

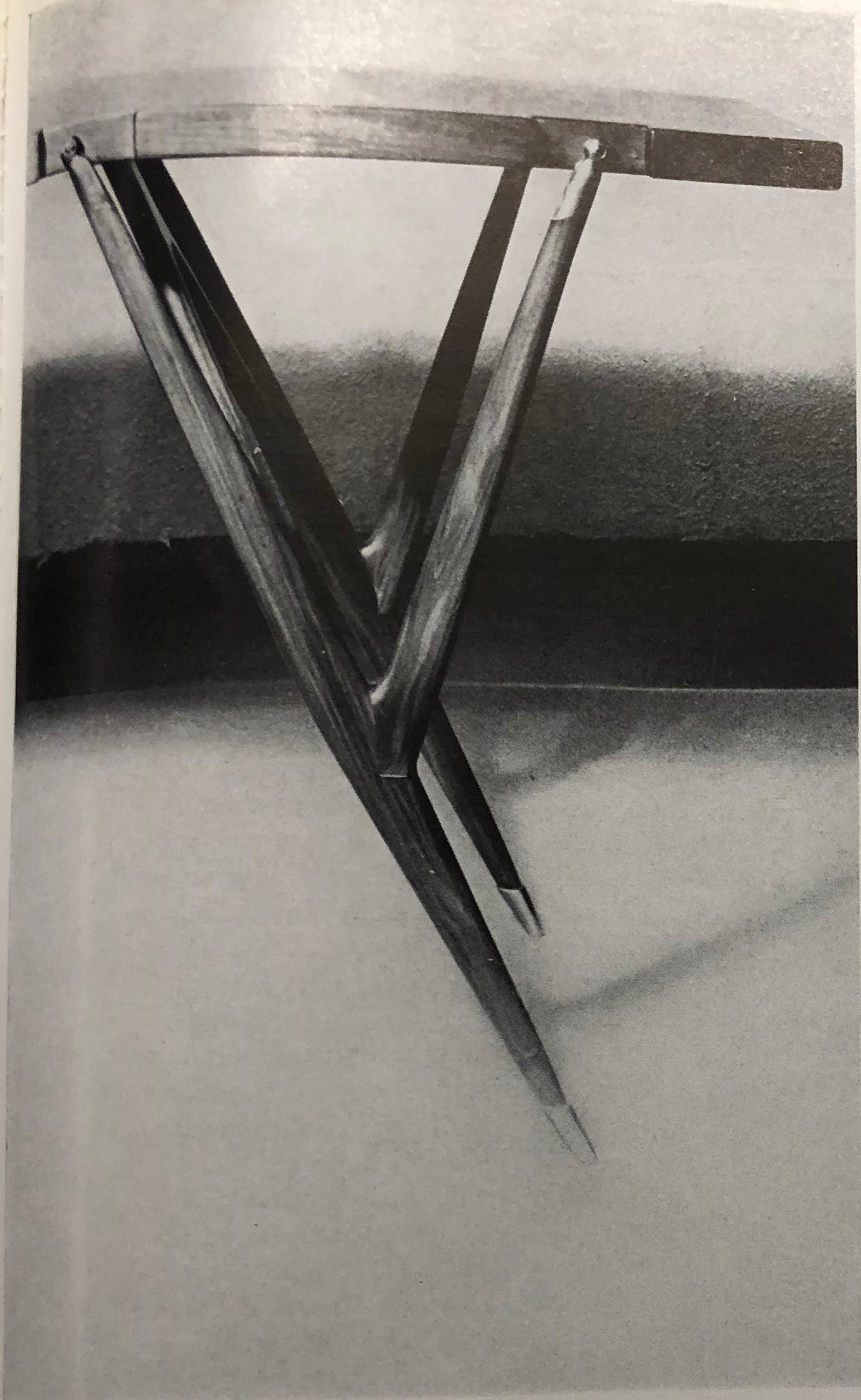
DeCarli

Ponti



Across the seas collaboration

for the new Singer collection



Parisi

Interest in Italian design has been growing miraculously since the post-war design renaissance awoke Americans to the knowledge that things were not dull in the sunny land that stretches into the Mediterranean. Ceramics, fabrics, and lighting fixtures from the new design-promise world soon filtered in abundant supply to these shores, but we saw few concrete examples, save in magazine pages, of the wonderful furniture the Italians begot, mostly because such pieces proved to be one-of-a-kind gems produced for the architect-designer by a local craftsman. There was one young man in one old furniture firm here, however, dissatisfied with this arrangement. Joe Singer, ener-

getic design helmsman of M. Singer and Sons, the 67-year-old company that has earned itself a unique reputation for fine traditional furniture, decided to do something about corralling Italian designs for an eager American market. Singer, a family organization manned now by two generations of Singer sons and cousins, seemed the perfect manufacturer to attempt the bridge. Besides employing many old-world Italian craftsmen in their factories, they had fathered their first modern line in the 1920's, but gave up all leaning toward the modern school about 1938 when they turned in distaste from the so-called modern design of that day. Instead they continued with their tradi-

tional pieces, expanding the line greatly, relying on construction impeccability and a rather lush design elegance to please their decorator customers.

Early in 1950, though, the Singers decided the time had come to branch out again, and with the discriminating Joe guiding operations, they began a search for possible designers in this country. None satisfied completely, with the exception of A.I.D. stalwart Bertha Schaefer, who has so successfully married the fine with the commercial arts via her 57th Street gallery.

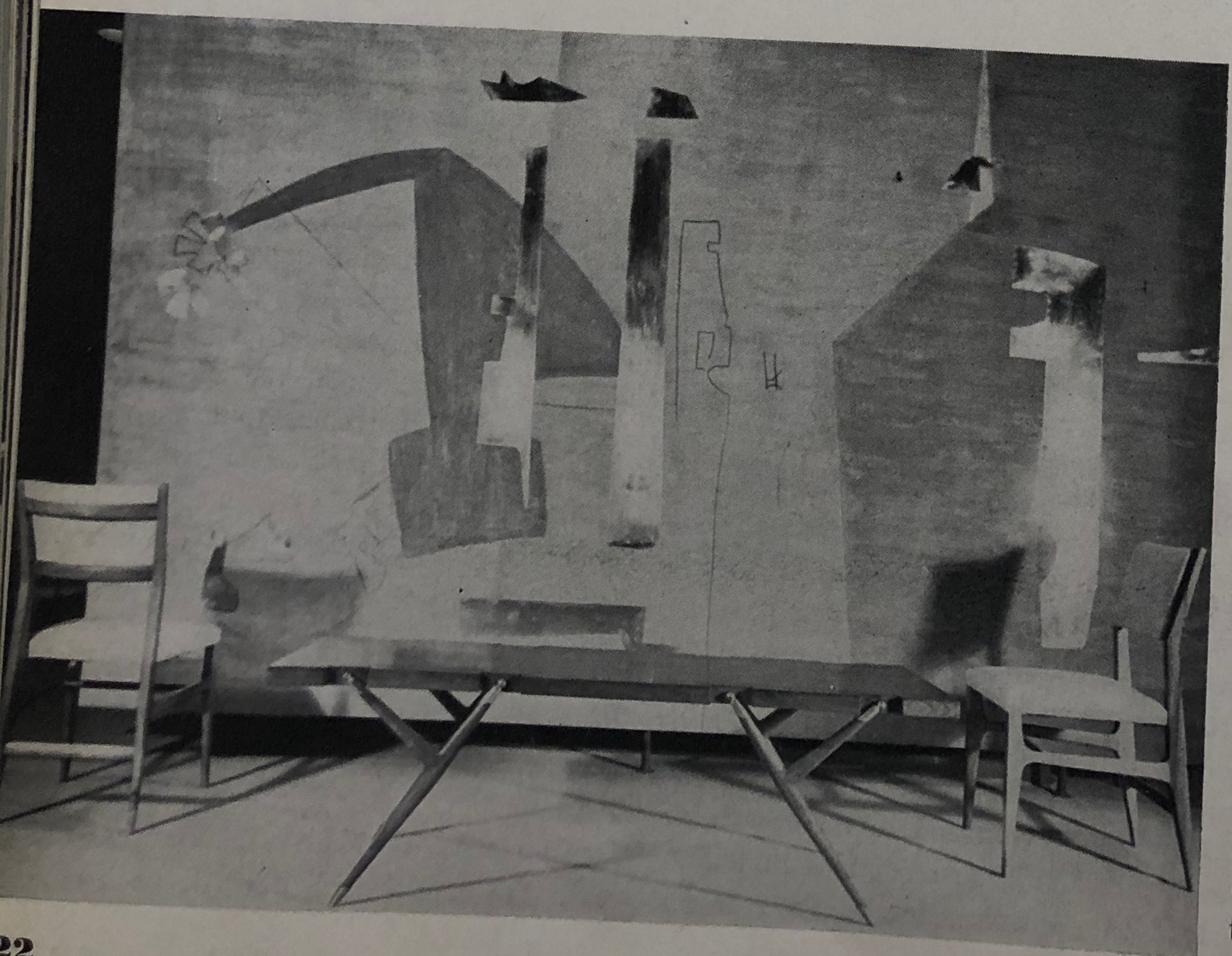
To supplement the proposed Schaefer furniture, Joe decided to look across the seas. So, armed with piles of back cor-

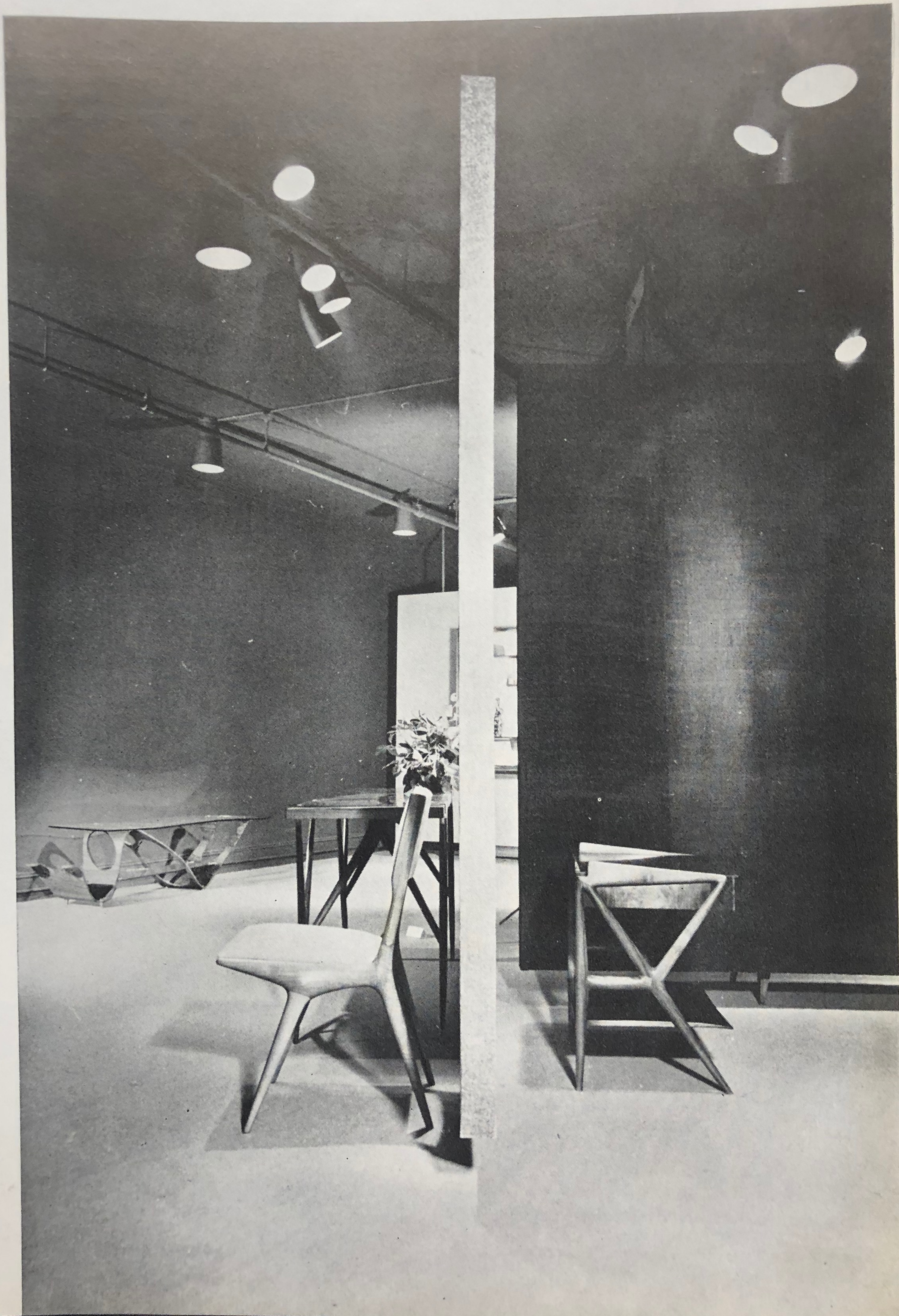


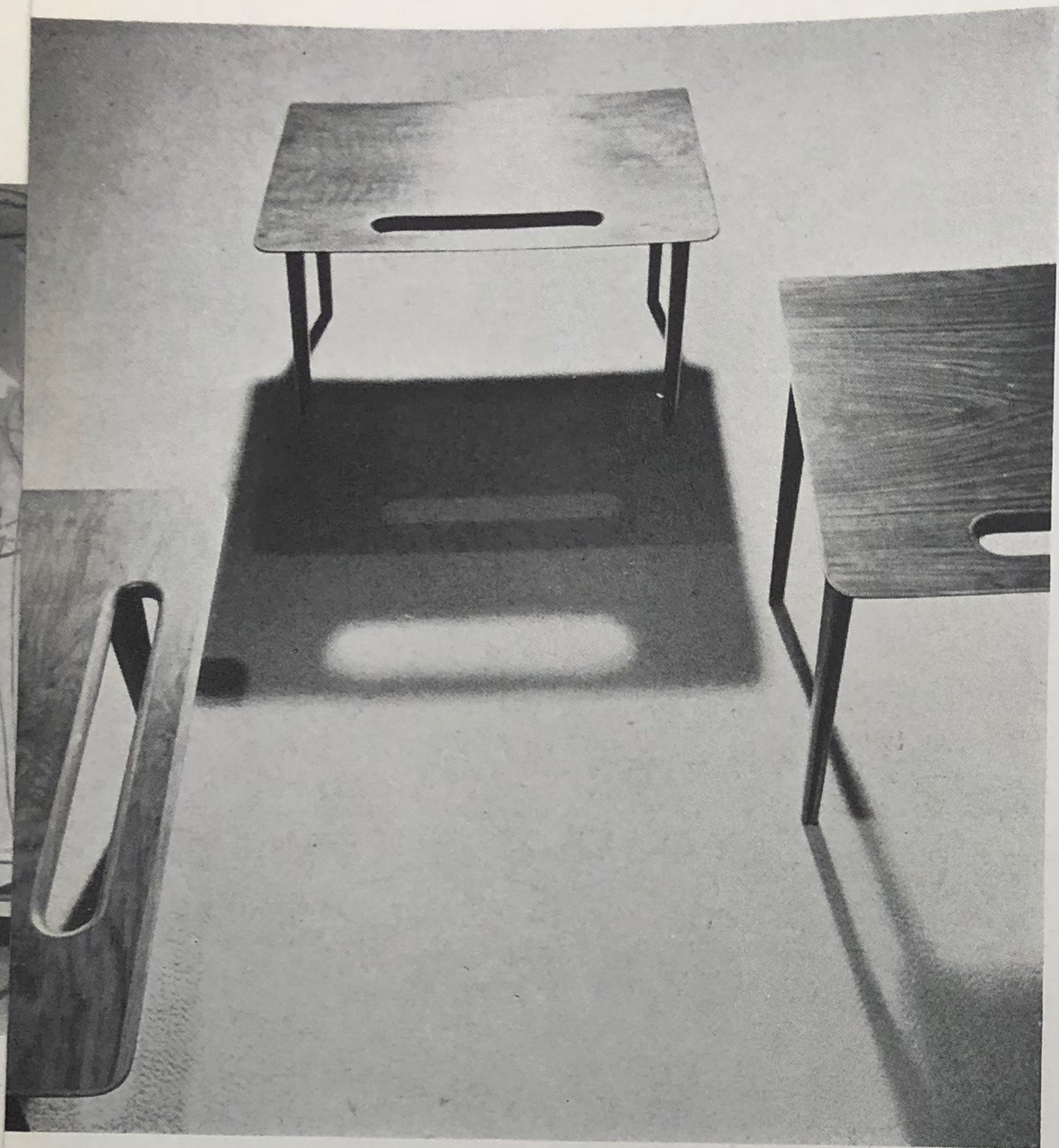
response to *Domus* editor-architect-and-ace-of-all-trades Gio Ponti, he sailed for Europe in the summer of 1950. From June until October he lived in Italy, consulting and working with the four architects finally selected to design the new Singer collection: Ponti, Carlo di Carli, Ico Parisi, and Carlo Mollino.

It took over a year after his return to have all details perfected and the final designs ready for unveiling in Singer's New York showrooms. Launched via a gala trade showing and week-long public exhibition, the 21-piece Italian group and 15 Schaefer offerings debuted in a magnificent setting designed by Miss Schaefer and lighting expert Richard Kelly. Miss Schaefer deftly combined paintings, murals, and sculpture by well-known artists into exciting backgrounds for the furniture, painting some walls yellow, orange, and dark charcoal, covering others with black silk, white grass cloth, imported graphite, and handmade flax papers. Two of the most dramatic of the settings are illustrated at left: the top photo features Nanno de Groot's *Painting in Oil and Graphite*, while the bottom one shows *Construction in Paint and Brass*, a striking mural by Fred Farr. As eye-stopping and spectacular as these, and the other art-graced displays are, the furniture holds its own, each piece dramatized by the background like a rare and fabulous jewel.

For the furniture is unmistakably jewel-like. The Italian architects attack design with a meaningful purpose: each piece must perform a job, yet sacrifice nothing esthetically to its functional end. Furniture, for all its practicality, remains essentially a work of art; every piece has the grace and fluidity of a piece of sculpture, the classic dignity of a master painting. Wood grains are meticulously matched, legs subtly tapered, shelves and edges narrowed to a knife-blade slimness. For this reason, some of the more ambitious Singer pieces will be manufactured in Italy, rather than here, so that old-school craftsmen can hand carve each sculpturesque member (Cont. on Page 158)



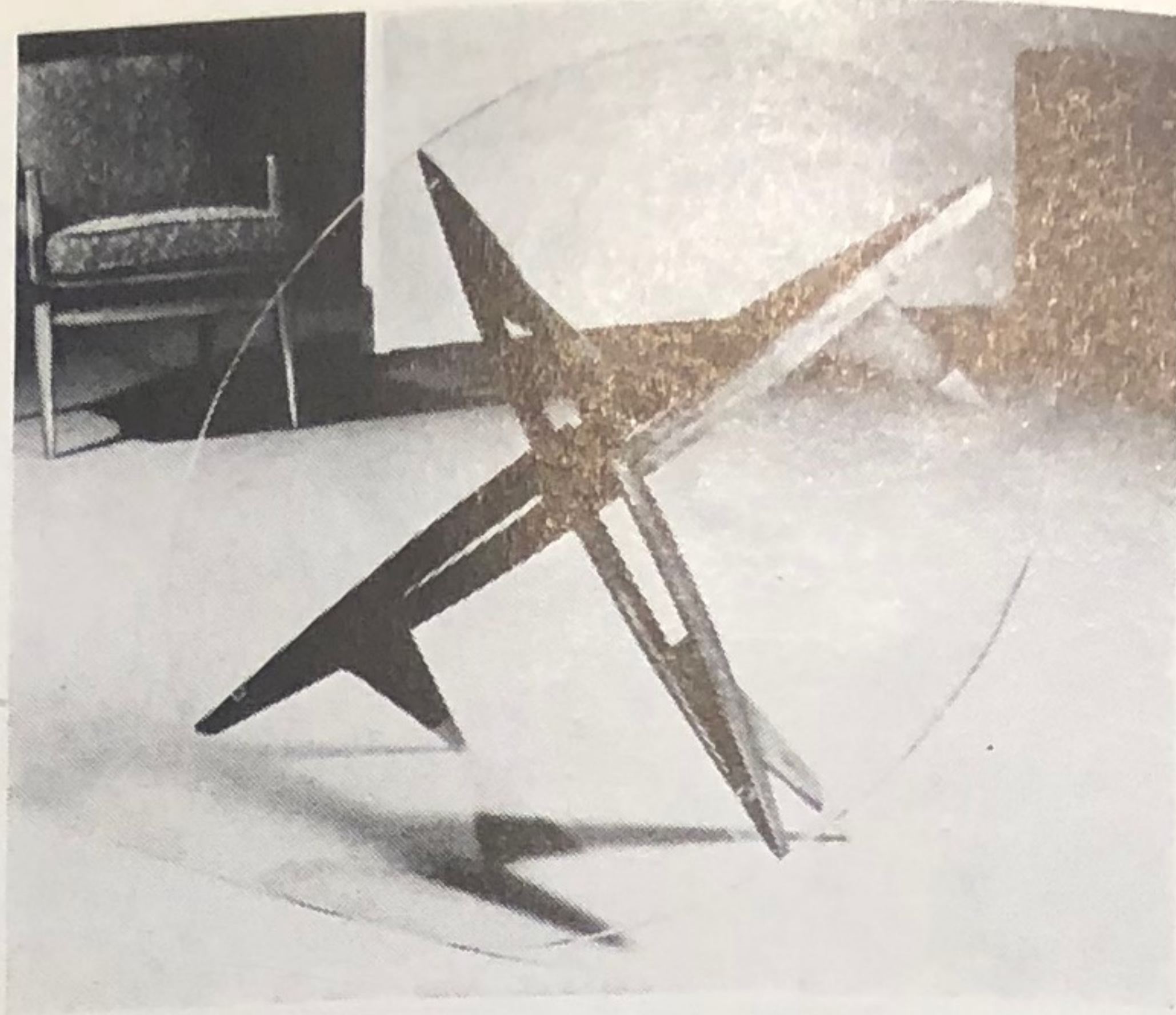




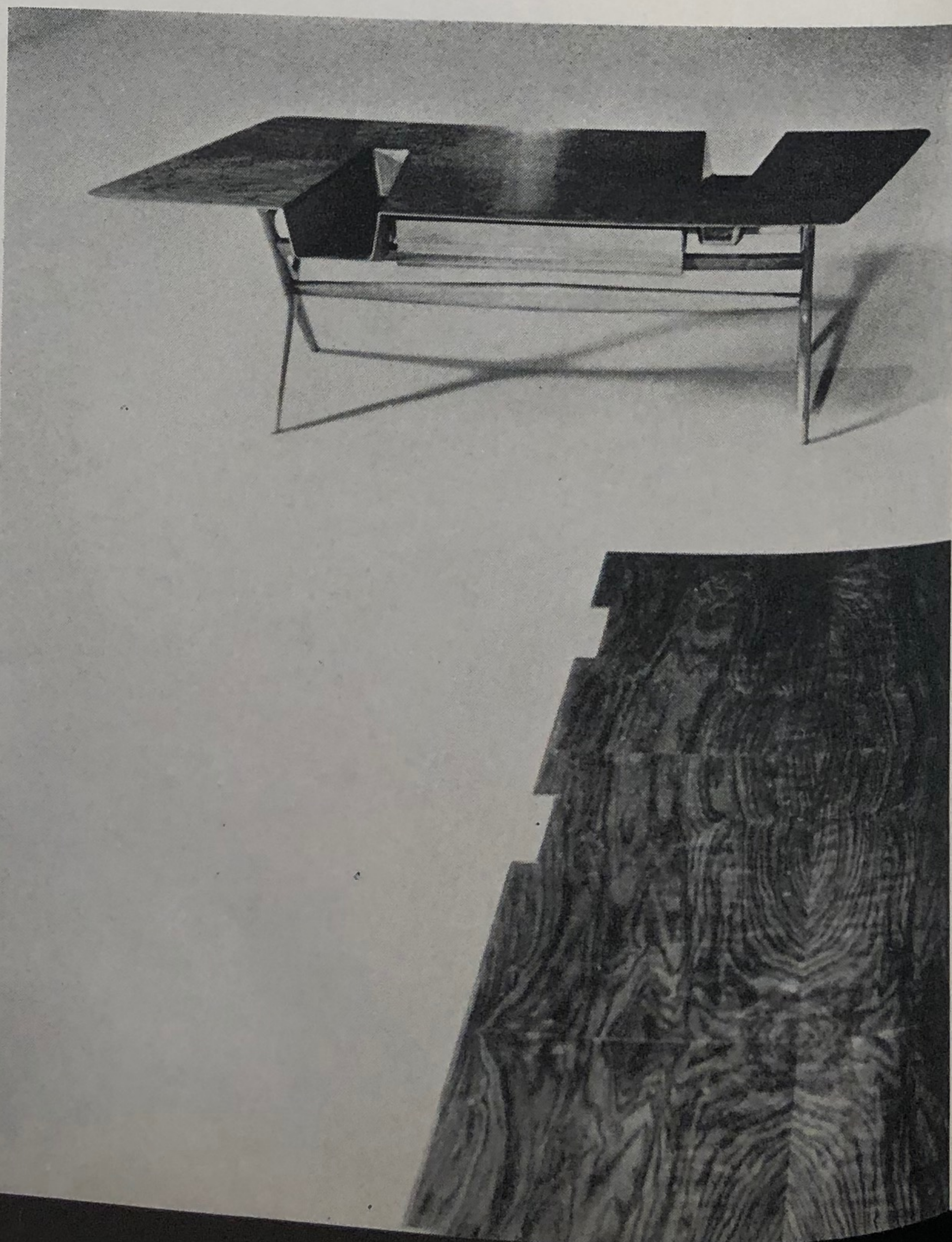
Parisi, influenced by his plywood aircraft construction work, lays emphasis on the form-must-serve-a-definite-purpose theory. In the nest of simple walnut pull-up tables above, he carves long slots that serve as convenient hand-holds. His parallelogram-shaped cocktail table at right has two deep troughs for glasses, and the magnificently-grained walnut console table in the lower right corner is notched along each side to recess the elegantly shaped legs. Close-up view of this detailing is shown on page 121.

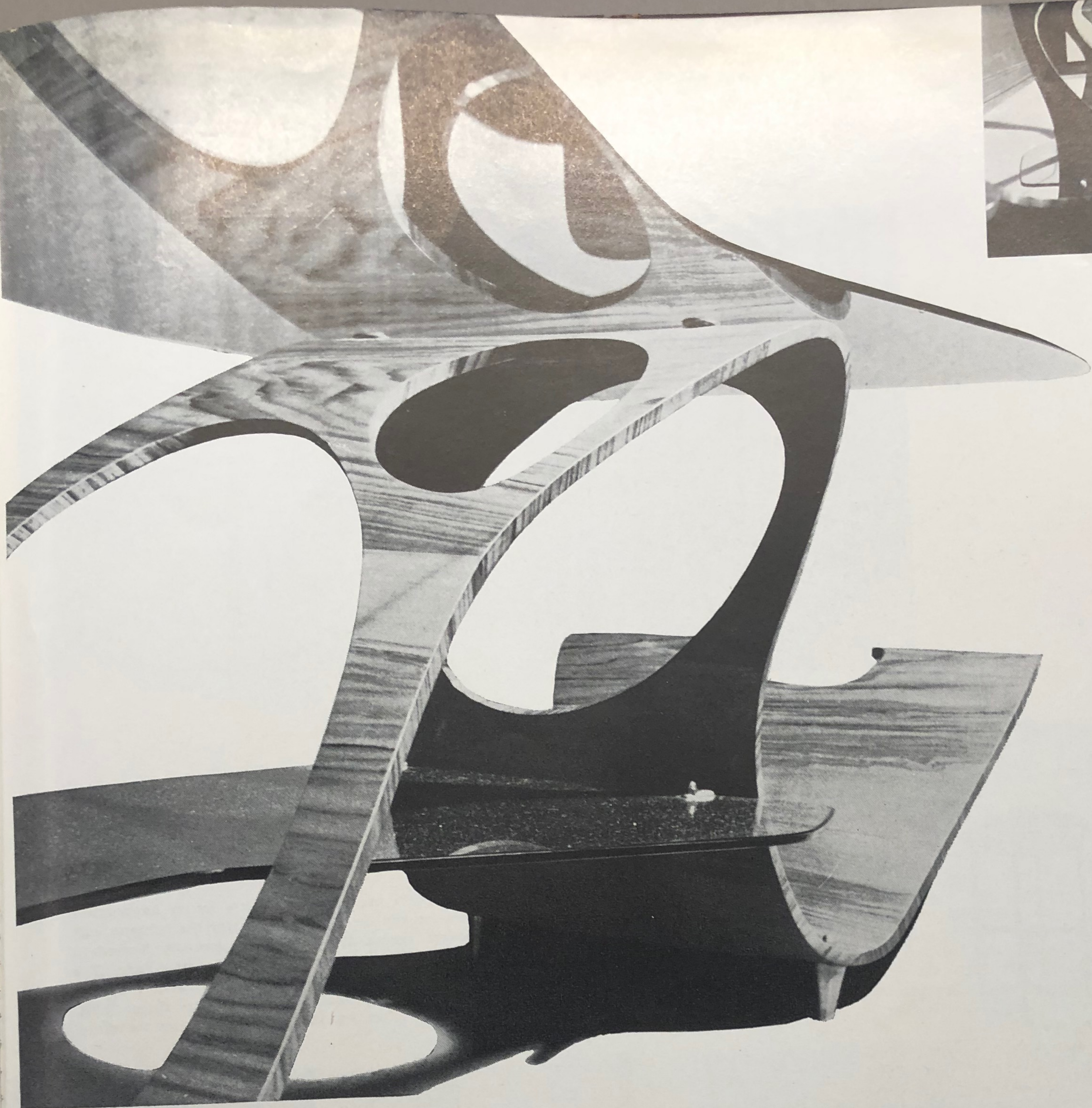


Bertha Schaefer's cocktail table, beautifully at home with the Italian designs, has an open, weightless base supporting an unpolished travertine top.

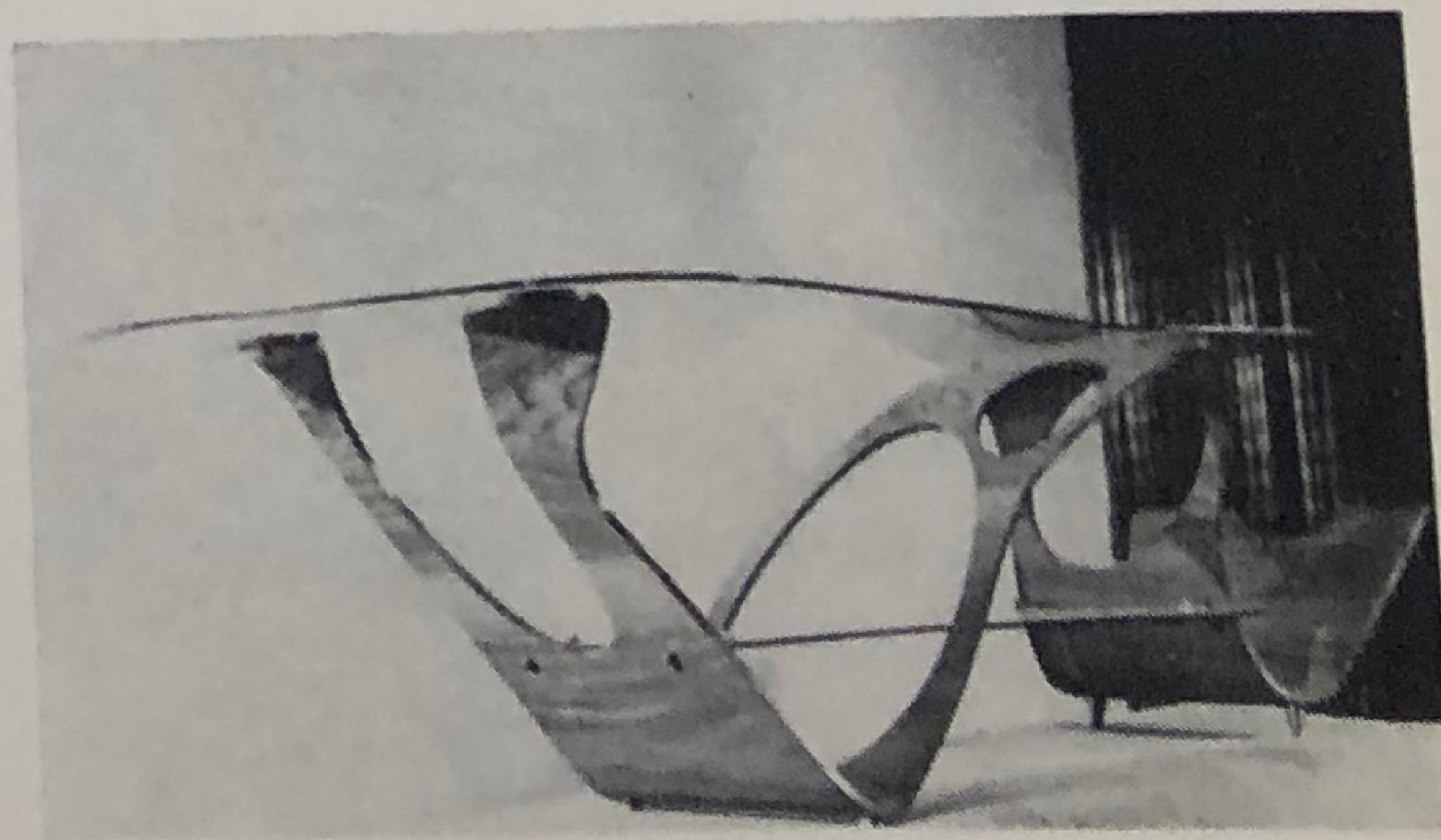
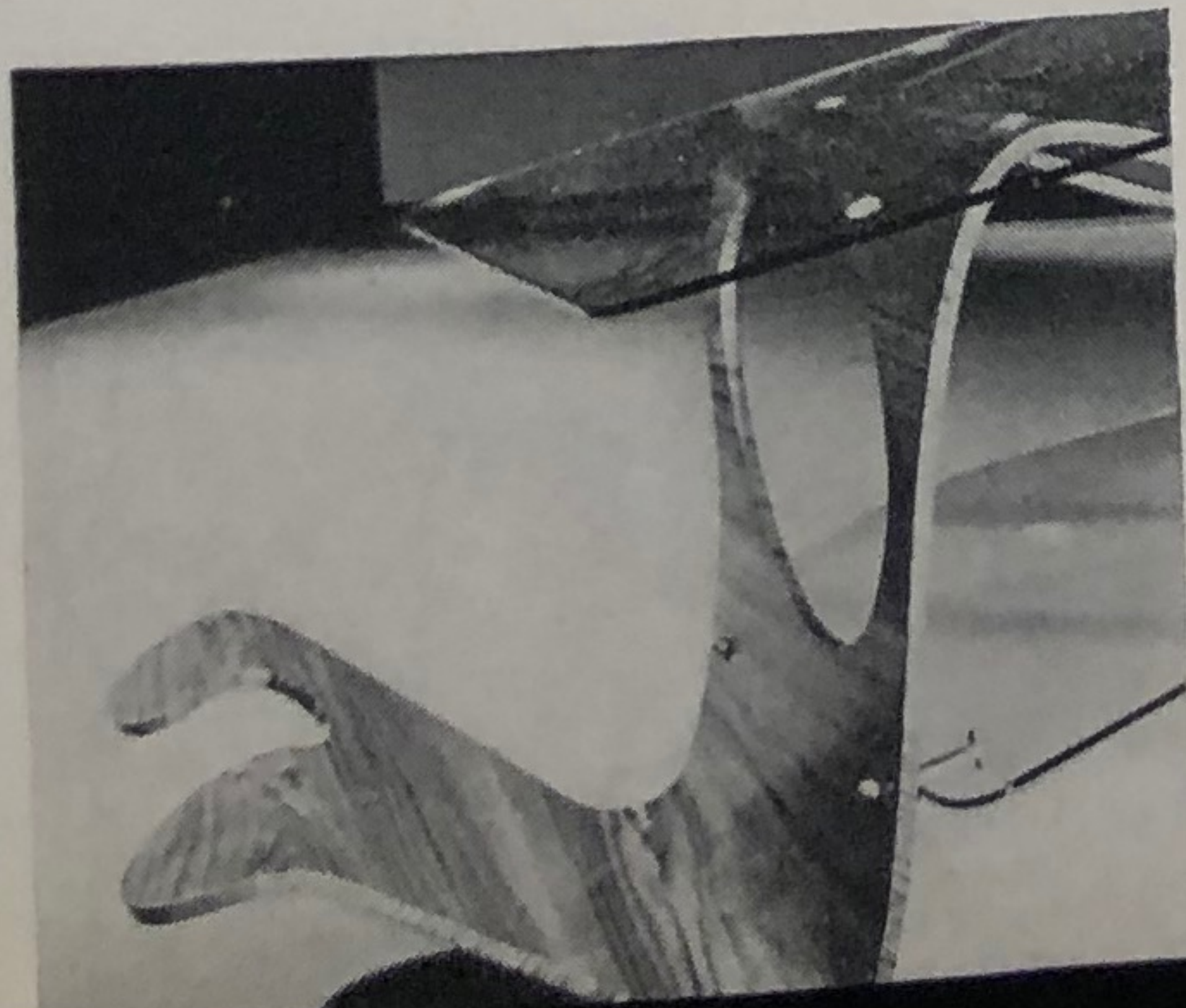


Ponti lets tension-stretched walnut tell its own construction story in this glass-topped cocktail table, whose cross-shuttle base is held together by a central brass joint. Tapered legs are brass-sheathed.





Carlo Mollino contributes two tables: the playful, glass-shelved, a-la-Moore-based whimsy illustrated here, and another, whose free-formed walnut base resembles the branching of an olive tree. Both give vent to this architect's belief that decoration should be "arabesque" with "everything permissible, as long as it is fantastic." This table, a perfect foil for crawling youngsters, bends walnut plywood into a support for two free-formed tempered glass shelves. The joinings are brushed brass.

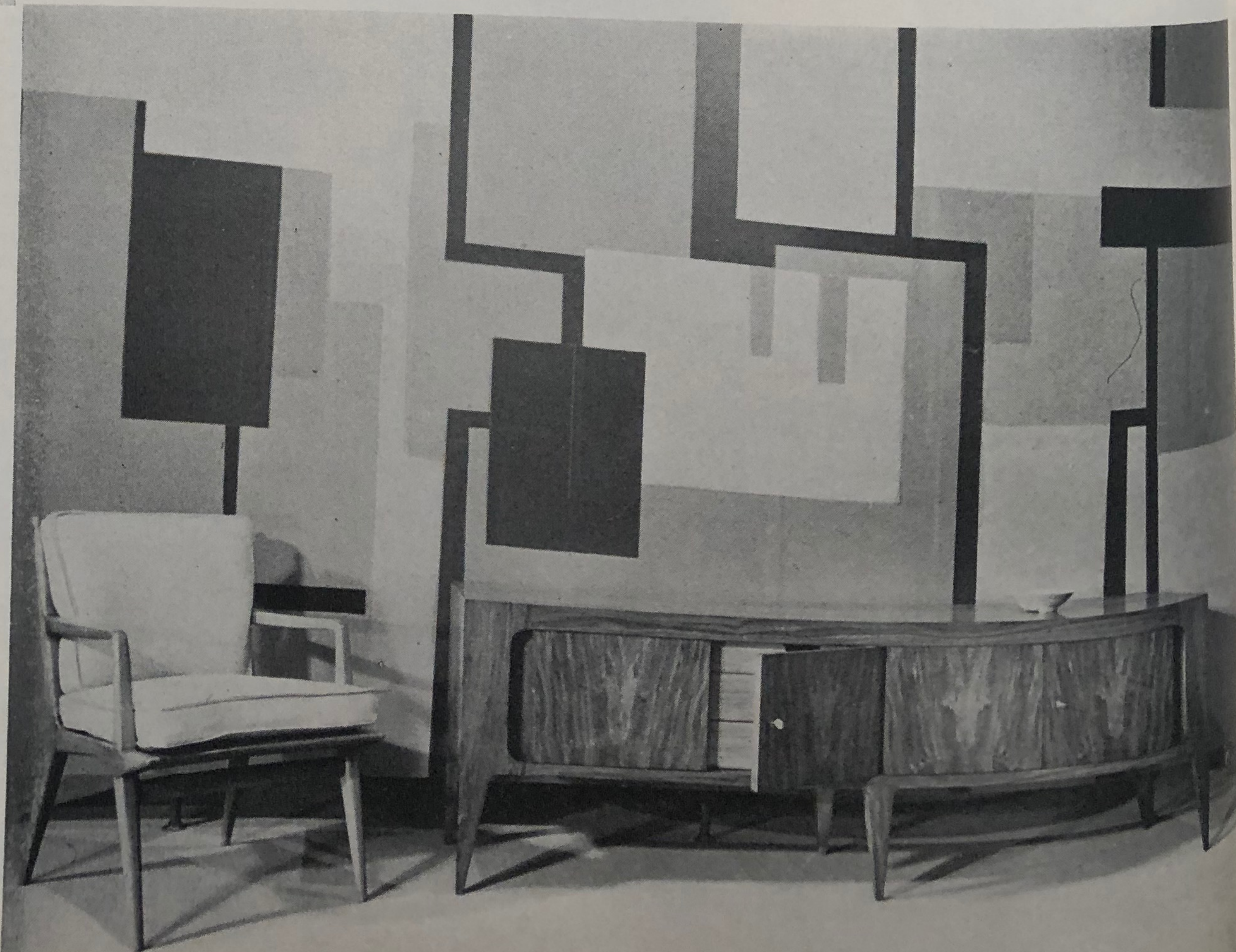


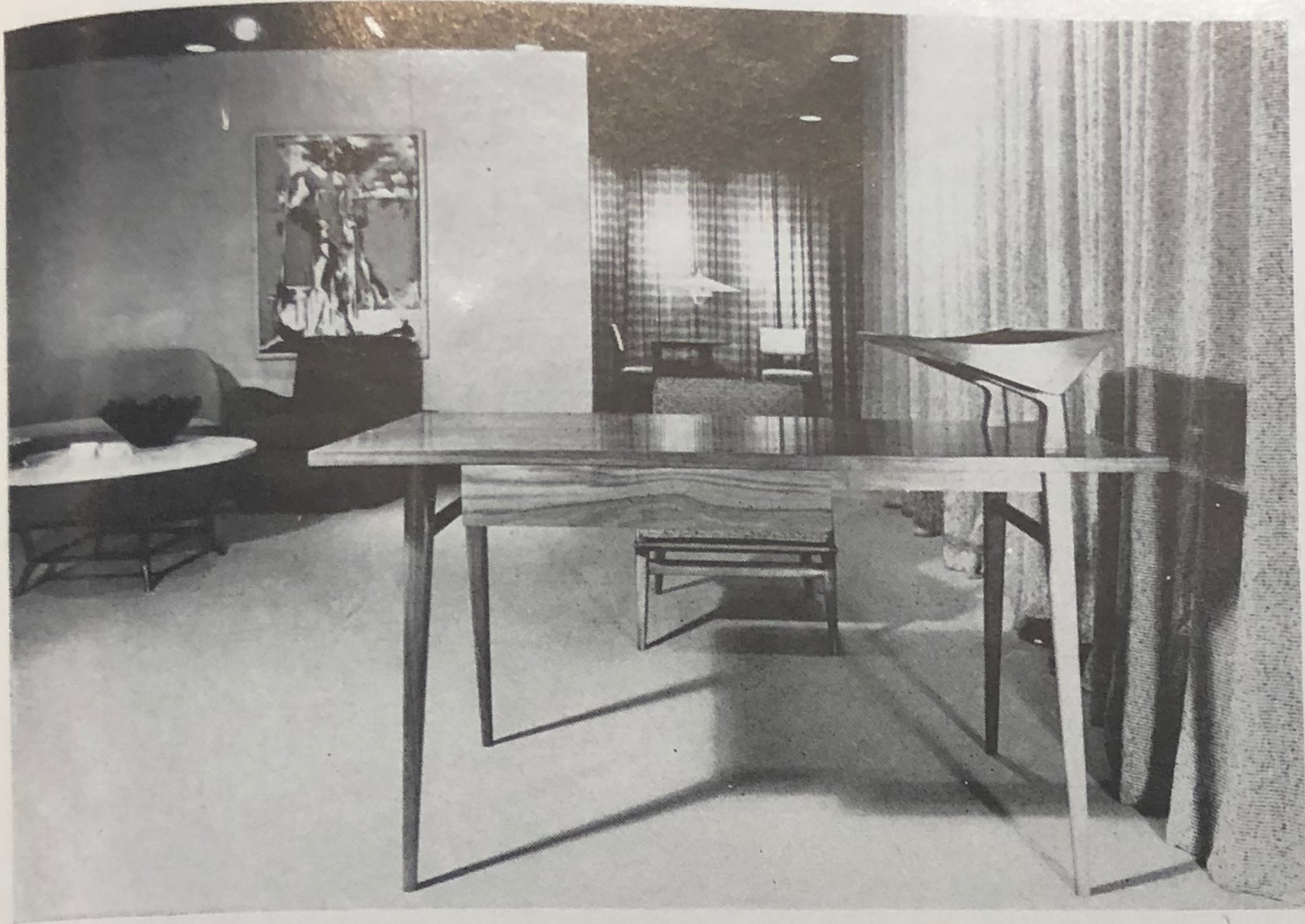


Left and right: more Bertha Schaefer designs: the ample walnut desk, fitted with one off-center drawer and raised book trough. At left, below, are this designer's delightful occasional tables, four drop-leaf circles of walnut which fit compactly into one chairside rectangle. The walnut-framed, rubber-cushioned lounge and occasional chairs, illustrated here and in the photo below, are by di Carli.



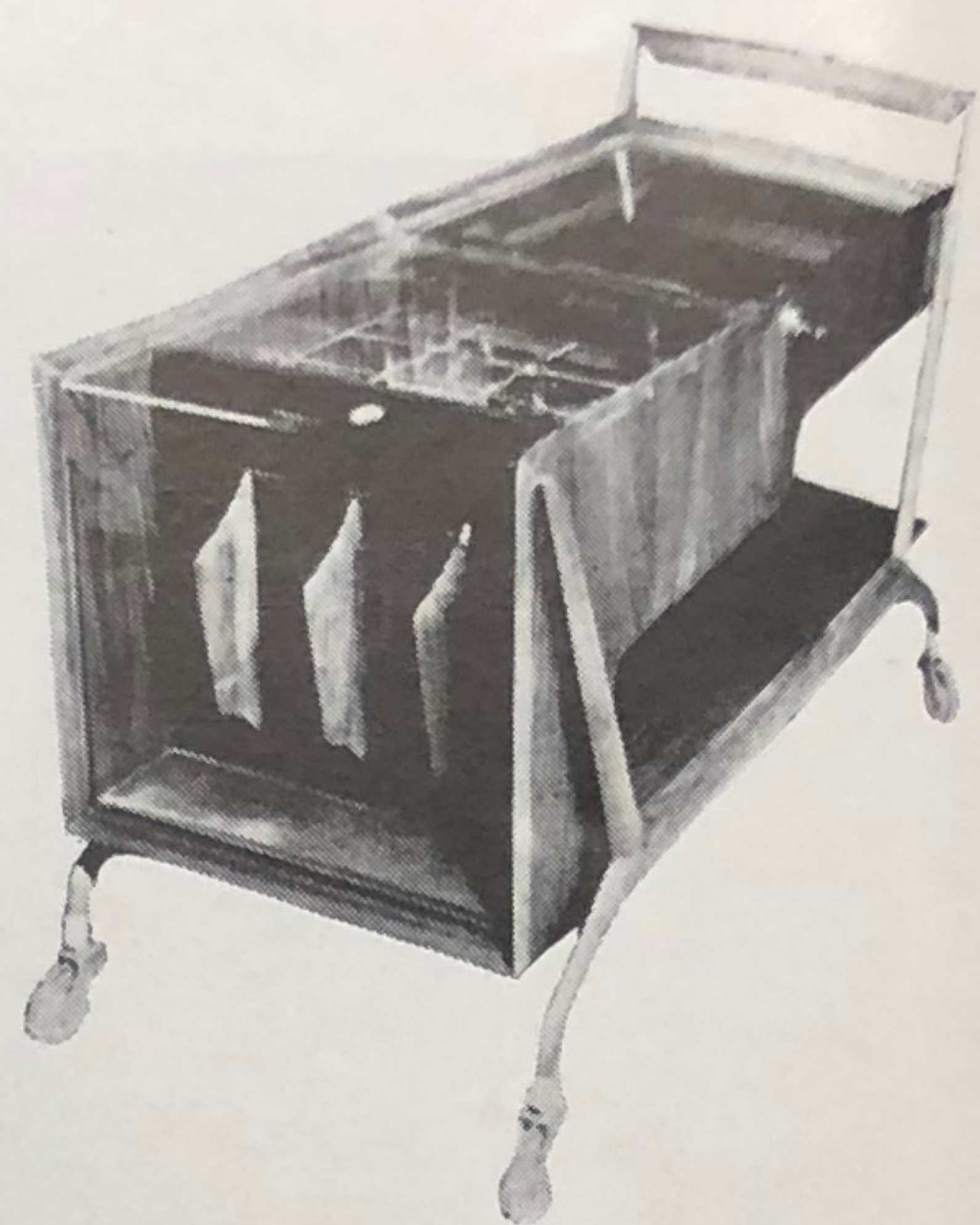
Gio Ponti's low cabinet, which serves handsomely alone or can double as a base for his hanging wall cabinet (pages 128, 129), rests serenely beneath a colorful sandpaper montage by Dorothy Farr. The key-fitted double doors swing out wide, thanks to special vertical spaces left open for them. They conceal shelves on one side, drawers on the other.





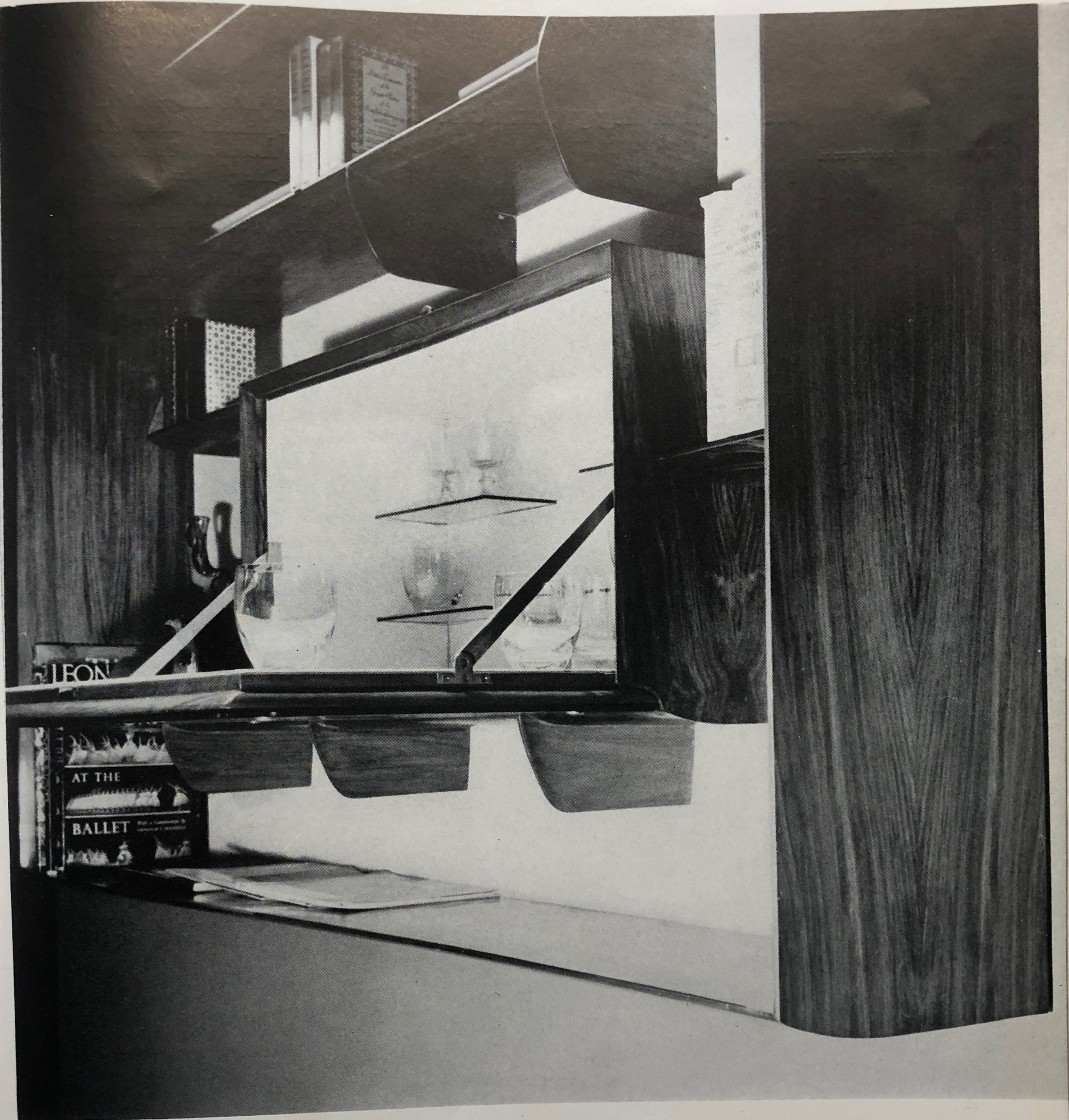
The drawers of Ponti's kneehole desk below seem to float suspended within the richly-grained walnut frame, while the back reveals a full-length bookshelf. Typist in bottom photo pulls out drawer by concealed finger holds. Girls are sitting on Ponti's elegant little side chair, upholstered in linen, but also available with cellophane plaiting (see photos, pages 120, 122). Note how back tips slightly rearward for additional support and comfort.





As magnificent a bar cart as we have seen: Parisi's party-fetcher on wheels. Sliding glass shelves on top lock in place to discourage between-time sipping, cover racks for a dozen glasses. Slim flanges at front of cabinet disclose space to line up four bottles; open shelf at bottom can carry plates, napkins, other necessary party paraphernalia.





Close-up of the Ponti hanging cabinet, shown on rear wall at left, emphasizes thin, knife-edges of the tapered shelves which jut out irregularly from the white enamel backing. Drop-door of bar is faced with a glowing plastic mural by Zahara Schatz.