manchester looks like it does?

They were very busy in Manchester telling me why Bolognese churches look the way they look, but they couldn't be bothered to explain Manchester to me. I think that became one of my great impulses in trying to talk about design. For me, trying to understand design is a business of interrogating the ordinary world. Why does it look like that? Why are some things more pleasing than others? And that's a question I always ask. So walking down the street for me is a fabulous sort of intellectual and aesthetic challenge.

“Design should be like a good English butler. In the background, efficient and handsome.”

Brutalism has gone from being condemned as a concrete monstrosity to becoming a social media icon. Has it finally been understood, or has it simply become another aesthetic fashion?

There's nothing wrong with aesthetic fashions. Everything comes and goes and returns. Taste is on a sinusoidal wave. I've always personally liked Brutalism.

Certainly in this country, some of the greatest civic architecture of the twentieth century was what we call Brutalist. I love it because it's not boring. The people who condemn Brutalist architecture perhaps ignore the fact that these people are doing something expressive and meaningful, not trying to make bland, invisible, dull buildings.

In Britain it's enjoying a huge fashionable re-uptake now, but I've always enjoyed it. London's National Theatre, which is just fifty years old this year, is an absolutely magnificent bit of architecture. There's nothing wrong with concrete. I like concrete.

You once said that buildings cannot lie, unlike politicians. In an age of political uncertainty, technological disruption and virtual lives, has architecture become even more important to our wellbeing?

I do. I absolutely do. It's one of my mantras that architecture is more important than politics because ultimately architecture and our environment affect our lives more than politics do. Buildings can't lie, whereas politicians do all the time.

I'm chairman of the Royal Fine Art Commission. Four years ago, we started something called the Building Beauty Awards. There are lots of architectural awards around, but none of them makes beauty an explicit criterion. There seems to be nothing more important than pursuing beauty. It's like Stendhal in Florence, when he had the so-called Stendhal syndrome, when he was so affected by the beauty of the buildings. He defined beauty as "the prospect of happiness, or the promise of happiness." It may not be true, but it's a rather beautiful conceit.

We need more beauty. Although, importantly, if everything was beautiful, nothing would be beautiful. At the same time as we want more beauty, I think you have to have a measure of ugliness in the world in order to enjoy it. I spent some time teaching in schools of architecture. One of the things I've noticed is that if you ask a student deliberately to create an ugly design, they find it very difficult. Ugliness almost always happens by accident or carelessness rather than through intention. If I was still running the Design Museum, I'd have an exhibition about ugliness. Ugliness is fascinating.



Opened in 1911 in Liverpool, the Royal Liver Building held the title of Europe's tallest building until 1932. Photo by Dimitris Vetsikas/Pixabay

In Taste, you argue that objects reveal who we are. What do your own possessions say about you?

Possessions are the equivalent of heraldry for us. In the modern world, or the twentieth-century world now past, there's no such thing as innocence. There are no value-free decisions. You can't say, "I don't care about clothes, I just wear a white T-shirt." Wearing a white T-shirt reveals that you really care about wearing a white T-shirt.

I often hear people say, "I'm not interested in cars, I just drive an old Volvo." Of course what they mean is, "I really want you to know that I drive an old Volvo because that expresses my values."

What have I got in my study? I quite like cameras. I'm a very analogue person. I've got the last English 35mm camera, the same camera Edmund Hillary used to take photographs at the top of Everest. And lots of books. You can take someone's intellectual pulse by looking at the books they've got. I'm always surrounded by books. Books are the ultimate analogue product and by far the most efficient data retrieval system, far more efficient than any electronic ones. I absolutely adore books.

“You can take someone’s intellectual pulse by looking at the books they’ve got.”



Almost everything produced by Dieter Rams is today considered a classic. Pictured, the cover of the volume Less but Better, copyright Jo Klatt Design+Design Verlag 2014, courtesy of Gestalten 2014.



A glimpse into the analogue era: when communication required coins, patience, and a physical location. Photo by Rick Barrett/Unsplash

What analogue pleasure would you be most reluctant to lose?

We're never going to get virtual cooking. You can get recipes online, but I think all the important things in the world aren't going to be replaced by digital services or AI. Lawyers and accountants will be replaced by AI, but we all want lawyers and accountants replaced. Great idea. Building a dry stone wall, writing a letter with a pen on paper, these things will come back. People will begin to value that. AI might give us some advice about what buildings might be, but we're still going to have to build them. Food and buildings aren't going to be replaced by AI. AI might help us in the same way as power tools helped craftsmen.

I often think that food and cooking and architecture and design have a lot in common. You have to create a beautiful result, but it has to be functional and nutritious, and you have to have a good concept or a good recipe. Most important of all, it takes care. Care is extraordinarily important.

I once asked Jony Ive how he defined what he did. He just said he takes exceptional care, care beyond what is reasonable. Significantly, Jony Ive's father was a silversmith. He knew exactly how to work metal. In his designs for Apple, the early iPad took aluminium to the absolute limit. It was as much as you could ever do with aluminium.

Paradoxically and fascinatingly, these heralds of the digital age were actually designed by a man with a craftsman's mentality. I find that completely fascinating. On this matter, one of the most influential experiences I've ever had was spending a week in Venice a long time ago with Marcella Hazan. She used to do a little cookery course in her flat in Cannaregio. My wife and I went on it. It was one of the most life-enhancing and life-changing experiences I've ever had.

Marcella used to say wonderful things like, "I don't measure, I cook." She used to take six students at a time, and we all used to go off to the Rialto market first thing in the morning. We didn't have any recipes. We chose what looked good, radicchio from Treviso, capesante, veal chop, and brought it all back, and she said, "What should we do with this?" I love the principle of Italian food as well, that someone once said classical Italian food celebrates the nature of God rather than the genius of the chef.

Coco Chanel said luxury begins where necessity ends. You have suggested that luxury is about effort and care beyond what is necessary. Is genuine luxury becoming rarer or simply harder to recognise?

I don't like the huge luxury goods businesses. I find them repulsive. But I like Coco Chanel's idea of luxury. In fact, I like Coco Chanel so much my daughter is called Coco. Chanel also said that luxury isn't the opposite of poverty. It's the opposite of vulgarity. I like that very much.

The great thing about design is it makes beautiful things economically accessible. Part of the definition of design is about the democratisation of luxury. It's about making fine, great experiences available to everyone.

I don't mind specialness. If people want to spend £5,000 on a handbag, that's fine. I'm not a Puritan. But the big challenge for me is to be able to design and make a beautiful, serviceable item, whether it's a handbag or a pen or anything, at modest cost. That's what design in the industrial era is all about. This is the folly of my way of life. I've got this Montblanc which I use for symbolic purposes. It's actually useless to write with. What I actually write with is a Muji ballpoint pen, which costs less than a pound.

I'm very interested in hedonism because I'm very keen on pleasure. But true pleasure tends to come from restraint rather than indulgence. I like elitism, and I like specialness. Cole Porter once said, "I'm not a snob, I just like the best," which strikes me as absolutely right.

Stephen Bayley

Stephen Bayley is one of Britain's most influential writers, commentators and thinkers on design, taste and the meaning of objects. His first book, In Good Shape, published in 1979, was among the earliest British attempts to make the intellectual case for the design of ordinary things. It led to the Boiler House Project at London's Victoria and Albert Museum and ultimately to the creation of the Design Museum, which opened in 1989. Having studied art history in Manchester, Bayley went on to start the history of art degree at the University of Kent. The author of numerous books on design, taste and ugliness, he is also Chairman of the Royal Fine Art Commission and helped establish its Building Beauty Awards. Nearly half a century after In Good Shape, he remains an unmistakably provocative voice in design culture, still engaged in what he calls "interrogating the ordinary world".

www.stephenbayley.com

THE GENTLE ANARCHY OF MATERIALS



Martino Gamper surrounded by the chairs from his celebrated project 100 Chairs in 100 Days, in which he transformed discarded chairs into one hundred unique pieces over one hundred consecutive days. ©Filippo Pincolini.

There is an iconic image, now deeply embedded in the narrative of contemporary design, that captures the essence of Martino Gamper's work far better than any essay ever could. London, mid-2000s: a designer wanders through the city's outskirts, salvaging broken, abandoned chairs left on the pavement. Moulded plastic shells, Victorian wooden frames, a stool missing a leg. Back in his studio, these castoffs are dismantled, reassembled, and hybridised with surprisingly harmonious precision. The result is both groundbreaking and poetic: one hundred unique chairs, crafted in one hundred consecutive days. Nearly two decades later, 100 Chairs in 100 Days hasn't lost an ounce of its radical energy. It stands as a timeless reminder that true design doesn't require a blank slate - just an eye for memory, a willingness to listen, and a healthy dose of creative anarchy.

Born in Merano in 1971, Martino Gamper is today one of the most intriguing, elusive, and influential figures on the global design scene. Calling him simply a "designer" feels reductive, almost misleading. Gamper is a storyteller, an alchemist operating along the thin line between high craftsmanship and conceptual art. His background is deeply rooted in the physical reality of materials. He started out as a young apprentice cabinetmaker, learning the nuances of wood and the raw, physical limits of the medium. Then came the leap to Europe's capitals of experimentation: first Vienna, studying sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts under Arte Povera master Michelangelo Pistoletto, and later London, where he refined his vision at the Royal College of Art under the disruptive guidance of Ron Arad.

This dual soul - the artisan workshop and contemporary art - defines his entire body of work. For Gamper, the idea never quite precedes the material; rather, it is the physical encounter with the substance itself that dictates the form. In his London studio, making and thinking are merely two sides of the same coin. At a time when industrial design leans heavily into mass-produced standardisation, Gamper's work moves in a stubbornly opposite direction. His pieces celebrate the inherent imperfection of materials. In his furniture, whether one-offs for prestigious galleries or public installations, the joinery is exposed, the cuts are sharp, and the materials themselves - fine timber, cheap laminate, metal, plastic - coexist in a completely personal, asymmetrical harmony.

This is by no means a search for the quirky or the intentionally crude; far from it. Even when he dismantles and reassembles furniture designed by masters like Gio Ponti or Piero Portaluppi, his intervention is a profound mark of respect for the object's history. Gamper does not destroy for the sake of it; he repairs, transforms, and grants a second life. In this sense, his approach anticipates and embodies the most pressing conversations around sustainability and the circular economy yet strips them of any preachy or academic rhetoric. His approach is an ecology of action, where reclaimed materials become visual poetry and upcycling turns into a brilliant intellectual game.



Redesigned by Martino Gamper during the live performance celebrating the tenth anniversary of Nilufar Depot, PostForma Ico originates from a vintage nightstand designed by Ico Parisi. ©Filippo Pincolini, courtesy Nilufar.

His work reminds us that the objects surrounding us carry a history. A repaired chair or a reassembled table bears the marks and scars of their past use, and it is precisely those imperfections that allow them to connect with us on a deeply human level, as equally imperfect and fleeting beings. It is no coincidence that many of his most celebrated projects centre on food, conviviality, and collective performance. Extra-long tables to gather around, mobile kitchens transformed into stages for impromptu dinners, and interactive installations like Sitzung (presented in 2024 at Munich's Haus der Kunst), where the public is invited to continuously shift and rearrange the seating, reconfiguring public space according to the needs of the moment. In Gamper's universe, design is above all a social catalyst. A chair does not merely offer a place to rest; it establishes a distance, a hierarchy, or an alliance between the person sitting on it and the one facing them. It is a deeply political object. In this vision, design ceases to be a mere commodity and reclaims its true calling: a tool crafted to enrich the human experience and improve the quality of our daily lives.



Created in London in 2007, the project 100 Chairs in 100 Days transforms discarded chairs into unique compositions through a process of dismantling and recombination, exploring the potential of reuse and the unexpected relationships between materials and forms.
© Filippo Pincolini



Five curved wooden elements outline the unmistakable silhouette of Post Mundus, the chair designed by Martino Gamper for Gebrüder Thonet Vienna GmbH (GTV). © Tommaso Riva



Do you consider yourself more of a craftsman, an artist, or a designer?

Designer. I see design as a very open discipline. It allows me to move between craftsmanship, art, architecture, performance and publishing without having to choose one category. Design is a way of thinking and a way of making.

You began your training as an apprentice carpenter in Merano before studying under Michelangelo Pistoletto in Vienna and Ron Arad in London. How does this dual nature - craftsmanship and conceptual art - coexist in your studio on a daily basis?

I don't really separate them. Craftsmanship gives me the ability to understand materials, construction and production. Conceptual thinking allows me to question why something should exist in the first place. Every project starts with an idea, but it only becomes meaningful once it is made. The workshop is not simply a place where ideas are executed, it's where ideas are developed. I like to think with both my hands and my mind.

“The workshop is not simply a place where ideas are executed - it's where ideas are developed. I like to think with both my hands and my mind”

Is there an idea or an object that you have never made but would love to try your hand at?

I'm less interested in making a particular object than in creating environments. I'd love to design an entire public space where architecture, furniture and people's behaviour all become part of the same project. For me, the most interesting design begins when people start using it in unexpected ways.

What do you feel is missing from the world of design today?

More curiosity and less certainty. More consciousness and a little less intelligence, but still smart. Today, design is often driven by trends, branding and immediate visibility. I think we need more experimentation, more time to develop ideas and more projects that don't begin with a market analysis. Curiosity means taking risks and accepting that you don't know where you'll end up.



Martino Gamper reinterprets the LT29 bed by Franco Albini and Franca Helg, originally produced by Poggi in 1957, on the occasion of the performance celebrating the tenth anniversary of Nilufar Depot.
©Filippo Pincolini, courtesy Nilufar.



Sitzung a Torino, a project which was originally conceived by the artist for the spaces of the Haus der Kunst in Munich between 2023 and 2024. ©Sebastiano Pellion di Persano/Galleria Franco Noero

The project 100 Chairs in 100 Days became a milestone in your research work. How did the idea come about and, looking back after all these years, how do you view that experience today?

It began as a self-imposed exercise. I wanted to stop thinking about making chairs and simply make them, one chair every day for one hundred days, using existing chairs as my raw material. Looking back, I realise the project wasn't really about chairs. It was about learning to trust intuition, making decisions quickly and understanding that limitations can generate freedom. It still influences the way I work today.

The German word Sitzung, which means both “seating” and “meeting” or “session”, was the title of your 2024 installation that transformed the Mittelhalle of the Haus der Kunst in Munich into a fluid environment where the public could interact with the space and move chairs as needed. What fascinates you so deeply about chairs compared to any other type of furniture?

A chair is probably the most political object in the home. It defines how we sit, how we meet, who faces whom and who occupies space. A chair is never just an object, it shapes behaviour. That's why I keep returning to it. Every chair is also a proposal for a way of living together.



Martino Gamper, Sitzung 6, 2023.



“A chair is probably the most political object in the home. It defines how we sit, how we meet, who faces whom and who occupies space. A chair is never just an object - it shapes behaviour”



Industrial design often leans toward standardisation and geometric perfection. On the contrary, your work celebrates flaws, visible grafts, and asymmetry. Why is imperfection so important in your practice?

I wouldn't call it imperfection. I'm interested in traces, evidence of how something has been made, repaired or transformed. Those traces tell stories. Standardisation often removes those stories in the pursuit of efficiency. I'm interested in objects that reveal their history rather than hide it. We have to accept that we're not perfect. We're human, not machines, and we need to leave room for that humanity to be expressed.

Martino Gamper's chairs take centre stage at Munich's Haus der Kunst during the Sitzung installation. © Judith_Buss

Many of your projects incorporate conviviality, food, and performance. Is design an excuse for bringing people together, or are people the final element that completes the object?

Food is one of the most powerful everyday tools for bringing people together. To celebrate those moments we need objects and furniture that encourage people to gather. I often describe my work as being about places, spaces, people and behaviour. Furniture only becomes meaningful once it is occupied, moved, shared or even argued over. I'm interested in designing situations rather than simply designing objects.

“If you only respond to commissions, you spend your time answering other people’s questions. I prefer to ask my own”



In this photo and alongside: bright and deep colours bring to life Xequer, the rug collection designed by Martino Gamper for cc-tapis.



A prototype lamp created for the retrospective exhibition 'Before, After & Beyond', curated by Gamper alongside Sarah Douglas. © Angus Mill.



Designed by Gamper for Rubelli, Figura is a modular armchair that offers endless configurations by combining its components: seat, backrest, armrests, and sides.

Speaking of food: how are your skills in the kitchen? Is there a recipe you particularly love or that you created yourself?

I enjoy cooking, especially when there are lots of people around the table. I don't really follow recipes, I improvise. Cooking is very similar to designing; you work with what's available, adapt to circumstances and hope that people enjoy the result. For me, sharing a meal is one of the best forms of design because it creates conversation.

You have collaborated extensively with key contemporary institutions, such as the LUMA Foundation in Arles, yet most of your projects come to life without a formal commission. Why is that?

Curiosity has always been a stronger motivation than a commission. Many of my projects begin because I want to understand something or test an idea. If you only respond to commissions, you spend your time answering other people's questions. I prefer to ask my own. Interestingly, those self-initiated projects often become the reason institutions or clients approach me later. For me, research is not something separate from practice, it is the practice.

Bio

Italian-born designer Martino Gamper lives and works in London. Starting as an apprentice with a furniture maker in Merano, Gamper went on to study sculpture under Michelangelo Pistoletto at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. He completed a master's degree in 2000 from the Royal College of Art in London, where he studied under Ron Arad. Working across design and art venues, Martino Gamper engages in a variety of projects from exhibition design, interior design, one-off commissions and the design of mass-produced products for the cutting edge of the international furniture industry. In 2023, he was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for his contributions to design. In addition, iconic works such as his reinterpretations of Carlo Mollino's seating have been acquired for the permanent collection at the MoMA in New York.

martinogamper.com





VIPP, VERY IMPORTANT PIECES: *The Art of Long-Lasting Design*

It all started in 1939 with a quiet act of devotion and a very practical request: a heavy-duty pedal bin for his wife Marie's hairdressing salon. Holger Nielsen welded the first piece in his workshop in Randers, Denmark, blissfully unaware that he was shaping an icon of industrial design, one that would eventually find a home in the permanent collection at MoMA. He named it Vipp, after the Danish verb vippe, describing the smooth, tilting motion of its lid.

Decades later, in the early nineties, his daughter Jette Egelund took over and fundamentally reframed the brand's narrative. She pulled the bin out of medical supply catalogues and placed it where it truly belonged: in the world's most curated design showrooms. That single move set off a domino effect. Over time, that same obsessive attention to quality and detail was applied to a full-scale living ecosystem, spanning modular kitchens, lighting and contemporary furniture.

To give this expanding universe a home, the Vipp Shelter came to life: a steel-and-glass retreat anchored in nature, where every element, from the structural framework down to cutlery, shares the exact same design vernacular.

When images of the cabin first surfaced, the response was immediate. Design lovers didn't just want to buy it; they wanted to stay in it. Capitalising on this new opportunity, the Shelter evolved into a global network of guesthouses. It pioneered a new concept of immersive hospitality where the true product isn't a single object, but the sensory experience of inhabiting a space.

In this conversation with DM, Jette Egelund reflects on the journey of a fiercely independent company, explaining why true luxury today isn't about chasing trends, but about creating pieces designed to last a lifetime. And well beyond.



Holger Nielsen with the original Vipp pedal bin created in his workshop in Randers, Denmark, which later became an icon of industrial design.

When did you stop seeing the Vipp bin as just a creation from your father's workshop, and realise it was a masterpiece of industrial design ready for the global stage?

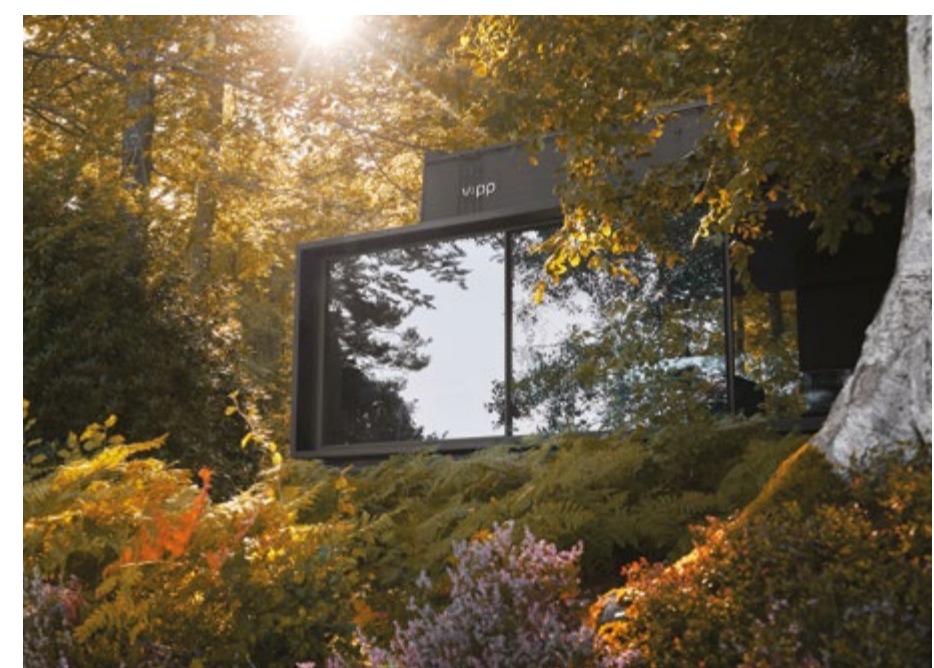
I don't think there was one dramatic moment when I suddenly called it a masterpiece. When I took over Vipp in 1992, I had grown up with the bin, so to me it was simply part of everyday life. What I did believe was that my father had made something with a strong function and a strong aesthetic, and that it deserved to be experienced beyond the professional market.

The important turning point came when I started taking the bin to the best furniture and design shops in Scandinavia and, eventually, when The Conran Shop ordered it for its stores in London and Paris. That was when I knew I was on the right track. The bin was beginning to be understood not simply as a piece of equipment for hairdressers, doctors and dentists, but as industrial Danish design.

In 1992, you took the helm of a company with just a single employee in the factory. What was the greatest hurdle, whether psychological or commercial, that you faced in convincing people that a pedal bin deserved a place in the design world?

The biggest hurdle was that people simply did not see the bin in that context. For my generation, it was a doctor's or dentist's bin. That was the challenge I faced: changing the perception of something people already knew very well.

I also had to learn everything as I went along. I had not set out to become a manufacturer or run a design company. I simply felt very strongly that my father's work should not disappear. Together with Kasper and Sofie, I wanted to bring the function and aesthetic of the bin from businesses into private homes.



The Vipp Shelter immersed in nature: the prefabricated steel-and-glass retreat that gave birth to the Vipp hospitality concept

Was there a specific “no” you received early on in your career that actually energised you or forced you to refine your vision?

Yes, there was resistance. One of the stories that has stayed with the Vipp history is my approach to The Conran Shop in London. It did not immediately get a positive response. I was persistent, however, and eventually left a bin behind. A week later, the first order came through. For me, that experience reinforced something that has been important throughout Vipp's history: sometimes you have to believe in the product before other people do.

In your opinion, what is the single biggest challenge that global design is being called upon to address today?

It is important to think long-term rather than following short-term trends or profits. Vipp's approach is to be “in it for the long run”, and the company continues to build on the idea that good design should last. That principle feels particularly relevant at a time when so many products are made to be replaced quickly.

Vipp's expansion into architecture and hospitality, with the Vipp Shelters and Guesthouses, was a visionary move. How does the fundamental Vipp philosophy translate into the physical experience of living within a three-dimensional space?

For me, the interesting thing is that the philosophy did not really change when Vipp moved from products into spaces. It simply became larger. The bin established a way of thinking: function, quality, distinctive materials and manufacturing, and a design language that does not depend on fashion. Vipp describes these as the pillars of its DNA. In the guesthouses, those same principles become an environment rather than a single object.

I also think it is important that we are not trying to create a conventional hotel experience. The guesthouses are meant to give people the feeling of living somewhere rather than simply staying somewhere. The architecture becomes a stage for the Vipp way of living.



Exterior view of the Vipp Shelter, an immersive architecture designed to offer a complete living experience in touch with nature.

“It all started in 1939 with a practical need and a pedal bin built to last”

In 2009, the Vipp bin entered the permanent collection of MoMA in New York. You famously noted that this is the only place where the bin functions strictly as decor. What does it feel like to know that a family object has found a home in the world's most renowned museum?

It is an extraordinary recognition, of course, but what makes it particularly meaningful is the journey. My father made the first bin for my mother's hair salon in 1939. It was made to solve a very practical problem. It was never conceived as a museum object.

So there is something wonderfully ironic about the fact that MoMA is the only place where the bin is strictly decoration. Everywhere else, its job is still to work. For me, the museum recognition confirms that something made for everyday life can have a lasting cultural value without losing its original purpose.

Vipp remains a fiercely independent, family-owned business, now led by your children, Kasper and Sofie. What is the most important unwritten rule or value you have passed down to them regarding the brand's identity?

I think the most important thing is to think long term, and quality, always quality.

Vipp is still family-owned and family-run, and that gives us the freedom to pursue ideas that are meaningful rather than simply chasing short-term profits. The founding principles have remained remarkably consistent even as the company has grown from a single bin to kitchens, furniture, lighting and architecture.

The responsibility is not to preserve Vipp as a museum piece. It is to carry the original values forward and allow them to develop.



Interior of a Vipp Guesthouse overlooking the sea, furnished with the brand's collection of furniture, lighting, and upholstery



An icon true to itself: the original 1939 version and the current model of the Vipp bin differ only in the subtle redesign of the lid.

In a world increasingly dominated by fast-moving trends and disposable products, Vipp stands for extreme longevity. How do you create an object that truly stands the test of time, both materially and aesthetically?

I think longevity begins with not designing for a particular moment. My father's bin was created as a functional tool, and that principle remains central. The design has changed remarkably little over the decades. At Vipp, we look at functionality, materials, manufacturing and durability as a whole rather than treating appearance as something separate.

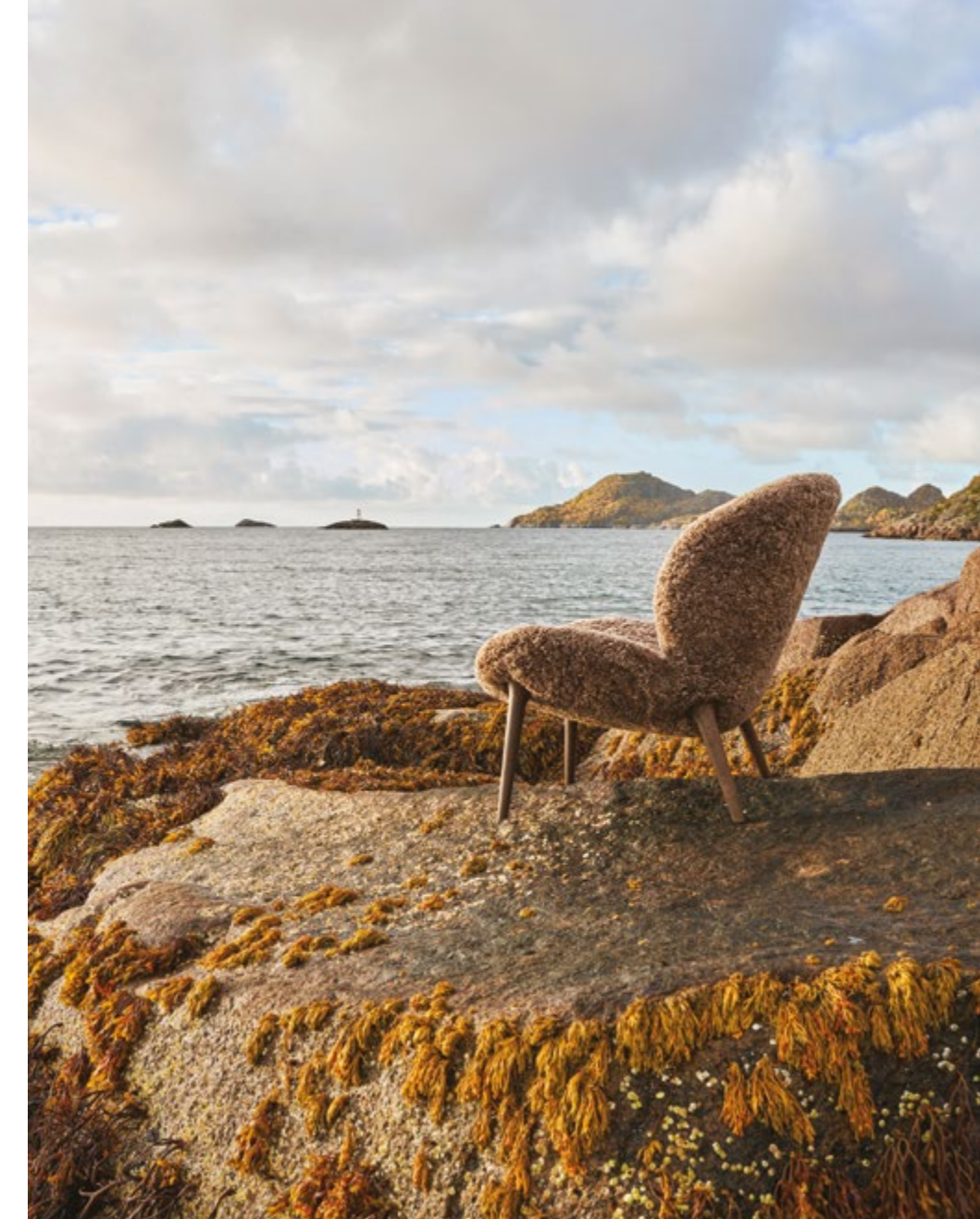
The bin is a good example because it has been used for almost a century without losing its original character. We have even continued to produce spare parts, which is another way of thinking about longevity: the life of the object should not end simply because one component needs replacing.

At the latest edition of 3daysofdesign in Copenhagen, Vipp presented a fresh interpretation of the Vipp guesthouse, created in collaboration with the Barcelona-based Studio Mesura. How did this partnership come about, and what core values does it convey?

The 2026 collaboration with Mesura explored the guesthouse in a new way. Rather than treating it purely as a secluded retreat, Mesura transformed it into what they called a "playhouse", inspired by the simple act of a picnic and the social atmosphere of Danish Midsummer.

The installation was built around the contrast between Vipp's steel heritage and soft, tactile textiles. It created a shared landscape for rest, conversation and play.

I think that is an interesting continuation of the guesthouse idea: architecture is not only about the object or the building itself, but about how people experience it together.



The Vipp Lodge Lounge Chair upholstered in Australian crossbred sheep, set against a Scandinavian coastal landscape.

Danish design has a legendary history rooted in functionalism and mid-century modernism. Where do you see the future of Scandinavian design heading, and how is Vipp steering that conversation today?

We are not interested in reproducing the past. The company has taken the original industrial design philosophy into completely new territories, kitchens, furniture, lighting and architecture, while keeping functionality, material quality and longevity at the centre.

So perhaps the most interesting future for Scandinavian design is not about looking Scandinavian. It is about retaining its underlying values while allowing the form and application to evolve.



“We grew from a single iconic pedal bin into a complete universe of living”

V1 Kitchen in Vipp's signature black powder-coating features a slightly textured surface, offering a deep matte black kitchen.

“Good design is not about decoration, but function, quality, and timeless materials”

How did the Vipp Art Bins project come to life? Can industrial design and contemporary art truly find common ground?

For me, the connection between Vipp and art goes back much further than the Art Bins project. My father had an artistic side. In his office, next to the metal factory in our childhood home in Randers, he had a large painting that he had received in payment for some buckets. He also taught classical dance in the evenings, and there was always classical music playing at home. So art and music were part of my upbringing.

The Vipp Art Bins project really began in Paris in 2005, when we invited artists to reinterpret the bin for a major charity auction, followed by an exhibition at the Louvre. Since then, more than 150 artists, architects and designers have used the bin as a canvas, including Ron Arad, Philippe Starck, Damien Hirst, Christian Lacroix and Inga Sempé.

I think industrial design and art can absolutely meet. The bin already has such a strong, recognisable form that an artist can reinterpret it without changing its function. They can respond to the object, challenge it, or simply use it as a canvas. That creates a dialogue between something made for everyday use and something made to provoke thought or emotion.



A special edition of the Vipp bin featuring graphic pattern work on its metallic surface



Vipp’s vision for the bathroom, where the iconic pedal bin completes the interior space.



A selection of pieces from the Vipp Art Bins project, where international artists and designers reinterpreted the iconic bin for charity auctions and exhibitions



Bio

Jette Egelund, daughter of Holger Nielsen - the craftsman who created the iconic Vipp pedal bin in 1939 - took the reins of the family business in 1992, transforming a small metal workshop into a global powerhouse of Danish design. Driven by relentless tenacity and an unyielding belief in functional beauty, she turned a single daily-life object into a MoMA-worthy masterpiece, eventually steering Vipp's vision toward lighting, furniture, and visionary architecture. Today, having passed the leadership to her children Sofie and Kasper, she remains the proud guardian of a fiercely independent legacy built on extreme quality and long-term vision.

vipp.com





THE INTUITIVE EYE

There is a natural, almost hypnotic magnetism that defines Nina Yashar. It is the aura of someone who refuses to settle for the surface of things, choosing instead to engage directly with their soul. A pioneer of collectible design long before the term existed, the founder of Nilufar has turned her name into a global hallmark, synonymous with refined eclecticism, visual audacity, and a steadfast, almost visceral devotion to beauty.

Raised amidst the intricate weaves of oriental rugs from her father's trade, Yashar took that textile heritage and made it the springboard for a personal revolution. From her beginnings in the 1980s to the creation of Nilufar Depot - a majestic post-industrial theatre where furniture isn't merely displayed, but staged as if on a backdrop - her path speaks of an unerring instinct. It is a sharp intuition ahead of its time, effortlessly pairing 20th-century masters with the most radical contemporary talent.

In this intimate conversation with DM, the gallerist reflects on how it all began, her deep bond with Milan, her eye-opening encounter with GianCarlo Montebello, and the quiet power of an idea of luxury and rarity that rejects all conformity.

Was there a particular moment when you realised you wanted to open a gallery?

There wasn't a single lightning-bolt moment. It came out of a conversation with my father when I was twenty-one. I'd been working alongside him for a few months, learning the carpet trade, and realised almost immediately that I didn't want simply to follow in his footsteps. I wanted to find my own path alongside his. I spoke to him about it, and he let me open a space of my own.

Is there a childhood memory, an object or a domestic space that unconsciously shaped the way you see the world?

I grew up, from the very beginning, surrounded by beauty, my father dealt in oriental carpets, and our home was full of them. That environment gave me a cultural sensitivity and an entrepreneurial instinct very early on, long before I understood I would ever use them professionally. I didn't have to learn to look at objects as carriers of history and craft, I simply absorbed it, the way a child absorbs a language.



Part of the installation La casa magica by Nilufar, the Portale mirror by Clara Schweers reimagines the mirror as a domestic portal between realities. © Alejandro Ramirez Orozco



Table Lamp 3 by Robinson Ferreux Maeght at Nilufar Grand Hotel, Milan Design Week 2026. © Filippo Pincolini

Growing up with a father in the carpet trade, what was the single greatest lesson you inherited from him?

The greatest lesson wasn't technical; it was a way of seeing. My father taught me, without ever formalising it into rules, that an object carries a story, a sense of craftsmanship, a piece of a culture, and that recognising that is a form of respect. And beneath that, he gave me something more instinctive: trust. Trust in my own eye, even when it goes against convention.

What motto guided your very first steps?

"Follow your instincts. Instinct minimises failure." That has never changed, from the carpets to the first piece of Scandinavian furniture I bought without even knowing what I was looking at, to every discovery since.

If you hadn't become a gallerist, what path would you have taken?

I would probably have stayed in the world of textiles and craftsmanship. But it's hard to imagine a version of me that doesn't spend her time putting objects, eras, and cultures into conversation with one another. It's more a way of thinking than a profession.

In a visionary's life, there is often one encounter that changes everything. Who pushed your boundaries the furthest?

If I think of a mentor, the name that comes to mind is GianCarlo Montebello, the renowned jewellery designer who also designed my home. It was Milan in the 1990s, and all my clients' homes were decorated with precious fabrics on the walls, reflecting that whole Mongiardino, Filippo Perego, Nicolò Castellini era. I said to myself: "I don't want anything like that. But what do I do? Who do I even ask?"

Fortunately, I met Montebello quite by chance. I came across a small sphere covered in gold leaf, sitting on a column in a client's home, and immediately asked to be introduced to the mind behind this "strange idea". That is how I discovered a very special jewellery designer whose approach was to understand the soul before the space. I knew he would create something deeply personal, interpreting my Persian background through the columns and colours and creating something that was entirely mine.

The long restoration of my home saw dark, low-ceilinged rooms transformed into an open-plan space complete with hand-painted frescoes. I had to be patient and trust completely in the creative process Montebello was bringing to life. At the time, I was living upstairs, pregnant with my daughter Lavinia. My attitude has always been to choose the harder road to reach beauty. I wanted something unique, something no one else could have. It was a long process, but an extraordinarily interesting one, and a memory I still hold very close.



During Milan Design Week 2026, the Nilufar Grand Hotel installation reinterpreted high-end hospitality spaces through a monumental scenography showcasing historical archive pieces alongside new contemporary editions. © Alejandro Ramirez Orozco

"My attitude has always been to choose the harder road to reach beauty"



Coffee Table Spider Web by Objects of Common Interest at Nilufar Grand Hotel, Milan Design Week 2026. © Filippo Pincolini

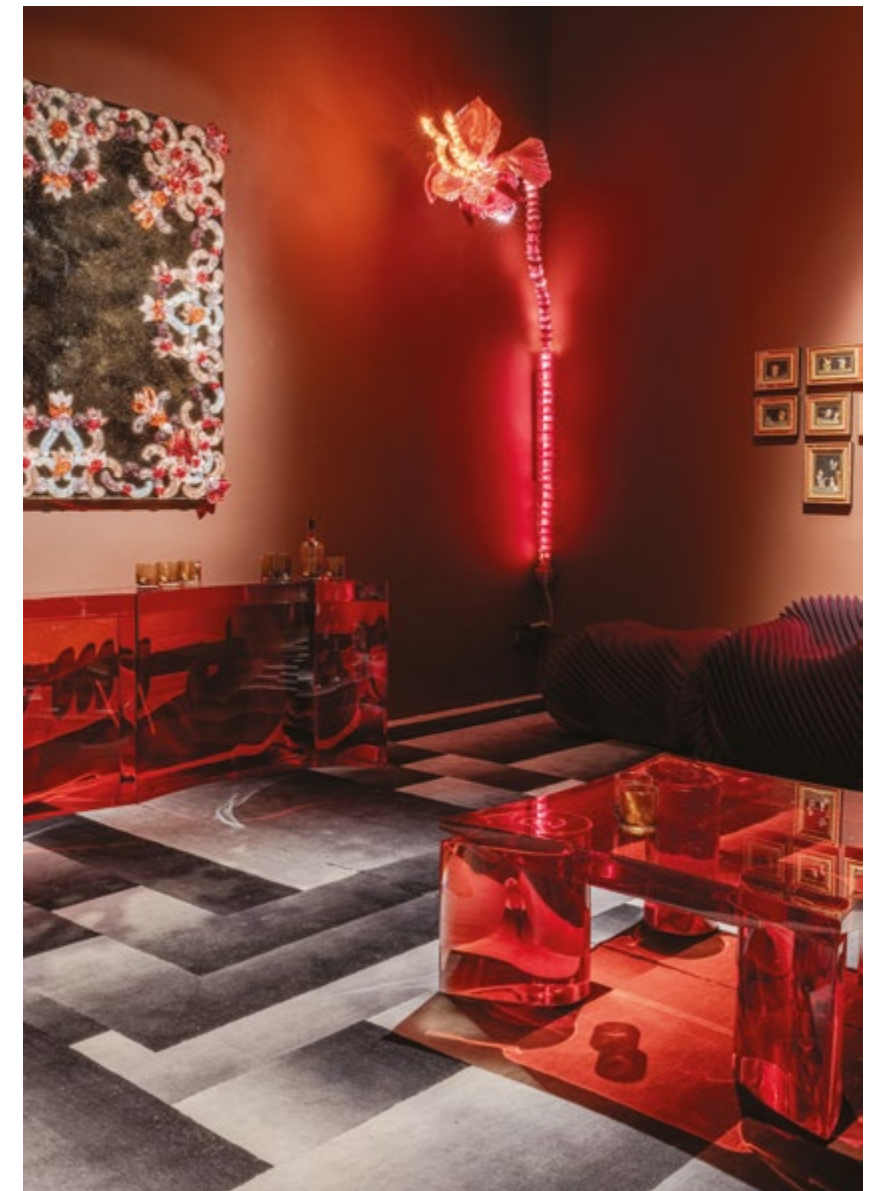
From Martino Gamper to Lindsey Adelman, you have championed some of the defining figures in contemporary design. How do you discover emerging talent and, above all, recognise true potential when you see it?

It's a profoundly personal process. I travel constantly and look at fairs and degree shows, but mostly I follow my instinct first: an emotional attraction, an object with a strong personality that surprises me. Only after that first spark do I bring in research: historical archives, other disciplines, how a piece relates to what's happening in design at the time. When I see something that moves me, I know almost instantly that it belongs at Nilufar.

Do you think this intuition can be honed over time, or is it more of an innate, inexplicable sixth sense?

It's both, honestly. There is an instinctive response I can't fully explain. I trust my eye and my gut. But I also do extensive research constantly, so that instinct is fed and sharpened by decades of looking. I don't think the two can be separated. Who are some of the names in contemporary design that you feel are worth keeping an eye on right now? Andrea Mancuso, who has been part of Nilufar for over a decade and whose recent work, from the Pentimenti collection to Lumiac, a chandelier that plays with human gesture and artificial intelligence, includes some of the most complete work I've seen from him. I'd also point to Filippo Carandini and Andrea Sanguineti, both now designing for Nilufar Edition, and david/nicolas, whose poetic, precise language has developed a real dialogue with us. There is no designer I represent whom I don't deeply admire.

"It's hard to imagine a version of me that doesn't spend her time putting objects, eras, and cultures into conversation with one another"



A detail of the fumoir at Nilufar Grand Hotel. © Alejandro Ramirez Orozco

The pieces you choose are often described as provocative. What does provocation mean to you, in design and in real life?

In design, what I find provocative is an object with a strong personality, something that challenges conventional ideas of beauty, form or function, that has an element of the unexpected and sparks curiosity rather than offering easy comfort. In real life... I think it's the same instinct, really. I'm drawn to people and situations that resist easy categorisation, that refuse to sit quietly within a single tradition or culture.

From your perspective, how has the concept of collectible design changed from the 1990s to the present day?

When I opened my gallery, there was no such notion as “collectible design”; the term didn't exist. Over the last ten years especially, it has changed enormously. It's no longer a niche but a recognised language within contemporary design. What has grown most is an awareness of the value of the object itself, including in terms of sustainability: not just its form or function, but also the research, narrative and process behind its creation. The audience has become wider and younger too, more attentive to the identity and history behind each piece, often approaching it through galleries and fairs like Design Miami or NOMAD.



Conceived by Nina Yashar, the Nilufar Grand Hotel project investigates hospitality, introducing collectible design into lived, everyday environments.
© Alejandro Ramirez Orozco



Meta(table)Lamp#2 by Audrey Large is a reflection on the impact of new technologies on contemporary aesthetics.
© Filippo Pincolini

In 2015, you opened Nilufar Depot in Viale Lancetti, drawing inspiration from Milan's Teatro alla Scala. What sparked the idea of turning a former industrial warehouse into a cathedral of design?

I found a former industrial space near Scalo Farini, at the time still a raw, almost suspended part of the city, and with the help of architect Massimiliano Locatelli I transformed it into what I've always thought of as a true theatre of design: a stage where individual works can live, confront one another and take on new meaning through new narratives, rather than a simple showroom. That's why people started calling it “the Scala of design”. I never wanted it to be just a container, but a place where design is performed and experienced, not just displayed.

Milan is where you built everything. Beyond your own spaces, is there a hidden corner or architectural landmark in the city that captures your own idea of beauty?

Villa Necchi Campiglio, by Piero Portaluppi, a masterpiece where proportions, materials and light are perfectly balanced, and which has been impeccably restored so that its original elegance and spirit can still be fully experienced today. It captures something I care about deeply: the way Milan blends history and contemporary sensibility without ever feeling forced.

Looking twenty years ahead, how do you see collectible design evolving?

I don't see it as a bubble. It doesn't come from speculation, but from a deeper shift in how people relate to objects: a growing attention to research, quality, authorship and history. I believe it will keep growing because it answers a real need for objects with identity, depth and longevity, and that need won't disappear. What will keep changing is who takes part: more institutions, more platforms like Milan's Salone Raritas, more young international collectors approaching design as a form of personal expression rather than purely as an investment.

What is the ultimate legacy you hope to leave for future generations of gallerists and design lovers?

I don't think in terms of leaving a fixed legacy or defining an aesthetic direction. What matters more to me is creating the conditions for different voices and sensibilities to coexist and keep evolving. If there's one value I'd like to carry forward, it's curiosity: the willingness to look beyond what's immediately visible and to keep questioning how objects shape the way we live.



Wall lamp Saffron Iridacee by Christina Pellizzari, © Filippo Pincolini

Bio



Nina Yashar is a celebrated gallerist, collector and patron, as well as one of the pioneering tastemakers in contemporary design. Iranian by birth, she moved to Milan as a child with her family, who were among the leading merchants of antique carpets and fine textiles. She began her career alongside her father before striking out on her own at just twenty-one. Initially focusing on antique and 19th-century French rugs, she soon found herself increasingly drawn to masterpieces of vintage design and contemporary creations. In 1979, she founded Nilufar, launching a career spanning over four decades. Along the way, she has been behind an extraordinary body of projects, exhibitions and collaborations, discovering and championing talents who have left an indelible mark and helping to shape the world of collectible design as we know it today.

nilufar.com



GAUDÍSSIMO!

Casa Batlló, or the Future Restored

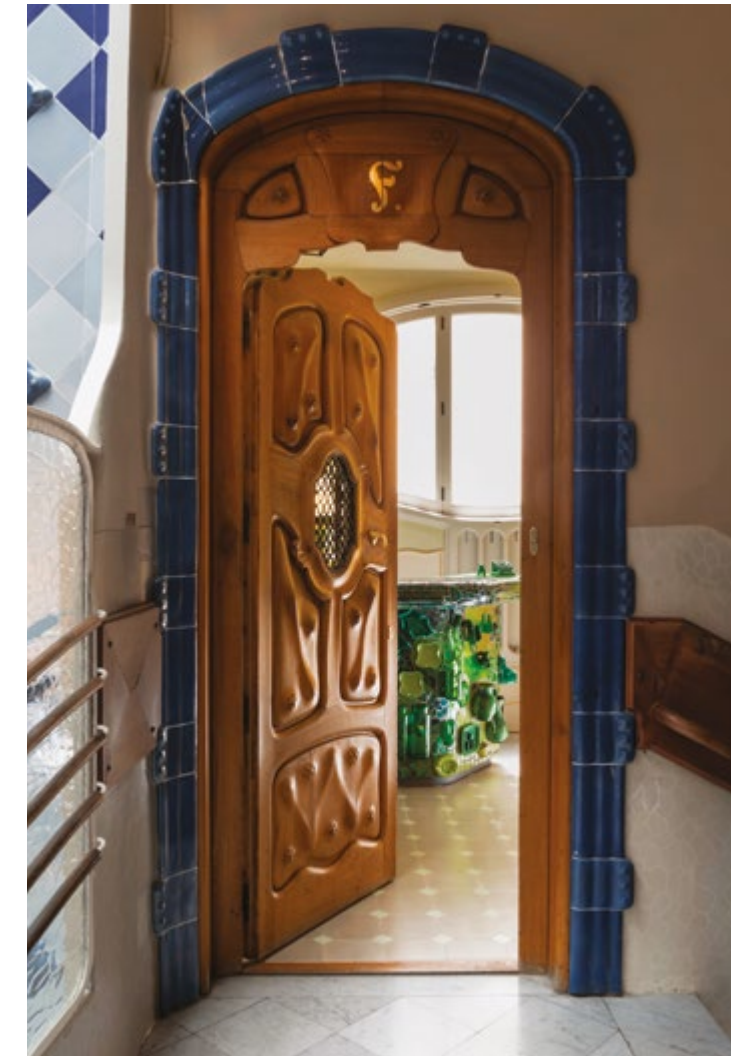
Antoni Gaudí's relevance lies not in formal extravagance, but in the extraordinary intelligence of his living concepts. More than a century later, the restoration of Casa Batlló reveals how his architectural approach anticipated many of today's key challenges: sustainability through the reuse of materials, natural lighting and passive ventilation, spatial modularity and the seamless integration of fine craftsmanship with everyday function.

Marking the centenary of the master's passing, architect Xavier Villanueva takes us behind the scenes of the landmark restoration which opens Casa Batlló's Third Floor to the public for the very first time. Driven by traditional Catalan craftsmanship and cutting-edge technology, this meticulous conservation opens a subtle, poetic dialogue with the contemporary interior design of Paola Navone and OTTO Studio.

In the heart of Barcelona, Casa Batlló is undergoing an extraordinary rebirth through what has already been acclaimed as the restoration of the century. 2026 marks a historic milestone with the long-awaited public opening of the Third Floor, the last of Casa Batlló's formerly inhabited private apartments to become accessible to visitors, after being kept hidden for over a century. This moment carries even greater significance as it coincides with the Gaudí Year, commemorating the centenary of the master architect's passing.

Through the eyes of architect Xavier Villanueva, head of conservation, Antoni Gaudí's masterpiece emerges as a living, continuously evolving organism. In this exclusive interview, Villanueva takes us behind the scenes of a monumental project that turned heritage restoration into an accessible cultural experience by opening the scaffolding to visitors. It stands as a landmark project in which cutting-edge diagnostic technology worked hand in hand with the traditional mastery of Catalan artisans, uncovering unprecedented insights into Gaudí's visionary approach to reuse and environmental sustainability, from ingeniously recycled original wooden doors to refined passive ventilation systems.

It is within this restored framework that the interior design intervention by Paola Navone and OTTO Studio unfolds: entrusted with furnishing and reinterpreting the Third Floor apartments, the designers introduce a new, contemporary layer of domesticity. Through bespoke elements and carefully chosen materials, they restore a lived-in atmosphere to the spaces without ever imitating or overshadowing the original architecture, creating a poetic and measured dialogue between past and present.



The third floor opens to the public after more than a century, revealing Gaudí's domestic architecture on the centenary of his passing. © Maria Algara, courtesy Casa Batlló Gaudí

Casa Batlló never ceases to reveal its secrets. As an architect who experiences and studies it so closely, what is the single greatest lesson this "living" structure teaches you each day?

The greatest lesson is that a historic building is never completely known. Every restoration reminds us that we are not working on a frozen monument, but on a living building that has accumulated layers of history, transformations and human stories. Our role is not to impose a new narrative, but to understand what is already there. Casa Batlló constantly teaches us that architecture can still surprise us more than a century after it was built.



A view of the former bedroom in the private apartment, now reimagined as a home library. © Maria Algara, courtesy Casa Batlló Gaudí

Many view Casa Batlló as an icon primarily because of the formal and decorative exuberance of its façade. From your perspective as a technical expert with a profound knowledge of the building, what is a less obvious structural or functional aspect that truly makes it a masterpiece of design?

What impresses me most is not its decorative richness, but the intelligence behind every decision. Everything has a purpose: the natural ventilation systems, the way daylight enters each room, the relationship between circulation and domestic life, the construction of the ceilings to manipulate light and spatial perception. Gaudí was never interested in decoration for its own sake. Beauty and function are inseparable throughout the house.

Often, the most complex conservation work is what the public never sees. What was the most delicate structural or consolidation intervention you carried out that remains entirely “invisible” to visitors?

Much of our work consisted of recovering what had disappeared beneath later interventions. We removed decades of alterations to reveal the original architecture without leaving traces of our own intervention. In many cases we consolidated structures, reinforced original materials or introduced technical improvements that remain completely hidden. When restoration is successful, visitors should see Gaudí, not the restorers.



The interior design intervention by Paola Navone and OTTO Studio enters the restored spaces while respecting the historical shell without imitating it. © Claudia Mauriño, courtesy Casa Batlló Gaudí

“Casa Batlló never ceases to reveal its secrets: it is not a static monument, but a living structure that teaches us every day how the architecture of the past could imagine the domestic life of the future.”

During the façade restoration, you transformed the scaffolding into an accessible walkway. Where did the idea to turn the restoration into a cultural experience come from, and how did the public respond?

We felt that restoration should not happen behind closed doors. It is also part of the life of the monument. Opening the scaffolding allowed visitors to understand not only the result, but the process itself: the research, the craftsmanship and the complexity involved in conserving heritage. The response was extraordinary because people appreciated becoming part of something that is usually invisible.



El Saló Gaudí is a theatrical space celebrating high Catalan craftsmanship, framed by handmade porcelain chandeliers, velvet armchairs, and hand-woven rugs. © Maria Algara, courtesy Casa Batlló Gaudí

While the Sagrada Família represents the monumental realisation of Gaudí’s vision, Casa Batlló offers something far more intimate: a glimpse into how the architect truly imagined the domestic life of the future. What do you find to be the most contemporary feature of the third-floor apartment?

Its functionality. More than its forms, what feels contemporary is the way Gaudí understood everyday life. The apartment is designed around comfort, natural light, ventilation, flexible circulation and an intelligent relationship between public and private spaces. These are concerns that remain completely relevant today. The Third Floor allows us to discover not only how Gaudí designed a house, but how he imagined people would live inside it.

What surprises did the restoration process reveal?

There were many. Decorative paintings hidden beneath layers of paint, original floral stuccoes, an unknown door handle designed by Gaudí, recycled doors adapted by him, original ventilation systems, even newspapers hidden inside the woodwork that helped us date later interventions. But perhaps the greatest surprise was discovering how much of the original house had survived beneath decades of alterations. The apartment was heavily transformed, yet remarkably complete.



Objects, colours, and materials interact with what is already there, without imposing themselves. © Victoria Gasseuy, courtesy Casa Batlló Gaudí

The third floor brings together your meticulous, period-accurate restoration with Paola Navone’s interior design interventions. How did the dialogue unfold between Gaudí’s architectural heritage and the contemporary sensibility of OTTO Studio?

From the beginning, we clearly distinguished between the historic architecture and the contemporary interior design. Our responsibility was to recover the original building as faithfully as possible. Paola’s intervention begins where restoration ends. She never tried to recreate a Modernist interior or imitate Gaudí’s language. Instead, she proposes a contemporary way of inhabiting these spaces while respecting the architecture. Because both layers remain clearly legible, they enrich rather than compete with each other.

The entire restoration project stands as a living tribute to Catalan craftsmanship. Carpenters, blacksmiths, ceramicists and glassmakers worked side by side with architects and historians to stay true to Gaudí’s legacy. How crucial was this hands-on, traditional expertise to the project, and to what extent did modern technology support your work?

The project simply could not have been carried out without traditional craftsmanship. Many original techniques can only be understood and reproduced through the knowledge of highly specialised artisans. At the same time, modern technology helped us document, analyse and diagnose materials with extraordinary precision. For me, the future of restoration lies precisely in combining both worlds: scientific knowledge and manual expertise.

The discovery of doors recycled and adapted by Gaudí himself reveals an almost modern aspect of his philosophy. What does Gaudí’s approach to reuse and sustainability, applied over a century ago, teach us today?

It reminds us that sustainability is not a new invention. Gaudí reused existing elements not as a stylistic gesture, but because it was an intelligent way of building. He understood the value of materials and adapted them creatively instead of replacing them unnecessarily. That attitude feels incredibly contemporary today and reinforces an essential principle of restoration: conserving what already exists is often the most sustainable decision we can make.



In the library, a warm and contemporary atmosphere takes shape, surrounded by silk drapes and furnishings steeped in history.
© Claudia Mauriño, courtesy Casa Batlló Gaudí

Casa Batlló

Casa Batlló stands as one of Antoni Gaudí’s most iconic architectural achievements, situated at No. 43 Passeig de Gràcia in Barcelona. The result of a complete reimagining of an existing structure between 1904 and 1906 for industrialist Josep Batlló, the building is a fully immersive architectural expression where light and ornament exist in effortless dialogue. In 2026, the long-private third-floor apartment - home to the Batlló family for over a century - was opened to the public following a three-year archaeological restoration led by architect Xavier Villanueva.

While the rest of the residence, including the famed Noble Floor, continues to anchor the main museum tour, this newly opened level reveals original stuccoes, fluid undulating ceilings, and custom details crafted by Gaudí himself. Reimagined through contemporary furnishings curated by designer Paola Navone, the space now operates as an exclusive enclave for private events and bespoke stays, seamlessly bridging its historic legacy with modern living.

You mentioned that Casa Batlló still holds many secrets waiting to be uncovered. Is there a specific area or feature of the building you would like to focus on in future research?

The exciting thing about Casa Batlló is that every intervention raises new questions. I am particularly interested in continuing to study the construction processes, the decorative layers and the evolution of the building over time. There are still details that can deepen our understanding of how Gaudí worked and how the house evolved after 1906. Research never really ends.

If Antoni Gaudí could see the building as it stands today and look back at the work accomplished in recent decades, what is the one question you would ask him?

I think I would simply ask him: did we understand you correctly? As restorers, we spend years studying every trace, every material and every construction decision, trying to recover the building with the greatest possible rigour. Ultimately, every restoration is an interpretation based on evidence. Knowing whether our reading of his work was faithful would be the most valuable answer we could receive.

Masterfully used colour, precious materiality, and attention to detail strengthen the identity of each room, reimagined as a fluid evolution of Gaudí’s vision. © Maria Algara, courtesy Casa Batlló Gaudí



The Dream Factory



We are used to thinking of the Vespa as the ultimate symbol of the Italian way of life. Yet its history is far more complex and fascinating. Its iconic curves trace back to the landing gear of World War II fighter planes, and its global success was the product of a remarkably sophisticated, early operation of brand repositioning. In his deep dive into the construction of this legend, historian Andrea Rapini strips away decades of marketing spin to reveal how an unexpected byproduct of the defence industry transformed into an undisputed icon of the twentieth century.



One of the earliest 1946 Vespa 98 models, featuring the protective front shield and low-mounted headlight on the front fender. On the facing page, Enrico Piaggio inside the factory surrounded by the first Vespa models, a symbol of Italy's post-war industrial recovery.

The Piaggio Vespa is routinely celebrated as the visual emblem of Italy's post-war recovery, a pop phenomenon born from the isolated genius of aeronautical engineer Corradino D'Ascanio. What is rarely mentioned, however, is that the father of the Vespa harboured a deep aversion to traditional motorcycles. He viewed them as clumsy, greasy, bulky, and notoriously difficult to ride when dressed in tailored clothing. D'Ascanio engineered the iconic scooter precisely by designing against these flaws: he completely rethought the riding position, upright and seated rather than straddling an engine, and concealed all mechanical components under a seamless body shell. By mounting the engine directly onto the rear wheel, he eliminated the oily drive chain, and by drawing a sweeping front shield, he protected riders from splashes and dust from puddles and dirt roads. He also added something unheard of for two-wheelers at the time: a built-in spare wheel. In the 1950s, with European roads still littered with debris and potholes, this was a stroke of pragmatic brilliance that quickly turned the Vespa into an emblem of long-distance touring and cross-border adventure. For functionalist theorist Bruno Munari, famous for advocating that "form follows function",



A shot from the exhibition Vespa 80 Years of an Icon, curated by Giacomo Bretzel, in which the scooter stands as a shared symbol of mobility, empowerment, and youth identity.

the Vespa's true design breakthrough lay in how it reshaped human posture and behaviour. On a traditional motorcycle, the rider leans forward, gripping the tank in a sporty, aggressive stance. On a Vespa, the rider sits completely upright, as if resting on an armchair or an office seat, with feet placed flat on the floorboard and knees neatly together. This composed posture rendered the scooter an inherently gender-neutral mode of transport long before the term existed. Until that point, motorcycling had been an almost exclusively male domain, due to high top tubes that made riding in skirts a social taboo. The Vespa broke that barrier instantly, creating a vehicle that could be ridden with equal ease by a woman in a skirt or a priest in a cassock. When the first model debuted on April 23, 1946, the blueprint for its global dominance was already set. Piaggio produced roughly 2,500 units in its first year; within a decade, that figure had ballooned to one million.

Yet brilliant engineering alone cannot explain how a utilitarian vehicle morphs into a global phenomenon. The real answer lies far beyond the assembly line. If D'Ascanio provided the mechanical ingenuity, it was the visionary instinct of industrialist Enrico Piaggio that turned the Vespa into a cultural movement. Piaggio recognised early on that post-war consumers were not merely buying machinery; they were buying freedom, identity, and aspirational lifestyles. He drove the company beyond traditional manufacturing, constructing a legend-making engine fuelled by cinema, avant-garde advertising, and international rallies.

As Rapini notes in *The History of the Vespa: An Italian Miracle*, the first critical step was the radical de-politicisation of the brand after the Second World War. This strategic re-branding was essential to sever ties with the past, as Piaggio had emerged from the war heavily burdened by its history as a defence contractor for the Fascist regime.

Across key European markets like France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, the Vespa was successfully framed as a symbol of democratic reconstruction, nimble mobility, and continental peace. On the streets of Paris or Frankfurt, it was marketed not as a working-class economy vehicle, but as the mark of a cosmopolitan, shared modernity. Piaggio essentially invented the aesthetic category of the urban elite vehicle out of thin air. Deprived of visible grease and gears, the Vespa appealed to a demographic that would never have considered buying a motorcycle: architects, art students, intellectuals, and urban professionals. It pulled off a rare feat of industrial alchemy, turning an affordable scooter into a sophisticated cultural statement.



Detail of a modern Vespa, showing the signature body shell that defines its lines.
Photo by Florian Avramescu/Pexels

“The Vespa turned an affordable scooter into a sophisticated cultural statement”

In the United States, marketing efforts deliberately avoided competing on fuel efficiency, a lost battle in a market dominated by massive American automobiles. Instead, campaign narratives focused entirely on the allure of the Italian way of life. Hollywood did the rest. Ante litteram product placement in classics like *Roman Holiday* (1953), starring Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck, permanently etched the scooter into the American consciousness as the ultimate symbol of urban romance and effortless cool. The brilliance of Piaggio, Rapini explains, lies in its quick response: the company seized upon this Hollywood-generated mythology, repackaging it and selling it back to the world as the authentic essence of Italian style.



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.

At the height of its popularity, the brand achieved what semioticians call a total linguistic takeover. In the global collective imagination, the word Vespa effectively subsumed the word scooter. Mentioning a Vespa no longer referred to a specific product built in Pontedera; it defined the entire product category and the lifestyle attached to it.

Yet this shift was not a one-way street. As the Vespa entered foreign markets, local subcultures rewrote its meaning. The most striking example came from the British Mods in the 1960s. In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, sociologist Dick Hebdige observes that Mods embraced the Vespa not for its wholesome Italian image, but for its functional cleanliness. The monocoque chassis and enclosed engine meant they could ride customised scooters in tailored suits and parkas without getting grease on their clothes. By slapping on dozens of rear-view mirrors, extra headlights, and pennants, the Mods subverted a vehicle designed for the Italian middle class, transforming it into the visual manifesto of an edgy, rebellious youth culture.

- 1. and 5. Period illustrations featuring female riders, symbols of female mobility and empowerment.
- 2. Gilberto Filippetti's famous 1969 poster "He who Vespas... eats the apples".
- 3. 1940s "Vespizzatevi!" promotional poster.
- 4. Avant-garde graphic ad centred around the scooter's iconic silhouette.

The Vespa's cultural footprint was so profound that it easily breached the rigid geopolitical divides of the Cold War. In 1956, while Piaggio's marketing machine was conquering Western markets, Soviet leadership faced a dilemma: citizens were demanding personal mobility, but the Kremlin refused to import an icon of Western consumerism. In response, engineers at the Vyatskiye Polyany plant dismantled a Vespa 150 GS piece by piece to engineer the Vyatka VP-150. Though built with thicker sheet metal to survive harsh Russian winters, the Vyatka was an exact clone of the Vespa. That the Soviet bloc had to duplicate an Italian scooter to satisfy its public's hunger for modern transport stands as proof of how completely the Vespa had redefined personal travel worldwide.

This carefully calculated image building was executed through precise media strategies. Piaggio's print campaigns leaned heavily into themes of female empowerment: posters worldwide depicted women not as passive passengers on the back seat, but as confident riders behind the handlebars. The visual emphasis remained on clean, effortless transit, turning the scooter into an emblem of independence for post-war women.



Workers on the Piaggio assembly lines at the Pontedera plant.

“Piaggio recognised early on that post-war consumers were not merely buying machinery; they were buying freedom, identity, and aspirational lifestyles”

Simultaneously, Piaggio used international Vespa Clubs and official magazines as tools of cultural guerrilla marketing. By featuring photographs of young riders touring across borders, the company linked the scooter to leisure, adventure, and internationalism, unifying European youth culture well before political integration took formal shape. In later years, this dialogue with younger generations took on an irreverent, surreal tone through iconic advertising such as Gilberto Filippetti's famous slogan, “Chi Vespa... mangia le mele” (“He who Vespas... eats the apples”), framing the scooter as a playful badge of countercultural rebellion.

Andrea Rapini's analysis ultimately demonstrates that the Vespa did not become a global icon by accident, nor through pure design excellence alone. Piaggio pioneered modern transnational branding by realising early on that consumer markets trade in identity and desire just as much as in physical goods. Through adaptable messaging, the company spoke simultaneously to French factory workers, German design students, and Manhattan professionals, building a unified global imaginary long before the age of globalisation.

It is fitting that today the Vespa endures not just on city streets, but within the permanent design collections of major institutions like the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Modern retrospectives and museum exhibitions continue to showcase what history has long confirmed: how an everyday mechanical object, born out of post-war necessity, was transformed through the intersection of design, cinema and culture into an enduring global shorthand for the Italian art of living.



Fast, powerful, and sporty: the 1968 Vespa 180 Rally, a true icon of its time.



The Vespa Primavera 125 80th in pastel green, a colour palette retrieved from the historical archives of the initial 1946 production.

Himanshu Saini, Heritage Reframed



If you think you know Indian cuisine but have never tasted Chef Saini's dishes, you haven't truly experienced how contemporary it can be. Chef Himanshu Saini is one of the most influential voices in contemporary Indian gastronomy.

As Executive Chef of Trèsind Studio in Dubai, he has redefined the perception of Indian cuisine by translating its immense regional diversity into a sophisticated fine dining experience. Under his leadership, Trèsind Studio became the first Indian restaurant in the world to be awarded three Michelin stars, establishing itself as an international benchmark for modern Indian cuisine.

Born and raised in India, Saini developed his culinary philosophy by studying the country's regional traditions before reinterpreting them through contemporary techniques. Rather than pursuing innovation for its own sake, his work seeks to reveal the cultural memory embedded in ingredients, recipes and rituals. Every dish tells a story that connects history, geography and personal experience.

At Trèsind Studio, food is conceived as a multidisciplinary experience in which flavour, craftsmanship, storytelling and aesthetics coexist. Plating, materials, lighting and the rhythm of the tasting menu are carefully orchestrated to create an immersive journey, demonstrating that design is not decoration but an essential component of hospitality.

Beyond the restaurant, Chef Saini has received numerous international recognitions, has appeared among the world's leading chefs and, in 2026, published his first cookbook, *The Rise of Indian Food: Recipes Reimagined* by Trèsind Studio (Phaidon).

His work continues to shape a new global understanding of Indian cuisine: deeply rooted in tradition, yet confidently contemporary.



Lobster tail, smoked chilli jam, tomato moilee, tomato XO

"I believe design will become quieter and more intelligent. We have moved beyond creating experiences that exist only to be photographed"



Ghee Roast Crab: The celebrated dish by Himanshu Saini for Trèsind Studio, inspired by Mangalorean cuisine, combines spiced crab cooked in ghee with burnt cinnamon and crispy curry leaves.

Your cuisine is often described as contemporary, but it is deeply rooted in tradition. Is your creative process closer to that of a designer than that of a traditional chef?

I don't think of myself as choosing between being a chef or a designer. A chef today must be both. Every dish begins with research, understanding the history, geography, and culture behind it. Design enters much later. The design helps to communicate those ideas in a way that feels fresh and relevant to today's diner.

At Trèsind Studio, every dish is a carefully choreographed experience. How do you think about design beyond the plate, considering space, objects, lighting and the sequence of the meal?

For me, design beyond the plate is about creating emotions. The lighting, music, tableware, service, and the pace of the meal all work together to shape how a guest feels. Every course is placed and paced intentionally to reflect the journey, building curiosity, surprise, and connection. When every detail supports the same story, the experience feels seamless and that's what makes it memorable.



Turbot, charred broccolini, curry leaf vinaigrette, celeriac curry.

Many designers speak about form following function. Does the same principle apply to your dishes, or can beauty sometimes lead the creative process?

We strongly believe function comes first. A beautiful plate that compromises flavour, temperature or comfort has failed its purpose. The visual aspect should arise naturally from the story of the dish and how it is reflected through a chef's personal style. When beauty is a consequence of purpose, it has lasting value.

Hazelnut praline parfait, black apple ice cream, and artichoke twig: the perfect balance of toasted sweetness, fruity acidity, and unexpected textures to close the tasting menu signed by Himanshu Saini



Naan soup-fflé: it tastes exactly like a tandoor-baked naan, but it eats like a cloud.

“For me, design beyond the plate is about creating emotions. The lighting, music, tableware, service and pace of the meal all work together to shape how a guest feels. When every detail supports the same story, the experience feels seamless and memorable”

Indian cuisine is extraordinarily rich in colours, textures and craftsmanship. How do you translate this cultural heritage into a contemporary visual language without falling into stereotypes?

We do not start with how a dish should look. We start with the story behind it. India is extraordinarily diverse, and every region has its own backdrops, colours, and dining cultures. Rather than relying on familiar symbols or thought processes, we focus on expressing the essence of the different regions individually through their craftsmanship and presentation.

What role do materials play in your storytelling? From handcrafted tableware to serving vessels, how important is the dialogue between food and the objects that present it?

The vessel is part of the story. Every material carries its own emotion and history. A handcrafted ceramic, a carved stone, a cast metal object or natural wood all influence how a guest experiences a dish. We never see tableware as decoration. For us it is another layer of storytelling. The dialogue between food and objects should feel effortless.



Tortellini, goat cheese raita, slow cooked lamb curry. The experience is completed at the table with a scenic finish of cucumber blossoms, pickled onions, and a wasabi leaf, elements that add a spicy, herbaceous, and balsamic note to the dish.

Your tasting menu unfolds almost like an exhibition or a theatrical performance. Do you draw inspiration from architecture, industrial design or other creative disciplines when designing a menu?

Yes, architecture teaches proportion and build-up. Industrial design teaches precision and restraint. Art teaches emotion. Theatre teaches rhythm, surprise, and timing. Fine dining draws parallels with many creative disciplines. We think the most exciting restaurants of the future will be those that borrow ideas across disciplines while remaining true to their own style.

As sustainability becomes central to both design and gastronomy, how has it changed the way you think about beauty, luxury and the dining experience?

Luxury today is no longer defined by abundance; it is defined by intention and restraint. Respecting ingredients, working closely with producers, supporting artisans, and reducing waste are all expressions of contemporary luxury. Sustainability is not something we add to a restaurant, it should influence every decision we make.

The Tender coconut kushiyaki explores coconut in unprecedented ways: the tender flesh is grilled and infused with Nilgiri spices, paired with the crunch of hearts of palm, and bathed in a yuzu rasam.



A sophisticated palate cleanser served before dessert: Aloe Vera, Rocket, Jal Jeera, Mango Sorbet.

Looking ahead, how do you imagine the relationship between design and fine dining evolving over the next decade?

I believe design will become quieter and more intelligent. We have moved beyond creating experiences that exist only to be photographed. Guests are searching for authenticity, emotional connection, and craftsmanship. Technology will continue to evolve, but I think lasting restaurants will be those that create genuine human experiences rather than visual spectacles.

What will distinguish truly memorable restaurants from those that are simply visually impressive?

A memorable restaurant has a point of view about everything: the food, service, architecture, music, tableware, and hospitality. Beautiful interiors may attract attention, but they do not create lasting memories. What stays with people is honesty, warmth, and the feeling that every detail had a purpose. At the end of the day, people remember how you made them feel more than how the restaurant looked.

Himanshu Saini

Himanshu Saini is one of the most celebrated figures in international gastronomy, based in Dubai. Raised in a family with deep agricultural roots, he began his culinary path at eighteen in Delhi. A pivotal moment came in 2014, when he moved to the United Arab Emirates to lead the kitchen at Trèsind. Four years later, in 2018, he launched its sister concept, Trèsind Studio, an intimate space dedicated entirely to fine dining and multi-course tasting menus. In 2025 came the ultimate recognition: a third Michelin star, a historic milestone that crowned Trèsind Studio as the first Indian restaurant in the world to reach the very pinnacle of fine dining.

tresindstudio.com



Glossary

A quick reference guide to some of the key concepts inspiring this issue of Homa's Design Magazine. They define some of the current and most interesting trends in the way we conceive our lifestyle today.

Asymmetrical Harmony

/ˌeɪ.sɪˈme.trɪ.kəl ˈhɑː.mə.ni/

A balance achieved without symmetry or uniformity, allowing unlike forms, materials and imperfections to coexist without losing coherence. Difference is not something to be corrected, but something that can be composed.

Boiler House

/ˈbɔɪ.lə ˈhəʊs/

The project at London's Victoria and Albert Museum where Stephen Bayley brought everyday industrial objects, from a Coca-Cola bottle to a Ford Sierra, into the museum conversation during the 1980s. A place where the ordinary object demanded to be taken intellectually seriously.

Collectible Design

/kəˈlek.tə.bəl dɪˈzain/

Design valued not simply for function, but for authorship, research, narrative, process and cultural identity. Neither mere furniture nor pure investment, the object becomes a form of personal expression and a carrier of history.

Contemporary Luxury

/kənˈtem.pə.ɹə.ri ˈlʌk.jə.ri/

Coco Chanel famously placed luxury beyond necessity and, more provocatively, opposite vulgarity. Today the idea is moving further from abundance and expense towards intention, restraint, durability, care and respect for materials, makers and resources.

Ghee

/giː/

Clarified butter and a traditional ingredient used throughout the Indian subcontinent, made by removing water and milk solids to leave concentrated butterfat. In Ghee Roast Crab, purification becomes an intriguing metaphor for tradition itself: concentrated rather than disguised, its essence made clearer through refinement.

Immersive Hospitality

/ɪˈmɜː.sɪv ˌhɒs.pɪˈtæl.ə.ti/

Hospitality in which the product is no longer simply a room, object or service, but the experience of inhabiting an entire designed environment. Architecture, objects and atmosphere become parts of a single lived experience.

Linguistic Takeover

/lɪŋˈɡwɪs.tɪk ˈteɪk.əʊ.və/

The moment when a brand name becomes so culturally dominant that it begins to stand for an entire category. The ultimate commercial triumph, perhaps, is when people forget they are using a trademark at all.

Social Taboo

/ˈsəʊ.ʃəl təˈbuː/

An unwritten cultural prohibition that can shape behaviour as effectively as any physical constraint. Design can reinforce such conventions, but changing an object, its use or the way we interact with it can also quietly dismantle them.

Standardisation

/ˌstæn.dəˈdaɪˈzeɪ.ʃən/

The industrial pursuit of repeatability, efficiency and uniformity. Its hidden cost can be the removal of the traces, irregularities and histories that reveal how an object was made, used, repaired or transformed.

Stendhal Syndrome

/stɛnˈdɑːl ˈsɪn.drəʊm/

An overwhelming physical or emotional response to exceptional beauty, named after Stendhal's celebrated experience in Florence. Perhaps the most extreme evidence that beauty is not merely something we see, but something capable of acting upon us.

Upcycling

/ˈʌpˌsaɪ.klɪŋ/

The transformation of discarded or existing objects and materials into something of renewed, often greater, value rather than reducing them back to raw matter. At its most interesting, reuse becomes not simply an environmental choice but a creative act.

Vippe

/ˈveɪpə/

Danish verb meaning to tilt or tip, describing the smooth movement that gave the original Vipp pedal bin its name. A tiny mechanical gesture that ultimately lent its name to an entire design universe.

Homa

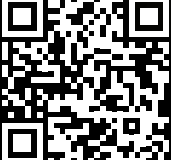
ORIGINAL MARKETING ACADEMY

COOL AS METAL

THE VISIBLE EXPRESSION OF CLIMATE CONTROL

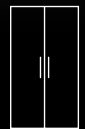


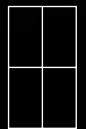
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