

Salone del Mobile.Milano 2018 – Overview

Anyone looking for a clear and unequivocal answer to the question “**what approach will design take in 2018?**” within the context of the great Salone Internazionale del Mobile di Milano cannot fail to be surprised. There is no one single approach, but many different, if not radically different, design approaches. In fact one could attempt a play on words, to the effect that **the lack of a well-defined trend** should be seen as the driving trend. Unless we are very much mistaken, it is fair to say that this is an observation that has been made increasingly frequently over the last decade - despite numerous attempts to pin new “ism” labels on things, this has simply not happened. There have been many and varied style approaches in 2018, from organicism to a return to the classic, a search for purity or fantasy and, within each different strand, there are designers from the most diverse cultural and geographical contexts. This sends a clear message that creatives all over the world are guided by their “**reference tribes**”, moving endlessly around a global market in which localisms appear, from a creative point of view at least, to be on the wane. The definitions that attempted to identify “national styles”, postulating Italian rather than Scandinavian or German design, now appear meaningless. Now, with all due respect to the purists, it would be perfectly possible to find a German designer working for a Greek company drawing on a Scandinavian lexicon (one such example is **Catharina Lorenz | Steffen Kaz** and their Halla chair for **Anesis**). Equally, in the design world, the term **ethnic** is declined in a Marco Polo-esque dream that blends Africa and the East, Lapland and Peru together like spices (**Paola Navone** is showcasing *Carve*, a hand-carved mahogany armchair for **Gervasoni**). These **polymorphic** instances (the phrases “inclusion” and “cultural crossing” have also been gathering pace) seem to have become increasingly unrelenting since the beginning of the new millennium and, as we have said, it is not clear whether we are likely to witness other unitary and long-lasting movements such as functionalism, “fine design”, postmodernism or minimalism again in the foreseeable future. While this absence of unidirectional approach should be powerfully stressed, there remain various characteristics common to all the trends evidenced, first and foremost the retrieval of the **narrative value of objects**, of their ability to create an **ambience** and live alongside each other in spaces conceived along the lines of *cabinets de merveilles*, collectors’ treasure chests. There are few references to the so-called white cube, now usurped by rooms (the **loft concept** is now extremely passé), steeped in **shades of pink/red** and **grey/petroleum**. Furniture, lamps and objects adapt perforce to this mood, “**warming up**” their images with **fine woods, precious finishes, enveloping fabrics** and, especially, a very particular kind of **tactility**. Furnishing in 2018 demands to be caressed by the eye as well as by the hand. There are no neutral presences, rather talking simulacra, capable of expressing our ideas, our passions – narrating them.

This is particularly evident when it comes to **organicism**, a sensual trend enjoying a sharp revival. Take **Artek’s** careful ongoing reworking of pieces by the unforgettable **Alvar and Aino Aalto** (note the ceramic Riihitie Road *cachepot*, a simplified version of the famous glass Savoy) and, still in the realm of decorative goods, **Constance Guisset’s Fusca** vases for **Bosa** - erotically calla-shaped, no longer dressed in immaculate white but clad in orchid colours. Even upholstereds are abandoning their classic forms and taking on more organic shapes, such as the great tapered rocks that make up the **Sydney** divan by **Jean-**

Marie Massaud (one of the most statement designers on today's scene) for **Poliform** and the shell resting on a rock effect of the Babled Chair by **Emmanuel Babled** for **Offecct Lab**. Even designs referencing a more composed **classicism** feature connected and sinuous details, demanding that one run one's hand along them with pleasure, such as **Paolo Rizzatto's New Lady** chair collection for **Alias**, in which he has gone so far as to combine great craftsmanship with industry. This approach also belongs to a very obvious trend that could be described as the **Hermès syndrome**: the historic French leather goods *maison* is cited everywhere, appositely or not, for the excellent quality of its materials and for the extraordinary commitment to craftsmanship that marks out its workmanship. This has triggered a great many products featuring the use of leather, marble, brass and burnished metals, with sartorial-type details (see, for instance, **Jean-Marie Massaud's Byron** chaise longue for **Poltrona Frau**), rather than original pairings of materials (such as rolling wood, using an ancient technique, with gently padded leather in **Shinsaku Miyamoto's Jabara** storage units for the Japanese company **Ritzwell**).

This marked return to the classic segues nicely into the genuine **classics**. The trend towards **re-editions** is becoming increasingly widespread and common. Great pieces from the past are being sought out, studied, admired and reworked, usually with great philological care (although there are some obvious, irresponsible style failures). The public (which has gone back to listening to vinyl, taking polaroid snaps and raving about Star Wars) understands well-established pieces and appreciates their historical past. Apart from the obvious nostalgic connotations and the recognition of exceptionally elegant design, buyers also appreciate the guaranteed return of an investment destined to perform well over time, regardless of fashion. In this particular sector too, research has been extended to different geographical contexts, from Brazil to Italy (a small table by **Pio Manzù** is back at **Alias**), but without a doubt the prevailing look is undeniably Scandinavian. Companies like **Fritz Hansen**, **Carl Hansen & Son** and **Erik Jørgensen** continue their scrupulous revisiting of pieces, from those now elevated to an iconic status to more simple ones such as the **Society Table** designed by **Arne Jacobsen** in 1952, reworked by **Carl Hansen & Son**, or the **essential elegance of the Markelius 01** table designed by Sweden's **Sven Markelius** in 1930 and the 1970 **EJ 270** sofa, reproduced by **Erik Jørgensen**. Quite apart from their style classification, these pieces are also being rediscovered because of their size, typical of the periods and environments in which they were designed, and which pay no lip service to gigantism, having been conceived in a more domestic vein, more suited to the real dimensions of the environments into which they are to be inserted (we have called this "the language of rooms"!). Even some of the more able designers are tending towards a general scaling down of volumes. Take for instance **Christophe Pillet's important work on upholstereds**, for indoors (the **High Time** collection for **Cappellini**), for outdoors (**Grand Life** for **Ethimo**) and for the contract sector (Memory Lane sofas and armchairs for **Tacchini**). Smaller objects do not look out of place with the fashionable **cosy** (the English term is obligatory) look, quite the reverse! In myriad welcoming environments, but never overdone. This reductionist approach brings with it an interesting and **original feminisation**. Assuming it makes sense to distinguish gender in creative activities, it is worth noting that women designers are onto a winning streak, both statistically and qualitatively. **Mattiazzi**, a company known for its robust processing of solid wood, has taken on board the delicate irony of **Inga Sempé** (with the **MC17** chair). We are also witnessing a generalised transformation of the work of stylists,

now promoted to the role of designers: **Elisa Ossino** and **Arianna Lelli Mami** and **Chiara Di Pinto**, otherwise known as **Studio Pepe**, in particular. Even among the ranks of emerging young Italian designers, women are absolutely predominant (these also include Cristina Celestino, Francesca Lanzavecchia, Elena Salmistraro, Alessandra Baldereschi, Maddalena Casadei, Giorgia Zanellato and Chiara Andreotti).

A number of pieces have been drawn from the world of re-editions, or rather, from the world of citations, not philologically retrieved but simply inspired by bygone furniture and ambiances; from the **Chiavari chair**, which has enjoyed enormous success both in the original versions and in the innumerable replicas, to the rehabilitation of the Italian pre-war sideboard (**Muriel** by **Ferruccio Laviani** for **F.lli Boffi**). Nostalgia also accounts for the return of various other items, such as the **screen**, the **console table** and the **valet stand**, a prevalently male object that subscribes to the current mania for taking care of one's wardrobe (see **Valet** by **Analogia Project** for **Frag**). Lastly, **mirrors reign supreme**, enough to satisfy an entire generation of narcissists who had clearly been in dire need. Standout pieces, practically works of jewellery design, include **Soleil** by **Giorgio Bonaguro** for **Tacchini Edizioni** and **Pinch** by **Lanzavecchia-Wai** for **Fiam**. On the other hand, **Inga Sempé's** evocatively named **Vitrail** mirrors for **Magis**, the reflective glass broken up by dense grids and coloured glass, resemble works of art, as do **Marco Brunori's** **Pablo** mirrors for **Adele-C**. There is also no shortage of sophisticated chinoiserie, like **Piero Zuffi's** reinterpretation of the Chinese horoscope for **MissoniHome**, as well as home fragrances, petit point cushions and the wildly popular wallpaper – not even **Mario Praz** in his *Filosofia dell'Arredamento* could possibly have imagined so many “returns”!

This is merely one aspect of the penchant for nostalgia, basically the most innocuously romantic of them all. Another facet of the same trend speaks the **language** of the mid-18th century **Gothic novels**, with settings worthy of the *Game of Thrones* (although it seems only fitting to remember that this phenomenon was sparked by the film *Lord of the Rings*, adapted from Tolkien). **Marc Sadler's** **Rock chair** for **da a.**, for example, harnesses an anti-aesthetic aesthetic (post-industrial or pre-industrial?) and is made entirely of metal with exposed rivets. **Fantasy** is therefore indubitably one of the most easily distinguished trends today. Justified by phenomena parallel to design, such as fashion and indeed cinema, it is particularly common on ceramics, monstrous or princely, funny or allusive. Mention has to be made of **Jaime Hayon**, one of this year's most trendy designers, and of **Natalie du Pasquier's** exceptionally sophisticated forms of poetic cubism for the legendary **Bitossi** brand. Fabrics are equally important, simultaneously drawing on African batik and 18th century prints, featuring exotic birds and dragons. All these are embellished with an immoderate and indiscriminate use of fringes in silk, raffia or rayon. Veined marble floors, antiqued wood and cementine tiled floors are all crying out for rugs, masses of rugs, from the sophisticated, simply constructed **Shade** range by young Turkish designer **Begüm Cana Özgür** for **nanimarquina**, with colours blending into each other, to **Hella Jongerius's** reinterpretation of antique felts in her **Sienna** collection for **Kvadrat**.

Elsewhere, the rooms we mentioned previously, cocooning and cosy, become museum rooms, not in major museums, but in museums of the everyday, of our memories, subscribing to the formula adopted by the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk. They identify a new form of collectionism, involving furniture and objects that, only a few years ago,



would have turned up in flea markets. Furniture and objects straddling nostalgia and **kitsch**. Kitsch is also another word that has again become useful to describe a current phenomenon. Having lost its negative connotation (Gillo Dorfles had thought it up way back in 1968, but it is enjoying even greater currency today in the wake of Alessandro Michele's Gucci revolution), kitsch applies to objects such as the small Hot Dog sofa by **studio Job** for **Seletti.it** (complete with hamburger and slice of gherkin), as well as to sparkly finishes, glitter first and foremost and therefore gold. **Gold** (and all its derivatives – gilt, pinchbeck, brass-plating) is a word that has made a powerful return to the furnishing world - possibly in an attempt to exorcise this never-ending financial crisis? Pantone has also come up with its 2018 counterpart – an Ultra-Violet that may not necessarily appeal to legions of superstitious buyers.

This analysis of the leading trends should also include the fact that one extremely positive aspect, that brings together all the “narrative thrusts” discussed above, is the **rediscovery of artisan techniques and skills** that are on the brink of dying out. Today's maximalist approach to design calls for tremendously high quality details, finishes and processes, featuring rare marbles (Calacatta gold paired with bronze in **Rodolfo Dordoni's Morgan Marble table for Minotti**), or the straw marquetry applied by **Cristina Celestino** to her flower-shaped tables (Carillon for **Gebrüder Thonet Vienna**) and the burl mosaic used for the top of **Massimo Castagna's Ace table for Henge**. There are also more humble materials, such as the nautical ropes on the beautiful Shade of Venice screens by **Marco Zito** for **Saba Italia**, which are ennobled by the intelligence of the processing.

Naturally as with all leading trends, this powerful narrative thrust, evidenced in terms of history, fantasy or kitsch, triggers an **equal and contrary reaction**, and thus there is no shortage of proposals distinguished by an exasperated minimalism. Continuing the literary metaphor, one might describe them as being marked out by a **deliberate linguistic silence**. The Japanese designer **Ichiro Iwasaki**, for example, imagines furnishing the lounge or waiting areas of offices with pared-back seating and work surfaces configured like abstract frames (Kiik for **Arper**), while Norway's **Daniel Ribbakken** has designed reflective surfaces in sheets of polished steel for **Artek** that form reflective 124 degree (this is the name of the product) “angles”. The relative silence of the lines can also be married with the narrative quality of the finishes, as in **Zanellato/Bortotto's Marea** containers for **De Castelli**, their surfaces marked by layers of oxydisation, rather like the *acqua alta* in Venice, or indeed with topological invention, as in **Gordon Guillaumier's** Faroe project for **Lema** in which the island seating area made up of cushions and storage containers references Gio Ponti's famous 1967 Triposto. Finally, there is the totally abstract concept, practically an ideogram, from the Japanese-Taiwanese duo **Tamaki** for **Living** – the fact that it is a clothes hanger would appear to be totally irrelevant.

Milan, 17th April 2018

Press info: Marva Griffin Wilshire – Patrizia Malfatti
press@salonemilano.it