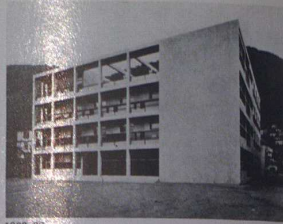


**THE MODERN MOVEMENT IN ITALY**  
**a Museum of Modern Art traveling show**



1929-31: Lingeri, Cattinero, Delfino, Terzaghi, Orsioni: Trade Unions Building, Como.



1932-36

- 1932-36 G. Terragni: political party HQ, Como.
- 1935 Figini, Lingeri, Pollini, Terragni: project for new Brera Art School building.
- 1950-52 Brizzi and Gori: covered market, Pescaia.
- 1949-50 Nervi, Bartoli: salt warehouse, Tortona.
- 1948-50 Aprile, Calcaprina, Plorentino, Perugini: Ardeatine Trench, Memorial to War Dead, Rome. Gates by sculptor Mirko.

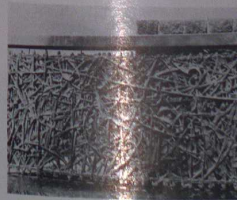


1949-50

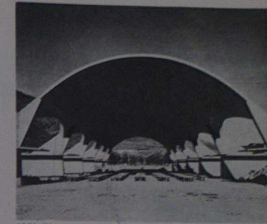
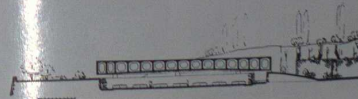


1855

Since the war, Italian design has been delighting the world with a resurgence of imagination and creativity. *Interiors* is glad to have been among the first to see the revival, and so is the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which now has arranged a circulating exhibition consisting of enlarged photographs and plans (some reproduced here) and called "The Modern Movement in Italy: Architecture and Design." (The show will be at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada, January 22-February 12, and at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, March 6-27.) Ada Louise Huxtable, who gathered much original material on a Fulbright Fellowship in Italy, organized the exhibition and wrote the text, which is unusually perceptive of the characteristics, impetuses, and directions of contemporary Italian styles. Selections from her essay tell the essentials of the story:



1948-50



1950-52

**Introduction**

It is strange that Italy, the country that produced one of the greatest rationalist movements in art history, the Renaissance, should have been late in receiving modern architecture. Certainly many of the concepts of modern architecture—its insistence on clarity, order, and logic—are close to the great and enduring expression of the Italian spirit. Yet Italy . . . shared few of the initial discoveries and little of the early excitement.

. . . (But) once the break with the past was made, the tradition of Italy's unusually strong architectural culture was bound to influence her contributions. Her rationalist tendencies were to aid in the production of a modern architecture of special refinement and calculated, ordered intricacy. Her traditions of humanism and individualism were to lead to a particular sympathy for the experimental phases of

modern architecture, and a predisposition toward the more sensuous and exuberant aspects of the contemporary style.

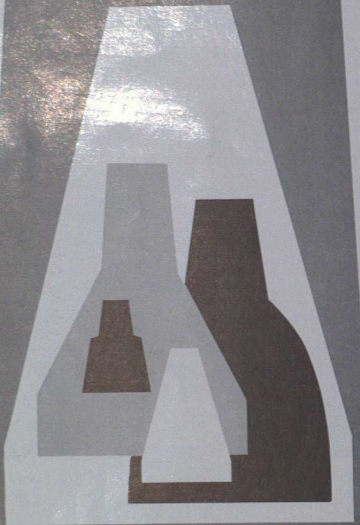
**The Italian Style**

The characteristics of present Italian work have been determined by two factors: the course of development of contemporary architecture and design in the past 20 years, and the specific contributions of the Italian heritage and temperament. Historically and artistically, Italy has been subject to many influences. She participated, though late, in the rationalist revolution and the stylistic definition of early modern architecture. She responded with interest to the delicately sensuous manner in furniture and interiors developed by the Scandinavian countries in the 40's, and was particularly aware of the "organic" architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, the informal domestic building of the American (Continued on Page 151)





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Small rug: Orange Wanda-Weve, by Belrug Mills, New York  
Second Reception Room  
White chair: Charles Eames, from Herman Miller Furniture Company, Zeeland, Michigan  
Curtain: Knoll Associates, New York

**The modern movement in Italy**

(Continued from Page 75)

West Coast, and the decorative mannerisms of South America. To the important lesson of the machine esthetic she added the taste for a more personal expression, less dependent upon standardized industrial processes, and more responsive to the desire for variety and individualized solutions.

**The Early Work**

Modern architecture came into existence in Italy as a mature expression in the 30's, a decade later than in northern Europe. . . Artistically, Italy was still in the grip of tradition, and her industrialization had come late and was far from complete. The need for the factories and housing

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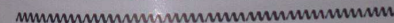
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of an industrial society was not a pressing reality to give stimulus to the new architecture, as in the more mechanized countries of Europe; it was rather the intellectual realization of the true state of twentieth century art and society that gave impetus to the modern architect in Italy. . . .

Although the early Italian work subscribed to the general principles of the International Style, it has a remarkably individual character. These buildings were conceived not in terms of flat, painterly surfaces, but as a series of intricate, three-dimensional cubes and rectangles, distinguished by the elegant, almost stylish complexity of the arrangement of their component parts. Characteristically, the Italian architect was often more intrigued by the decorative than by the architectonic quality of these geometric compositions, a preoccupation that continues into the present day.

### Architecture and the State

The early modern movement in Italy had its most powerful and well organized opposition not in political circles but in the strongly entrenched, tradition bound academies of Rome. It was this academic element in Italian architectural society that created the official Fascist style; the hollow, sham-heroic superficialities, the simplified, derivative classic forms that could be called "new" by the conservatives, that could win over the half-converted, where pedantic revivalism could not. By the 40's, this group held a virtual dictatorship over all official building.

### The Italian Contributions

But there remained much contemporary work that was spared the official mask. Buildings that were primarily

utilitarian, or based on pure engineering, like the stadia, airplane hangars and commercial structures of Pier Luigi Nervi, made positive contributions to 20th century architecture. Smaller private buildings and residences continued to be built in the contemporary style, helping to keep the modern movement alive. The Olivetti Corporation, manufacturers of typewriters and business machines, set an unusually high standard and a world-wide example with an integrated modern design program for all phases of its activity: products, advertising, factories, stores, and employee housing and facilities. (See *Interiors*, December 1952).

Also important were the special contributions of Italian architects in the design of expositions and shops, fields unrelated to monumental building, where much of the pure research, experimentation and transformation is done that translates the influences of the fine arts of painting and sculpture into terms of the practical arts of design . . .

### The Post War Work

The architect in Italy today is responsible not only for the building itself, but for the arrangement of its interiors and the design of the great body of furnishing and accessories indicated in the comprehensive term "l'arredamento."

The defeat of Fascism and the end of World War II made the present Italian production possible. Not only did it mark the end of the official style, but it also put out of power the politically sponsored academic group that represented the real dictatorship in Italian design. There was a great need for new building and for reconstruction, for export products in industry and the crafts. There were tremendous shortages of materials, money, living space, and lack of standardization that called for a special in-



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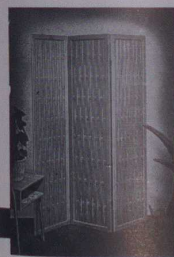
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ventiveness. Italy is a country virtually without mass production; prefabrication is experimental, everything is custom built or custom designed. This lack of industrialization, in spite of its serious limitation, has made possible the use of a great variety of solutions, many of which will, in turn, contribute to the art of the machine.

### Post War Architecture

The diversity of the post war architecture is both stimulating and disturbing. Its provoking quality is in the frequent use of structural elements in an apparently anti-structural way: a reinforced concrete frame is deliberately exploited for its decorative pattern; a tremendous ceiling span appears to be supported by nothing but glass; strange, organically shaped concrete shells shock the traditional sense of structures. . . . It is this ability to experiment beyond the previous uses of an established vocabulary and to exploit the spatial and esthetic possibilities of contemporary structural forms that distinguishes much Italian architecture of the post war period.

### Post War Design

Italy's industrial products and home furnishings show a special awareness of the decorative quality of structural elements. Supports are treated almost independently, contrasted with sculptural forms in wood, metal or marble. This juxtaposition of the staccato straight line with the flowing curved line, of the geometric shape with the free form, is a specific characteristic of Italian design. The successful use of the two seemingly antagonistic expressions creates a feeling of balanced tensions that explains much of the special quality of vitality of the Italian product. The degree to which this combination is held in



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restraint, the amount of its conscious refinement, is largely responsible for the success or failure of the individual example. The dynamic and experimental quality of Italy's post-war work is the product of almost a decade of extraordinary creative activity, during which Italian design has emerged as a major contribution to contemporary art.

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Melanie Kahane: Peter Pan showroom, pages 90-91.

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