

AGAINST VINTAGE

by Laura Traldi

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«This vintage thing is really getting out of your hands», tweeted Italian journalist @GiordanoGiusti yesterday. He referred to the misfortune of a Tyrolean walker who fell into a cliff after following the instructions of a guidebook he has purposefully selected to take with him, dated from 1985. It's a story that made me think of some Dutch friends of mine, proud owners of a VW campervan from the '70s, who had to swap their jewel for a contemporary, air-conditioned car when they arrived in Spain to avoid a death by heat.

They are stories that make you laugh (the unlucky walker did not get hurt, my mates had a lovely holiday after all) but also cry: they are, as a matter of fact, the actual proof that when it comes to selecting something that we like, our thought goes immediately to the past, as if only there we can possibly find what's best for us.

I often wonder, for instance, what **Achille Castiglioni** would say in front of yet another interior with his Arco lamp (or, most probably, a copy). Or how **Joe Colombo** feel, he who invented Star Wars-like objects before even Star Trek was invented, if he could see that the top of cool 40 years after his death are bars and restaurants that recall the times of his parents.



Wes Anderson's Bar Luce at the [Fondazione Prada di Milano](https://www.fondazioneprada.com/) has 1950s interiors

I have never met the great maestros who have marked the history of design. Yet I am convinced that if confronted with the vintage craze they would say, like I do: beautiful, yes, but how boring.



The Haymes paints catalogue proposes tones inspired by the past.

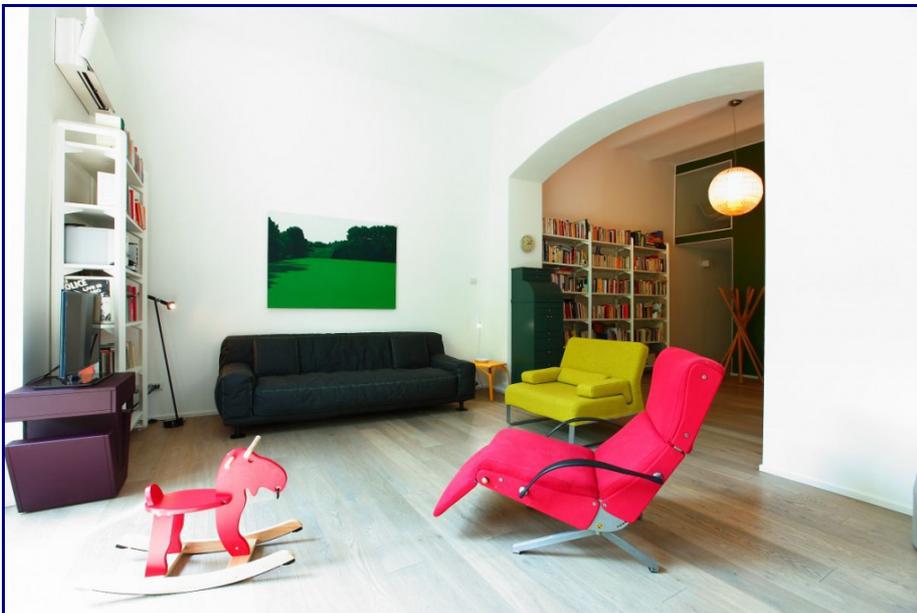
This is by no means a war declaration against historical designs. **Being unable to appreciate the classics would be the same as disdaining art masterpieces that have marked their time, culturally, socially and aesthetically:** like the *Demaiselles d'Avignon* by Picasso, the super essential sculptures by Dan Flavin, the *arte povera* by Pino Pascali or the light installations by Olafur Eliasson. But I am ever more often overcome by a desire when I browse through magazines and observe the beautiful interiors and designs that they propose: **to see what's new, to capture something that truly stems from our time while capturing its essence.** It is exactly the same hope that [I had expressed before the last Salone del Mobile](#) and that does not abandon me. It would be wonderful, for instance, to see the equivalent of the mini-kitchen di Joe Colombo or of the Blow armchair by Zanotta. Or, again, objects that can penetrate deeply in the collective imagination (like Memphis') and produce long lasting loves and hate reactions (we owe Jasper Morrison's essential style to the British designer's desire to confront himself with Sottsass' "wonderful world"). **Yet what we find today are remakes that of these fundamental objects and flavours that shaped the history of design evoke the forms, the looks, the surface. And that, precisely by doing so, deny their revolutionary and avant-gard role.** The choice, for most people who do not know much about design or who cannot afford the editions of the icons, is today between copies or pieces positioned as new and original but that recall the past.

The same goes also for interiors, ever more invaded by a "vintage" style that has now moved from classy magazines into mainstream. To such an extent that nowadays "fake" old furniture and décors can be found everywhere, from stores to e-shops.

«We live in a very conservative time in which we identify “timelessness” and quality with the past», told me [David Adjaye](#) whom I had the pleasure to interview a while back. «It's not good. **The past needs to be understood by a propulsive force is needed to move forward.** Not with experimentation for its own sake but **through considering architecture, interiors and design as means to create a new sociability**, of which form should be a mere manifestation».

In this “new” social role of design there is plenty of space of history. Actually, it is in times such as these very conservatory ones that it is key to study the past, at least to figure out how much of what surrounds us and is positioned as “new” has no invention and how little revolutionary spirit is in someone who features a piece made in the 1970s in an interior today.

On the contrary, it would be wonderful to see vintage furniture (or re-editions of it) used **in a contemporary spirit, in spaces that are not inward looking or relying on nostalgia.**



The Milanese home of Giulio Iacchetti and Silvia Cortese, photo Frank Vaughan

There are good examples of this happy mix: like **the Milanese home of [Giulio Iacchetti and Silvia Cortese](#)**, where period furniture by Aldo Rossi are a perfect match for a space conceived to enhance a social lifestyle that is very different from the one in which the pieces were originated. Or a home, designed by [Buratti Battiston Architetti](#) (I recently wrote about it on La Repubblica), **full of vintage pieces inserted in a fluid architecture that underlines the dimensions of the environments and that creates light effects similar to James Turrell's works of art. No-one, basically, despite the presence of pieces by Gerrit Rietveld or Charlotte Perriand, would ever consider these interiors as “vintage”**: the period furniture actually adds a special touch in a purely contemporary atmosphere.



A home designed by Buratti Architetti

«There is a common idea that all that is old is also automatically beautiful», told me Gabriele Buratti. **«It's a fashion that stems from insecurity.** People and companies do not want to dare, they prefer to be on the safe side. After all, it is true that the Maralunga sofa by Magistretti for Cassina is, to-date, a best-seller. And it is, indeed, a wonderful piece of work. It is up to architects and interior designers to remember, though, that what made the design icons special - and the reason why they are still so much appreciated today - was the hunger for something new that characterised the time in which they were conceived. When they were sold, their innovative content was a suitable answer to the clients' thirst for contemporary atmospheres. Today's customers, on the contrary, want vintage ones. The real problem for today's design culture is not the presence of vintage pieces or their re-editions the use that we make of them: **to create nostalgic atmospheres that by default reject anything new in them.** I personally think it is sad when all that people who live today can produce, in terms of design, are objects inspired by the past. It's like they have given up. **And I think it is a mistake when magazine promote objects conceived today but boosting a vintage look: in the long term, this is negative for the industry and also for the culture of design. In the past, design magazine played a major role in defining the Italian design scene as we got to know it. I do not see this happening today».** And that, possibly, is something to be truly nostalgic about.