

The International Design Yearbook 2001

Editor: Michele De Lucchi Introduction: Jeremy Myerson General Editor: Jennifer Hudson Design: Lovegrove Associates



Based on an original idea by Stuart Durant

All commentaries and chapter introductions by Jennifer Hudson unless otherwise indicated

Senior Editor: Paul Harron Assistant Editor: Helen McFarland

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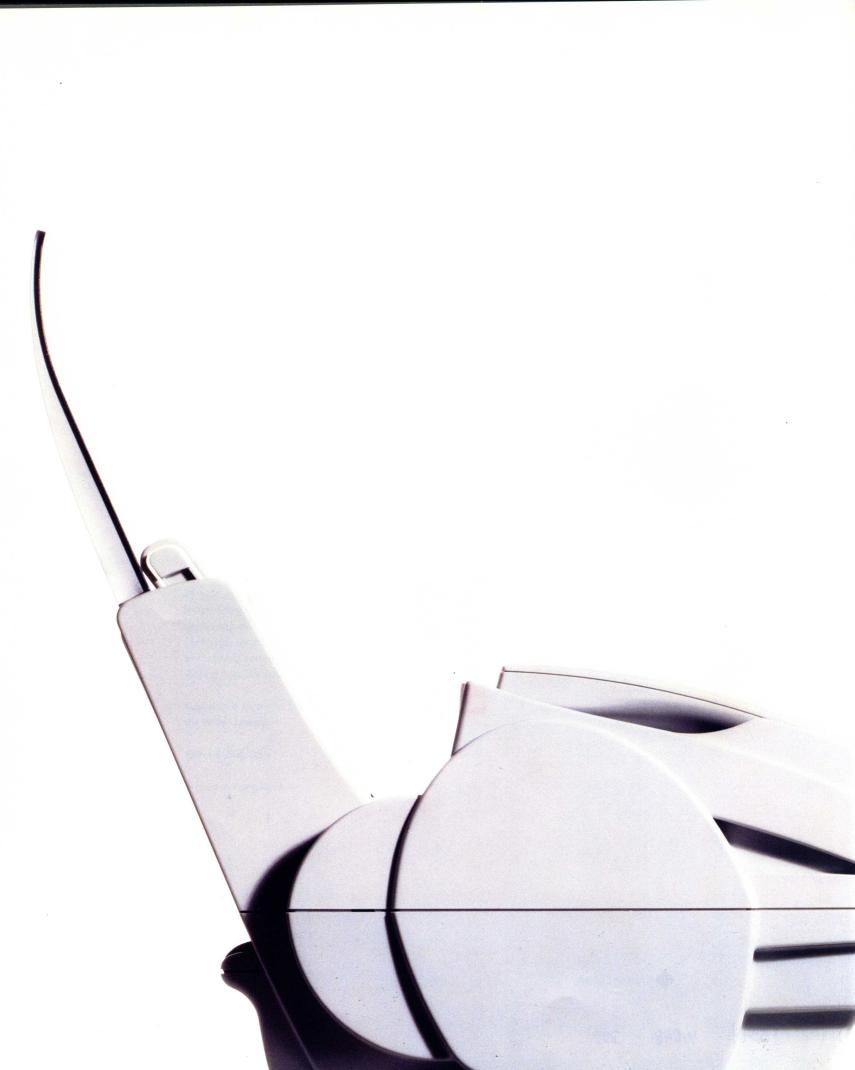
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Introduction

Jeremy Myerson



In the pantheon of modern Italian design, Michele De Lucchi is up there with the greats. He has often been described as the creative link between the pioneering post-1945 era and the contemporary design scene, a thread that runs from Ettore Sottsass and Achille Castiglioni through Andrea Branzi and Alessandro Mendini to De Lucchi's door. Yet he prefers to see his role as a standard-bearer from a broader transnational perspective. Taking a break during the long, arduous task of making his selection for The International Design Yearbook 2001 in London, De Lucchi lifted his head from the light box, ran his fingers through his idiosyncratically long, scholastic beard, settled his spectacles on the end of his nose, and declared: 'My profession is not to be a designer or an architect - it is to make a bridge between industry and humanity'.

This role as mediator or interpreter between what he calls 'the cynical logic of the entrepreneur' and a world seeking greater meaning in the material objects all around it has interested De Lucchi for a very long time. It certainly influenced his selection for this publication. Any new idea regarded as capable of lifting the spirit or meeting a need was viewed positively. Anything deemed to be working against the human interest was destined for the reject pile, no matter how marketable it might be.

Fellow Italian designer Alessandro Mendini was once asked to give five reasons why he admired Michele De Lucchi. His succinct answers spoke volumes about De Lucchi's philosophy and achievements. First, Mendini admired the clarity of his ideas, right from the start of his career, and second, the independence of his formal language in the years after Memphis, the '80s movement that confirmed his international status. Third was De Lucchi's organizing ability, reflected in his successful design practice, and in his capacity to give younger designers a place in the team. Fourth, Mendini admired the ability to create forms that survive the transition from a small to large scale, so breaking down the barriers between design and architecture. Fifth, he admired De Lucchi's sense of poetry, which was so expertly applied to the design challenges of a domestic setting.

Clarity, independence, organization, scale and poetry are indeed the hallmarks of De Lucchi's career. One can see such virtues in the many aspects of his professional life. These qualities are also reflected back from the shimmering collection of furniture, lighting, tableware, textiles and products, the work of other designers, chosen so diligently by De Lucchi for this edition. There is a gentle tolerance, an acceptance of diversity, in De

Lucchi's selection, indicative of a cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary characteristic that he admires in others, possesses in his own portfolio, and terms 'fluid thinking' (see p8). Yet his early involvement in the Radical Design movement of the early 1970s while studying architecture at the University of Florence (1969–75) was born of an impatience and intolerance with the status quo in Italian design at the time.

Radical Design was linked to student radicalism across European campuses at the time and set out to question mainstream capitalist ideologies, especially in city planning. The intention was serious, the techniques used were often experimental and surrealist, and based on pop culture. With three fellow students, Michele De Lucchi founded his own Radical Design group, Gruppa Cavart, in 1973 in Padua. Over the next three years Cavart produced manifestos, seminars, temporary structures and films about the future of architecture – material which contributed to the new Italian design of the 1980s.

In 1977, after working as a professorial assistant at the University of Florence and making his first forays into industrial design, De Lucchi moved to Milan, a defining moment in his career. He switched from architecture to design through work for Ettore Sottsass, Andrea Branzi and Gaetano Pesce. He began to contribute lighting to such groups as Studio Alchimia, influenced by his own research into 1950s Italian design. His bright, vibrant designs for hi-fi equipment, influenced by Op Art, appeared in the acclaimed architectural journal *Domus*.

Sleek, conformist modern design was by the end of the 1970s under sustained creative attack from a group of radical Milanese designers and architects. It was seen as aloof and elitist compared to the more democratic approach in Italy of the 1950s. As a new movement in design emerged with a new decade, De Lucchi found his milieu. Sottsass, a consultant to Olivetti since the 1950s, was central to his elevation to the main stage. In 1979 De Lucchi also began working for Olivetti and began collaborating with Sottsass on other projects. The intuitive ability of the older man to find ways to put abstract architectural forms into electronic products was exactly what De Lucchi, puzzling over how to reconcile the needs of production and people, was keen to explore.

When in 1981, Sottsass launched Memphis, it was inevitable that De Lucchi, then just 30 years old, would be a key lieutenant. De Lucchi was not just a creative spark within the group but also its tireless

organizer, coordinating the work of its members and seeking financial backers. As Memphis shocked and thrilled in the early 1980s, De Lucchi's own objects displayed growing maturity and quality. Personal commissions from such firms as Artemide, Fontana Arte and Bieffeplast signalled the extent to which Memphis (and De Lucchi's role within it) had captured the imagination. But De Lucchi himself was keen to move on. In 1986 he launched his own provocative and radical Milanese group, Solid, to explore the idea of geometrics in design.

From tackling design from the viewpoint of an architect, De Lucchi returned to architecture and interior design – from the metaphor-based viewpoint of a product designer. At the head of his own growing practice from 1988 onwards, he went on to design more than 50 Fiorucci shops as well as a range of products and systems for Olivetti, mixing and merging the theoretical and practical disciplines of architecture and design to create a playful and poetic visual language which was very much his own.

Alongside commercial commissions and public manifestos, De Lucchi also initiated his own Produzione Privata in 1990 – a personal mechanism to make limited-edition objects in order to stimulate debate and initiate ideas away from commercial pressures. His interest in nonconformist cultural production, as opposed to mainstream market introduction, is well known and accounts for the many objects which result from cultural competitions and collectives shown in The International Design Yearbook 2001, from Hidden (pp34-5) to Droog Design (pp84-5). Produzione Privata was devised as a way in which handcraft could influence mass production, defining new tactile, formal and material qualities. As technology raced on, De Lucchi was anxious to protect and enhance the user experience, which gives any designed object or space its dignity and its meaning.

This humanist approach also made sense to some large commercial organizations whose faith in unbridled technological advance was becoming fragile by the early 1990s. In 1991, Michele De Lucchi won an international competition to design Deutsche Bank's branch offices. So began a period when his organizational skills and ability to bring on young designers would come to the fore. Although today De Lucchi has scaled back his practice to around 35 staff, he is designing the new generation of Italian post offices and his role as a design director capable of leading major programmes is widely acknowledged.

Unusually for such a high-profile design 'name', De Lucchi is very interested in the dynamics of the design team. His experience with Olivetti gave him a healthy respect for the achievements of in-house design, something which most stellar consultants tend to overlook. In the Products category of The International Design Yearbook 2001, a section which he describes as the strongest in the book. De Lucchi pays tribute to design teams at Siemens (p191), Philips (p185) and Sharp (p182). He regards Sharp's output as particularly consistent. The work of Jonathan Ive, design director at Apple Computer, also earns his praise. 'Only Apple could do what it's done,' he commented. What Apple has achieved is a new, much copied visual language for computer products, combining colour and translucency in components of supreme engineering precision and quality. The giant easel-like character of Apple's Cinema Display (p188) or the lightness of the Power G4 stack (p189) represent for De Lucchi near perfect examples of design as a bridge between industry and humanity. These are technological objects that demand your engagement and ownership.

As an architect De Lucchi has perhaps done his best work in product design, most notably on the famous Tolomeo lamp series for Artemide which unites technical precision with a poetic delicacy in updating the suspended-arm traditions of the Anglepoise and Tizio (see p13). So he is naturally encouraging of other architects venturing into furniture and lighting. Foster, Chipperfield, Moneo and Hadid all have work included in this edition. Norman Foster's lights for Artemide have even been specified by De Lucchi for the new Italian post offices. Moving seamlessly between design and architectural scale, from the small hand-held object to the vast public interior, is something with which De Lucchi has always been comfortable.

His architectural commissions in the early 1990s included a pavilion for the Groninger City Museum in the Dutch city of Grongingen, a crazily spectacular architectural amalgam composed by Alessandro Mendini and including contributions from Philippe Starck and Coop Himmelblau alongside De Lucchi's square brick building devoted to the city's history and archeology. On a project devoted to the most avant-garde instincts, here was the radical showing signs of restraint and an interest in tradition. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, former editor-in-chief of Domus has written of De Lucchi: 'Having been a design revolutionary ... he has turned into a mellowed advocate of a simplicity and discretion that is nevertheless not afraid to draw on the past. I find this development so interesting because in his

case there is nothing revisionist, let alone reactionary about it.'

Quite how deep De Lucchi was willing to delve into history was revealed in a joint design project with Achille Castiglioni in 1990, an executive office furniture range called Sangirolama for Olivetti. This was based on the famous Antonelli painting of 1418, San Gerolamo nello studio (Saint Jerome in his Study). De Lucchi and Castiglioni were anticipating the softer influence of domestic furniture on the scientifically managed office. A decade on, that prediction has become a reality. De Lucchi is today designing offices for Armani using only home office furniture. The 'separation of the spheres', as historians have described the split 150 years ago between the home and the workplace, is no more. Work is re-entering the home at a rapid pace, driven by technology and changing business practices, and this trend is reflected in many of De Lucchi's furniture and lighting choices for this book. I expect a lot more innovation in the home,' he remarked during the selection.

What is clear is that complex, over-engineered office systems and products are inappropriate for working at home. De Lucchi also believes that simple reinventions of traditional objects are a necessary antidote to unsettling technological change, a point exemplified by his recent beechand-leather benches for Poltrona Frau (see p8). In reconciling human needs with the demands of serial production, the timeless generic or classic in design has a key role to play in providing a starting point for the relationship with the user. This idea finds expression in De Lucchi's selection. Just look at Starck's Emeco chair (p32) or Emmanuel Babled's Murano glass (p153) or Christopher Deam's aluminium trailer (page 225).

New technological ideas are given due recognition in these pages, from smart textiles and LED (Light Emitting Diode) lighting to Ron Arad's computeranimated vases made using stereolithography. Yet there remains an admiration for simple, timehonoured things that work and reassure on a practical and emotional level for people. In 1986 Michele De Lucchi described his Solid design collection as 'above all an act of faith in the future; it exemplifies the fact that design, other than just produce beautiful things, can also generate practical and tangible progress'. Much the same could be said of his selection for *The International Design Yearbook 2001*.

Michele De Lucchi Bench, Piazza di Spagna Poltrona Frau, Italy 1999/2000

IntroductionMichele De Lucchi

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the publishers and to Jennifer Hudson for their kind invitation to be the Guest Editor of *The International Design Yearbook 2001*. It is an excellent opportunity for me not only to update myself about designs and production around the world, but also to check and reconsider my personal interpretation of the role of designers and architects (especially those closest to industrial projects) in the society and environment in which we live.

The exercise of choice for *The International Design* Yearbook 2001 has been varied to say the least; I was expecting it, and wasn't disappointed. Quite the contrary. I therefore have grounds for thinking that presenting so much variety, energy and genuine enthusiasm will really be justified and useful. I viewed the 2,000-odd items sent in, which apart from a distinction by type of commodity, are impossible to catalogue in terms of style, character, figurative origin or iconographic reference. Linguistic limits and formal reference codes are increasingly hard to distinguish. I believe that, as I remember Herbert Schultes saying when he was in his last months as the director of design at Siemens, we have definitely entered into the era of 'fluid thinking', where everything must flow unimpeded, from culture to culture, discipline to discipline, role to role, skill to skill. We are in the first information and telecommunications technology era and are the first to enjoy this long-awaited worldwide orgy of connectivity, easy knowledge, abundance (already excessive) of information and images and richness of choice. We at *The International Design* Yearbook 2001 team have learned something about richness of choice, having coped with the arrival of CD-Roms so crammed full of images that just looking at and analysing all of them seemed at times humanly too much to bear. And who knows what will happen in the years to come?!

Experts say that one of the abilities most in demand now and in the future is tolerance, and not just political and racial. I think that is true and that it is a trait required in our field as well, not so much in the sense of being able to accept things that are not pleasing and with which we do not agree but, above all, being able to put things together, combining and blending styles, visions and different technologies of opposite origins. Fluid, tolerant and creative: these are the premises for design, updated to the year 2001. The concept of creativity certainly could not be absent. How do you manage to hold together such disparate aspects and concepts unless you have a powerful stimulus towards research, innovation, new products, fantasy and dreams?!

At this point, this is my interpretation of the designer's role: to promote freedom of expression for everyone, using designs, creations, stories and metaphors. The designer and the architect are story-tellers, as Ettore Sottsass used to say in the 1970s during the time of Radical Design in Italy, and as Jean Nouvel has said in recent times at his wonderful conferences. A design is a story and the object – the product – visualizes the arguments of the narrative, be it in direct or symbolic form. Design is communication; it transmits an impetus of contemporaneity, involvement, of stimulus for freedom of expression. It is not that different from what we were saying, together with Ettore Sottsass, over 30 years ago when we claimed that the architect designs metaphors to stimulate the creative talents which are inherent and often hidden in the deepest recesses of everyone's personality. The difference is that this theory was at the time a provocative rejection of design of the traditional type; today it is a concept which helps us understand and accept what is happening in the world.

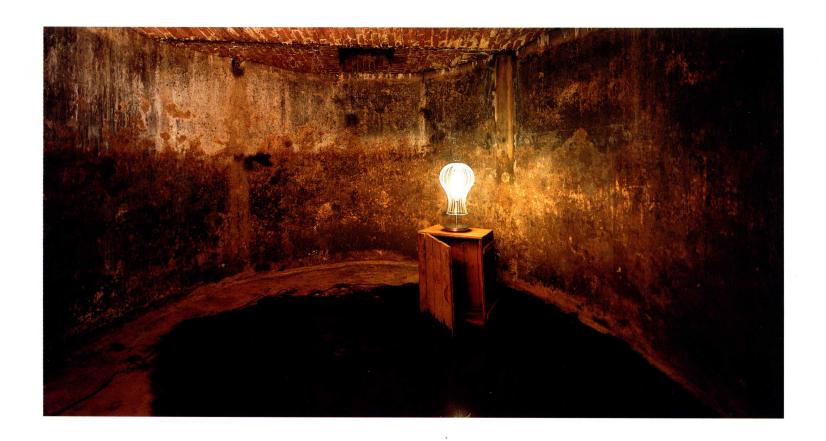
In my selection I have kept categories of similar products separate, as it has always been done in The International Design Yearbook. In 'fluid thinking', as well, the evolution of specific individual productive spheres remains independent. Furniture, lamps, accessories, fabrics, electronic products, vehicles, etc. logically go through different evolutionary phases, which can hardly be compared. The productive technologies, the characteristics of distribution systems and market demand, all still form a solid and concrete barrier to the homogenization of innovative movements. However, I have indicated similar linguistic categories to show emerging figurative trends wherever possible. It is still certainly interesting to compare chair with chair, table with table and lamp with lamp: it undoubtedly remains one of the major contributions which The International Design Yearbook offers with each annual edition.

I would, however, also like to stress a few points. The first concerns business initiatives: indeed, many events are linked directly to operations which are hard to define, initiated and promoted by individual, public or private investors who, apparently acting purely out of cultural interest, see in design a rich and fertile field. This applies to Hidden – Leon van Gerwen bought the sdb aluminium display company and called in a dozen designers with the proposal that they design products for the home uninfluenced by commercial pressures. The designers were able to propose furniture and objects for the home freely, without any brief, whether functional or market-driven. What emerged were products with a strong





Michele De Lucchi Lamp, Rumi From 'Thinking of Sufi Poets' exhibition Produzioni Privata



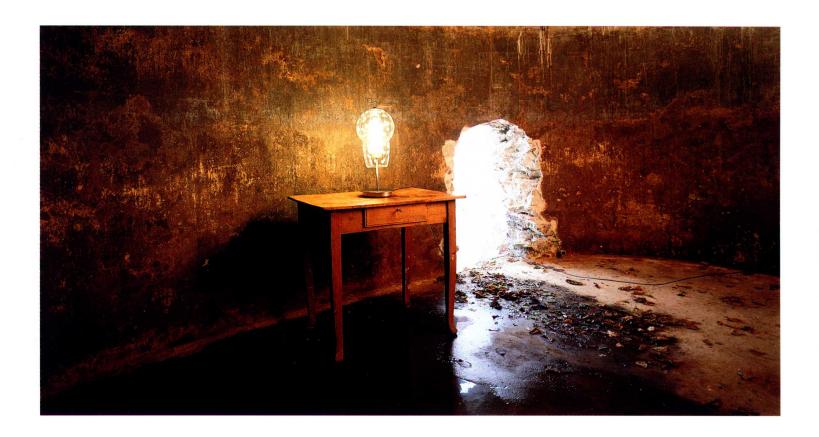
expressive charge, certainly new and in some cases provocative, just like the philosophy of this newborn company.

The 'provocative' approach also applies to the far more well-known case of Droog: also Dutch, it is a free, nonconformist group, united in the idea of renewing the meaning of design. Droog was founded in 1993 in Amsterdam and basically presents, not a catalogue of products, but a mindset to which to relate. Over the years, it has promoted and developed experimental projects to which young designers have contributed in particular. Droog's products have been marketed internationally up to now by the DMD company of

Vaarburg. Droog is no longer concerned solely with products, but also with their presentation, display and the events which accompany them. In confirming that the interpretation of the disciplinary limits are changing rapidly, Droog is announcing that architects, interior designers and advertising and graphic agencies are now also collaborating in disseminating the success of Droog Design, that means dry design.

Symptomatic, entertaining, authentic, original and disruptive are words that certainly describe the catalogue *do*, in which no fewer than 10 designers or studios, including Marti Guixé of Spain, Thomas Bernstrand of Sweden, Radi of France and Dawn

Michele De Lucchi Lamp, Nizami From 'Thinking of Sufi Poets' exhibition Produzioni Privata



Finley of the United States have designed products for an experimental brand created by the Amsterdam advertising agency KesselsKramer. The title of the project, 'do create', alludes both to the designers and the consumers: the designer creates the products with which the consumer has to interact. The designer creates an unsigned product which is completed by the consumer, who adds his personal touch. The user is invited to intervene and play, he can influence the design and the product can identify the personality of its consumer. One no longer buys a form, a style or a function, now one buys an experience. Personally, I am a great admirer of Gijs Bakker and Renny Ramakers for the work they have achieved and the communicative force of

their publications. I believe they represent the most innovative and enthusiastic design formula of these last few years, and I also admire them for having been able to sidestep traditional obstacles and difficulties in spreading an independent and original design culture.

Cappellini, albeit in certain more controlled and experimental movements, also every year surprises us by gathering around him excellent designers from all over the world and presenting projects and products that are always original, always fascinating, never banal; this year's selection is no exception.

And the public initiative of Kunstindustrimuseet and the exhibition for 1999 promoted by Louise Campbell, Cecilia Enevoldsen and Sebastian Holmbaeck called 'Walk the Plank' is notable. It is a friendly and unceremonious challenge, a search for ideas, imagination and skill, at a crossing-point between designers and cabinetmakers, between design talent and production talent. Some 20 furniture designers were invited to be paired together with as many cabinetmakers and each pair was given a plank out of which it had to make an item of furniture. The resulting pieces were exhibited at the Museum of Decorative Art in Gronnengarden and then sold at auction. The profit was then donated to a fund enabling furniture designers to experiment with new prototypes.

There are also many private initiatives by individual designers who, not having found sufficiently ample scope for research themselves in the industrial sector, create small but significant business initiatives which have had noteworthy success, often going well beyond the original aims. Ingo Maurer, Ron Arad and Philippe Starck have all experimented with the thrill of a business initiative based more on poetic logic than on a business model. It has often gone well, even very well as in the case of Ingo, who succeeded in turning a business into a wonderful poetical attitude. I myself can be catalogued in this sector with my Produzione Privata, whereby I try to simulate on a small scale what I would like to be able to do with the major industries, but which industrial logic finds impossible to accomplish. And it is precisely the experience with Produzione Privata which has helped me to understand this phenomenon and which leads me to talk about it now. It also drives me to underline the importance of crafts and the value of something still made 'by oneself', made by hand, in just a few editions, if not only one. Industry and crafts are not different when compared in terms of their contribution to the culture of design.

I have always upheld the role of crafts as a research forum for industry – an ideal forum, free from the constraints imposed by the size of the investment, the risk of research, the possible consequences of success or the lack of it. Working with crafts creates an ideal laboratory, the significance of which is not always understood in terms of its potential, and not always grasped in its current experimental role. I say 'ideal' because crafts combine technology and human talent, knowledge and sensitivity, knowhow and skill. Crafts free the prototyping from any restraints and allow vast liberties of expression.

It is one of the prerogatives of the happy success of Italian design that despite the lack of new names it

maintains its reputation as an international centre of design. In Italy, to the discredit of the industrial and political structure and to the credit of a limited number of businessmen, some extraordinary craft traditions have been kept intact which each year enable Italian and foreign companies to present at the Salone del Mobile [Furniture Fair] in Milan an infinity of new ideas, new models and new visions.

These craft traditions also encourage the phenomenon that tends to bring the world of design ever closer to the world of fashion; and this is to the absolute benefit of design because it can absorb from fashion its extraordinary inventiveness and productivity, the continuous capacity to generate innovation and interest, and to direct the world towards new and ever more appealing visions. Furthermore, it enables it, step by step, to witness the ongoing interesting alternation of choices, forms, ambitions and hopes. I would like this to be the most far-reaching role to be attributed to design.

I would also like to stress a point concerning design projects made by architects: I mean those who, in creating architecture, are obliged also to define the internal spaces and consequently often design the fittings for them. It involves a special way of seeing and understanding the design of objects for the home: I know this as a fact because here, too, I have direct experience since I am myself an architect. This selection has in fact been an opportunity for me to examine just how much architectural culture influences the industrial culture and how much, in my own work as a designer, derives from my original grounding. Clearly, architecture and design meet chiefly where one finds internal space and furniture, functional and aesthetic places and tools, environments which people inhabit and objects and utensils, whether fixed or mobile.

It is very difficult to describe concepts which depart from the meaning of words! It is equally difficult to understand why the worlds of spaces and things move, in terms of discipline, on two such diverse platforms. Only in rare cases do the distances fill up and the two worlds unite, amalgamate and combine, thereby enhancing one another. The architect designs the furniture and fittings according to his instinct of spatial definition, 'constructing' element upon element, like stone on stone, form on form, adding and subtracting, but nonetheless working in a frenzy of composition guided by his trade, a trade that has existed since the beginning of mankind. Fittings, furniture, objects, things, are today subjected to the industrial culture, which abides by completely different values linked to productive logic, technological

convenience, market research and more generalized tastes. It is difficult to put together parameters so diverse and remote: only in a few cases has this been possible, precisely thanks to a third protagonist – unexpected and I really wonder whether always desired - namely, art. In certain cases, something greater than expected may happen - a wider concept which can govern one and the other and bring everything together in a single idiom. This is probably what we call art, but what I prefer to call the spirit of time, the spirit of all shapes, ideas, moods, the specific images of a precise historic moment. It is in this ideal place that architects and designers, with the ability to construct and produce, should meet. Furthermore, another challenging ideal of 'fluid thinking' is to combine architectonic culture and industrial culture, allowing the experience of a millenary culture to permeate the little more than centenary culture of an industry still struggling to show its best side, to display in the midst of the worst, whatever it is best at.

For this edition of the International Design Yearbook I have had the good fortune to put together the work of great architects like Foster, Sejima, Moneo and Chipperfield who with greater or lesser indulgence for industrial logic have produced significant furnishing projects. They certainly concede nothing to the enticements of mass produced products; they certainly do not make use of the new possibilities of expression favoured by parametric programmes, and by modellers of forms. The current vogue for rounded corners, curved surfaces, handles and protuberances of a quasi-biological origin, seems for the time being not to affect figurative research of architectonic origin. However, there are trends which cannot be concealed and the tendency to soften shapes, to cushion surfaces and break up geometric rhythms which are too rigidly defined, is increasingly evident and surely appears as the major trend of our time, the master movement which drives the figurative experimentation of these years.

Meanwhile, minimalism also appears to be taking on a new lease of life – now ever more curtailed and abstract, it has opened the way to a new expressiveness where formal research is combined with a refined selection of materials, textures and flavours. This new direction derives from the desire to make contemporary things stand out from the ordinary, to decontextualize them where possible, with a healthy and authentic touch of irony and disenchantment; it may, however, at times appear to be a banal and empty desire to poke fun and it can also be difficult to distinguish between what has a meaning and what is a hackneyed joke.

Michele De Lucchi Lamp, Tolomeo Pinza Artemide, Italy 1996

There is no lack of big names on the list of this year's chosen designers: Sottsass, Starck, Citterio, Cibic and many others who also remain meaningful references both in experimental projects and commercial products. Equally significant is the presence of Philips, Siemens and Sharp, whose design centres have developed a vast volume of work over the past few years, offering products on the market of extraordinary figurative quality and opening up to consumers products and environments updated in terms of both image and style.

In conclusion, I would like to address myself to those whose work has not been included: limited space has prevented it. I would, however, like to tell them not to worry and not to be offended – firstly because I am often wrong and secondly because what is culturally diffused is not always genuinely deserving of discriminating commercial success. I only hope that this selection adds to the quality on the list of all the *International Design Yearbooks* published up to now; I hope above all that this edition will also prove, as the others have for me, a favourite source of inspiration. Everything that can stimulate creativity deserves to be propagated.

