

Living Ponti Style: Design to be Lived by Living Men

Natasha Lardera (May 22, 2013)



The Italian Cultural Institute of New York and Molteni&C present *Vivere alla Ponti*, an exhibition that features a collection of furniture and a series of letters, family photographs, and videos that exemplify the modernity of Gio Ponti, a key figure of 20th century design. On view until May 31.

On the balcony of my bedroom in Milan, growing up I was always admiring the back of a house... it just looked so beautiful on the outside and I wondered what the inside looked like. I even had the courage to walk close to that house, to see it from a different angle and up-close... dreaming of one day having a house as beautiful as that one.

Imagine my surprise when I walked into the Italian Cultural Institute a few days back to view the latest installation titled *Vivere alla Ponti* (Living Ponti style), when I recognized the house of my dreams in Via Randaccio (designed in 1925 by architect Gio Ponti with the collaboration of Emilio Lancia. This was the first house to be designed and lived in by Gio Ponti and seems almost to be a small monument to Palladio, I discovered.



The exhibition presents a collection of furniture and a series of letters, family photographs, and videos that exemplify the modernity of Gio Ponti, a key figure of 20th century design. On display a collection of furnishings designed by Gio Ponti between 1935 (chair for the first Montecatini Building) and the 1950s (bookcase, bureau, small table, picture frames and rug for Casa Ponti in via Dezza in Milan, 1956-57). The exhibition is enriched with a section devoted to Ponti's projects in the United States: Alitalia offices (New York, 1958), Time Life Building Auditorium (New York, 1959), Denver Art Museum, (Denver, 1971), MUSA, travelling exhibition of Italian furniture in the U.S.A. (1950-53), furniture for M. Singer&sons (1950s), furniture and walls organized for Altamira (1953).

The exhibition will be open to the public until Friday, May 31. At the opening the [Director of the ICL, Riccardo Vial](#) [2], together with the curators of the exhibition, Francesca Molteni, founder of Muse, and Franco Raggi, deputy-president of the Milan Ordine degli Architetti, [Massimo Vignelli, designer and founder of Vignelli Associates](#), [3] and Marianne Lamonaca, curator and deputy director of the Bard Graduate Center, spoke thoroughly of the artist who has inspired generations of designers (including Vignelli himself).

Who was Ponti? A decade after his death his daughter, Lisa Licitra Ponti, summarized his career as: "Sixty years of work, buildings in thirteen countries, lectures in twenty-four, twenty-five years of teaching, fifty years of editing, articles in every one of the five hundred and sixty issues of his magazines, two thousand five hundred letters dictated, two thousand letters drawn, designs for a hundred and twenty enterprises, one thousand architectural sketches." It was, as she concluded, "a great deal, and all from one man".

"Ponti called us to him," Francesca Molteni said at the opening. She and a few collaborators were visiting Ponti's nephew's house and they were inspired by a bookcase, by its simple, beautiful lines and its functionality.

So, once again, [Molteni&C.](#) [4] turned the spotlight on the masters of architecture and design with a project involving a re-make of furniture and furnishings. The project focuses on a collection of furnishings and pieces designed exclusively for private homes or for limited series, presented on the occasion of the 2012 Salone del Mobile. It is the result of in depth research, selection and an analysis of prototypes, made possible thanks to cooperation and an exclusive agreement signed with Ponti's heirs. The collection, put together under the direction of Cerri & Associati Studio, includes furnishings that Gio Ponti designed between 1935 (the aluminum chair for the first Palazzo Montecatini) and the 1950s (the multi-layer elm-clad bookcase, the iconic elm essence chest of drawers featuring different applied wooden handles, the occasional tea table with metal legs and a hand-painted grid, the armchair with a satin-nish brass frame, mirrored frames and the pony skin rug rug, all items present in Ponti's house on Via Dezza in Milan, 1956-57).

The exhibition, though, is not just a showcase of beautiful pieces of furniture. It represents a life style. "The Architect and the Artist interpret the character of inhabitants, of every inhabitant. Design houses to be lived by living men!" Ponti said in 1957. Thus the creators of the Vivere alla Ponti project wanted to reconstruct the historical and cultural setting where those furnishings were born, understanding their professional needs and technical solutions. They were placed in houses that were thought out for the people who lived in them, for the happiness of children, the comfort of office workers, and the efficiency of work. These are places where architecture, interiors, and furnishings harmoniously come together, designed to "Live alla Ponti."

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