

## 15 things

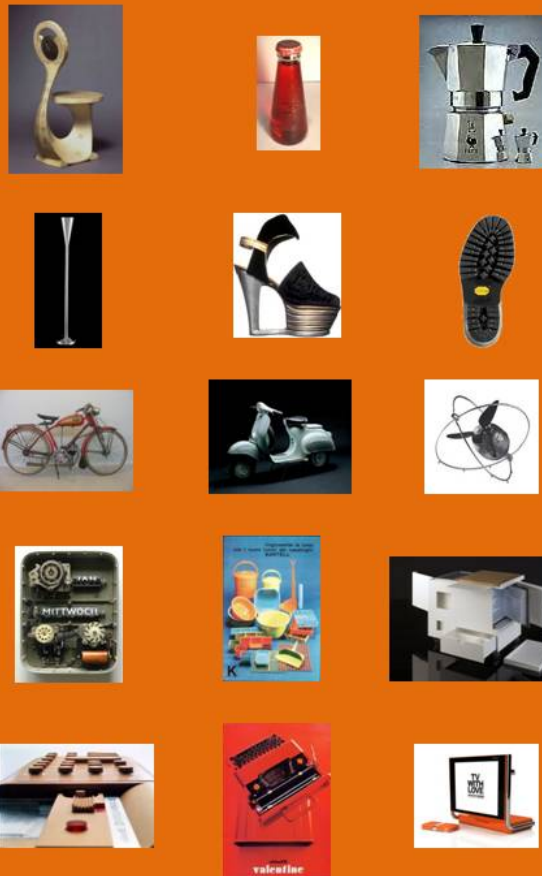
(a secret history  
of Italian design)

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**DESCRIPTION:** *Fifteen Things* explores intertwinings between design, science, technology, society, art, and culture by means of the “excavation” of fifteen objects from different periods in the history of modern Italian design, from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Combining micro- and macro-perspectives, it approaches design history from a broad aesthetic, historical, and socio-anthropological standpoint. The seminar combines readings from contemporary Thing Theory, material culture studies, and design history, with materials from literature, popular culture, and media. It is built around a chronologically ordered sequence of case studies of exemplary *things*: artifacts designed for purposes of sitting, drinking, lighting, walking, moving about, cooling down, cooking and cleaning, writing and calculating, or media viewing. The sequence begins with Carlo Bugatti’s Liberty style masterpiece, the *Cobra chair*, first exhibited at the Turin 1902 International Decorative Arts Exhibition. It concludes with Valerio Cometti’s 2006 *Alpha lcd tv* design, an attempt to reinvigorate the now moribund Brionvega brand, once associated with breakthrough designs by the likes of Marco Zanuso and Mario Bellini.

Each session of the seminar will be devoted to the thick description, analysis, and study of an individual case examined with respect to the broader family of objects to which it belongs (whether Italian or non-Italian), to the historical context in which it was produced, and to the social settings into which it inserted itself. Emphasis will be placed on the interaction between design thinking, the genealogical frameworks within which a given object is cast, and the century-long history of each class of objects. Though chronologically ordered, each session will be concerned with 20<sup>th</sup> century design history as a whole.

The seminar's aims are: to prompt reflection on the complexity of design thinking and processes through the in-depth study of historical examples; to promote insights into how objects shape and are shaped by everyday life; to sift out what is global vs. distinctively Italian about the case histories examined; and to think critically about the object lessons provided by fifteen iconic designs from the history of Italian design with respect to contemporary practices in architecture and design.

**READINGS:** the bulk of the course readings will be assigned on a week-by-week basis and either distributed electronically or found on the reserve shelves of the Loeb Library. Three books have been ordered for the course and are available at the Harvard Coop:

--Harvey Molotch, *Where Stuff Comes From*, NYC and London: Routledge, 2003 [a broadly framed, sociological study of the genesis and place of everyday things]

--Giampiero Bosoni, *Italian Design*, NYC and Milan: MOMA / 5 continents, 2008 [a thumbnail sketch of Italian design history with a decade-by-decade breakdown of major categories and currents]

--Pier Paride Vidar, ed., *On my Vespa, Italy on the Move*, Milan: Charto, 2006 [our principal sourcebook for week 7 of the seminar devoted to scooter design]

All course readings are in English.

**SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS:** aside from regular attendance, careful preparation of course materials, and active participation in seminar discussion, there are two requirements of all enrolled students, one oral and one a final research project.

--all enrolled students are expected to make a 15 minute in-class *presentation* that provides a detailed interpretation of a specific design artifact related to the iconic object under consideration during a given week of the seminar. These presentations should be tightly focused on decoding a single artifact, so they need not presume a great deal of attention to context or background information.

--all enrolled students are expected to set to work early in the semester on a design project that either proposes a **contemporary reinterpretation** (i.e. an updating) of one of the iconic *15 things* around which the seminar is built or creates a **fictional past object** related to one of these *15 things*. Wedding historical research and analysis to design thinking and practice, this assignment asks you to make an argument through and around a design that reflects critically upon the materials examined in the course of the semester. The project should ideally consist in:

- a set of presentation drawings or models of the object [format and materials of your choice];
- a narrative that positions it with respect to the category of objects to which it belongs; and
- a set of materials—an imaginary press campaign or set of advertisements, a set of hypothetical scenarios, for example—that imagine how this product could have been or might be communicated, and/or the actual social uses to which it could be put.

Student projects from the seminar will serve as the basis for a small exhibition to be held in the Special Collections room of the Loeb library in early 2010.

**GRADING:** final grades for the seminar will be calculated on the following basis: class preparation and participation (40%); final seminar paper and class presentation (60%).

## OVERALL SEMINAR PLAN

- 1) Tuesday, Sept. 8 – **INTRODUCTION**
- 2) Tuesday, Sept. 15 – **THING THEORY** = Harvey Molotch, *Where Stuff Comes From* (2003) and other readings
- 3) Tuesday, Sept. 22 -- **SITTING** = Carlo Bugatti, *Cobra chair* (1902)
- 4) Tuesday, Sept. 29 – **DRINKING** = Fortunato Depero, *Campari Soda bottle* (1932); Alfonso Bialetti, *Moka express stovetop coffee maker* (1933)
- 5) Tuesday, Oct. 6 – **LIGHTING** = Pietro Chiesa, *Luminator* (1933)
- 6) Tuesday, Oct. 13 – **STANDING** = Vitale Bramani, “*Carrarmato*” *Vibram sole* (1937); Salvatore Ferragamo, autarchic women’s sandal (1938)
- 7) Tuesday, Oct. 20 – **MOVING** = Corrado d’Ascanio, *Vespa V98 Farobasso* (1946); Adriano and Marcello Ducati, *SATA/Ducati Cucciolo* (1950)
- 8) Tuesday, Oct. 27 – **COOLING** = Ezio Pirali, *Zerowatt VE 505 Electric fan* (1953)
- 9) Tuesday, Nov. 3 – **KEEPING TIME** = Gino Valle, *teleindicatori numerici* (1960)
- 10) Tuesday, Nov. 10 – **COOKING & WASHING** = Gino Colombini, *Kartell Scolapiatti a muro smontabile* (1960); Joe Colombo, *Boffi mini-kitchen* (1964)
- 11) Tuesday, Nov. 17 – **WRITING :: CALCULATING** = Ettore Sottsass, *Olivetti Valentine typewriter* (1969); Mario Bellini, *Olivetti Divisumma 18* (1972)
- 12) Tuesday, Nov. 24 – **VIEWING** = Valerio Cometti, *Brionvega Alpha lcd tv* (2006)
- 13) To be scheduled between Dec. 8 and Dec. 15 – final wrap-up session devoted to the present of Italian design plus presentation and crits of completed student projects

## DETAILED WEEK-BY-WEEK BREAKDOWN (a work in progress)

**INTRODUCTION**      **readings:** Harvey Molotch, *Where Stuff Comes From*; Giampiero Bosoni, “What is Italian Design?” pp. 11-48 in *Italian Design*; Umberto Eco, “Phenomena of this sort must also be included” [pdf]

**SITTING**              **1902 – Carlo Bugatti, *Cobra chair*, Bugatti workshop**

**descendants:** ufficio tecnico, *sgabello elastico 50c*, Columbus (1933); Giuseppe Terragni, *Sant’Elia chair* (1936); Bruno Munari, *Chair for Brief Visits* (1945); Giò Ponti, *Superleggera* (1951); BBPR, *sedia Electra*, Arflex (1954); Achille Castiglioni, *Mezzadro seat*, Zanotta (1957); Joe Colombo, *modello 4860*, Kartell (1968); Vico

Magistretti, *Selene*, Artemide (1969); Archizoom, *poltrona Mies*, Poltronova (1969); Mario Bellini, *Cab armchair* and *side chair*, Cassina (1976)

**related objects:** other Bugatti chairs and furniture (circa 1900)

**comparison cases:** ufficio tecnico, *Poltrona 904*, Poltrona Frau (1930); Marco Zanuso, *poltrona Lady*, Arflex (1951); Gaetano Pesce, *Up 1 chair*, C&B Italia (1969)

**readings:** Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism* (1909) [www]; Galen Cranz, *The Chair* (NY/London: Norton, 1998), pp. 23-89 [reserve]; Henry H. Hawley ed., *Bugatti* (Cleveland Museum of Art and University of Washington Press: Seattle, 1999), pp. 1-37, 119-127; David Rifkind, *Furnishing the Fascist interior: Giuseppe Terragni, Mario Radice and the Casa del Fascio* [pdf]

**some links:** [www.chairblog.eu/category/chair-history/](http://www.chairblog.eu/category/chair-history/);  
<http://www.1902.info/engine/info.do?oid=11&>; Bruno Munari lecture @ IUAV (1992) on YouTube; [www.arflex.it](http://www.arflex.it)

## DRINKING

**1932 – Fortunato Depero, *Campari Soda bottle*, Campari [a]**

**1933 – Alfonso Bialetti, *Moka express*, Bialetti Industrie [b]**

**predecessors:** [a] *Codd-necked bottle* (1872); *Crown Cork Bottle Seal* (1892); *Coca-Cola contour bottle* (1916); other bottle designs for soda and alcoholic beverages; [b] *caffettiera napoletana* (2<sup>nd</sup> half 19<sup>th</sup> cent.); Pier Teresio Arduino, *macchina espresso Extra*, Victoria Arduino (1910)

**descendants:** [a] too many to enumerate: select your own; [b] copycat Moka Express models (Bonjour café, Express, etc.)

**comparison cases:** [a] the Perrier bottle (1906); the Absolut bottle (1980s); [b] octagonal 1930s tea and coffee services; Aldo Rossi, *La conica*, Alessi (1980-1983); Richard Sapper, *9090 coffee maker*, Alessi (1982); Aldo Rossi, *La cupola*, Alessi (1988)

**readings:** Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise* [reserve], 15-84; H.G. Wells, *The Great Accelerator*, available at <http://www.readprint.com/work-1495/The-New-Accelerator-H-G-Wells>; Fortunato Depero and Giacomo Balla, *The Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*, available at [http://artsaha.org/?page\\_id=80](http://artsaha.org/?page_id=80); Schnapp, *The Romance of Caffeine and Aluminum* [pdf]; excerpts from Iain Gately, *Drink: A cultural history of alcohol* / New York : Gotham Books, 2008.

**some links:** <http://www.ineedcoffee.com/>;  
[http://inventors.about.com/od/foodrelatedinventions/a/soft\\_drinks.htm](http://inventors.about.com/od/foodrelatedinventions/a/soft_drinks.htm);  
[http://www.camparigroup.com/it/press\\_media/history\\_communication/campari\\_html.jsp](http://www.camparigroup.com/it/press_media/history_communication/campari_html.jsp); [www.historicbottles.com/sodamineral.htm](http://www.historicbottles.com/sodamineral.htm)

## LIGHTING

### 1933 – Pietro Chiesa, *Luminator* (1933), Fontana Arte

**predecessors:** Luciano Baldessari, *Lampada Luminator*, Luceplan (1929); anon., *Luminator italiano* (1931-1933)

**descendants:** Gino Sarfatti, *Model 1063 floor lamp*, Arteluce (1954); Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, *Luminator floor lamp*, Gilardi & Barzaghi (1955); Angelo Lelli, *Luminator*, Arredoluce (c1960); Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, *Toio floor lamp*, Flos (1962); Ettore Sottsass, *lampada Callimaco*, Artemide (1981)

**related objects:** Pietro Chiesa, *Fontana table* (1932)

**comparison cases:** Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, *Arco floor lamp*, Flos (1962); Bruno Munari, *Falkland hanging lamp*, Danese (1964); Achille Castiglioni and Pio Manzù, *Parentesi lamp*, Flos (1970); Giorgio de Chirico, Persol, *Occhiali da sole 649* (1938)

**links:** [www.artemide.com](http://www.artemide.com); [www.flos.com](http://www.flos.com); [www.luceplan.com](http://www.luceplan.com); <http://www.fontanaarte.it/index2.php?l=eng>;

**readings:** Alberto Bassi, *Italian Lighting Design 1945-2000*, (Milan: Electa, 2004), pp. 12-39; Tim Benton, "Italian Architecture and Design," (Ch. 19, pp. 219-229) in Charlotte and Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood, eds. *Art Deco 1910-1939*, (London: The Victoria and Albert Museum, 2003); Maristella Casciato, "The 'Casa all'Italiana' and the Idea of Modern Dwelling in Fascist Italy," *Journal of Architecture* 5.4 (Dec. 2000): 335-353

**recommended readings:** Maureen Dillon, *A Social History of Domestic Lighting* (London: The National Trust, 2002), pp. 161-199; Piero Castiglioni, Chiara Baldacci, and Giuseppe Biondo, *Lux: Italia 1930-1990. The Architecture of Lighting*, (Milan: Berenice, c. 1991).

**additional bibliography:** Laura Falconi, *Fontana Arte: A Transparent History*, (Milan: Skira Editore, 1998); Laura Falconi, *Gio Ponti: Interni, Oggetti, Disegni 1920-1976*, (Milan: Electa, 2004); Vittorio Gregotti, *Il disegno del prodotto industriale. Italia 1860-1980*, (Milan: Edizioni Electa, 2nd ed., 1986); Marianne Lamonaca, "A 'Return to Order': Issues of the Classical and the Vernacular in Italian Inter-War Design," in Wendy Kaplan, ed., *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885-1945*, (Miami Beach: Wolfsonian in association with Thames and Hudson, 1995), 195-221; Giò Ponti, "L'opera di Pietro Chiesa," *Domus* 234, no. 3 (1949): 32-49.

## STANDING

1937 – Vitale Bramani, "*Carrarmato*" *Vibram sole* [a]

1938 – Salvatore Ferragamo, *autarchic women's sandal* [b]

**related objects:** Converse sneakers (1909); Keds sneakers (1917); Superga *scarpa di tela 2750* sneaker (1925); first Addidas tennis shoe (1931)

**comparison cases:** Ambrosiano & Giancarlo Zanatta, *Doposci moon boots* (1970)

**links:** www: [www.vibram.com](http://www.vibram.com); [www.salvatoreferragamo.it](http://www.salvatoreferragamo.it);  
<http://www.sneakerhead.com/sneaker-history-p1.html>;

**reading:** *Leaders of Fashion: Salvatore Ferragamo (1898-1960)*, (Florence: Centro Di, 1985), pp. 22-28, 36-42 plus skim catalogue entries pp. 86-162 [reserve]; Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil, *A Long Walk* (pp. 2-28), Stefania Ricci, *Made in Italy* (pp. 306-324), Alison Gill, *Limousines for the Feet* (pp. 372-385) all in Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil, eds., *Shoes: A history from sandals to sneakers*, (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2006) [reserve].

**additional bibliography:** Stefania Ricci, *Made in Italy: Ferragamo and twentieth-century fashion*.

## MOVING

**1946 – Corrado d’Ascanio, Vespa V98 Farobasso, Piaggio**

**1950 –Adriano and Marcello Ducati, SATA/Ducati Cucciolo, Ducati**

**predecessors:** Alberto Gilardi, *motore ausiliario Mosquito*, Garelli (1946); Aldo Farinelli, *motore ausiliario SAITA* (1946)

**descendants:** ufficio tecnico, *MP3 series*, Piaggio (2006)

**comparison cases:** Umberto Dei, *Imperiale men’s bicycle*, Atala (1930); Ermenegildo Preti, *Auto Isetta*, Iso (1953); ufficio tecnico Fiat, *500*, Fiat (1957); Giorgetto Giugaro, *Panda*, Fiat (1979); Vittorio Casini, *ciclomotore Ciao*, Piaggio (1967); Mario Bellini, *Kar-a-sutra concept car* (1972)

**related cases:** Corrado d’Ascanio, *Motofurgone Ape* (1947), Piaggio

**links:** [www.umbertodei.it](http://www.umbertodei.it); [www.it.piaggio.com](http://www.it.piaggio.com)

**readings:** Pier Paride Vidar, ed., *On my Vespa, Italy on the Move*, (Milan: Charto, 2006); extracts from Jeffrey Schnapp, *Speed Limits*, (Skira: Milan, 2009)

## COOLING

**1953 – Ezio Pirelli, Zerowatt VE 505 Electric fan (1953)**

**predecessors:** early Edison, Western Electric, GE, and Victor *table fans* (late 19<sup>th</sup> cent.; first decade 20<sup>th</sup>); Peter Behrens, *AEG table fan* (1908); *Marelli table fans* (1920s and 1930s); Sutton Corporation *Vornado 12D1* (early 1940s)

**descendant:** Marco Zanuso, *Ariante* (1975)

**readings:** selections from Francesco Tabucco, ed. *Wind Machines // Macchine del vento: Evoluzione, storia, significato del ventilatore da tavolo*, (Milan:

Grafiche Moretti, 2004) [pdf]; Gail Cooper, *Air-conditioning America*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1998). pp. 51-79 [reserve].

## KEEPING TIME

**1960 – Gino Valle, *teleindicatori numerici*, Solari**

**related objects:** Gino Valle, *Cifra 3 clock*, Solari (1965)

**comparison cases:** ufficio tecnico, *orologio Radiomir*, Officine Panerai (1938); Enzo Mari, *Timor perpetual calendar*, Danese (1966); ufficio tecnico, *orologio tubogas*, Bulgari (1975)

**readings:** Robert Levine, *A Geography of Time*, (NY: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 51-80 and 129-152; Paul Starkey, "Time and Work," in Blyton, Hassard, Hill, Starkey, *Time, Work and Organization*, (London/NY: Routledge, 1989), pp. 35-56 [reserve Loeb]; João do Rio, *The Rush to Finish Up*, in Schnapp, *Speed Limits*, (Milan: Skira, 2009), pp 247-250.

**links:** <http://www.solari.it/>; <http://www.solari.it/ita/soluzioni/orologi.php>

**COOKING :: WASHING 1960 – Gino Colombini, *scolapiatti a muro smontabile KS 1171/2*, Kartell [a]  
1964 – Joe Colombo, *Carellone mini-kitchen*, Boffi [b]**

**predecessors:** [a] Giulio Castelli, *portasci brevetto Pirelli*, Kartell (1952); [b] R. Buckminster Fuller, kitchen and bathroom designs for dymaxion house [1945]; R. Buckminster Fuller, *Autonomous living units* [1949]; Alberto Rosselli, *Unità bagno in plastica*, Montecatini (1957)

**descendants:** [a] Marco Zanuso, *cucina E5*, Elam-Tisettanta (1971); ufficio tecnico, *piano cottura rialzabile* (1990), Alpes; [b] Giulio Iacchetti & Matteo Ragni, *Moscardino (Spork)*, Pandora Design (2000); Ernesto Meda, *Solaris kitchen*, Ernestomeda (2008)

**related objects:** [a] Giovanni Guzzini, Raimondo Guzzini e Piero Cruciani, *contenitori in plastica bicolore*, Fratelli Guzzini (1954); Roberto Menghi, *contenitori per liquidi*, Pirelli (1958); Joe Colombo, *carello portaoggetti Boby*, Bieffeplast (1970) [b] Joe Colombo, *Living Center*, Rosenthal (1970)

**comparison cases:** Earl Tupper, *Tupperware* (1939)

**links:** [www.kartell.it/](http://www.kartell.it/); [www.fratelliguzzini.com/](http://www.fratelliguzzini.com/); <http://www.ernestomeda.com/>;

**readings:** have a look at Christine Frederick, *Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home*, (Chicago: American School of Home Economics, 1920) [available on Google Books]; Ignazia Favata, *Joe Colombo and the Italian Design of the Sixties*, (Cambridge: MIT, 1988), pp. 11-22, 110-117 [Loeb reserve]; selections from Klaus Spechtenhauser, *The Kitchen – Life World, Usage, Perspectives*, (Basel, Boston, Berlin: ETH / Birkhauser, 2006), pp. 45-71 [Loeb reserve]; Augusto Morello & Anna Castelli Ferreri, *Plastic and Design*, (Milan:



Arcadia, 1988), pp. 41-58 plus have a quick look/read through the projects described in pp. 65-113 [Loeb reserve].

consult pamphlets on reserve at Loeb: Good Housekeeping Institute, *How to plan a modern kitchen*; The Gas Industry and Jane B. Drew, *Kitchen Planning: A Brochure of New Plans and Suggestions for Labour-Saving Kitchens*; Agricultural Experiment Station, Iowa State College, *Make your kitchen modern*

**WRITING :: +/-/X/ ing** 1969 – Ettore Sottsass, *Valentine typewriter, Olivetti* [a]

1973 – Mario Bellini, *Divisumma 18, Olivetti* [b]

**predecessors:** [a] Camillo Olivetti e uff. Tecnico, M1 typewriter, Olivetti (1911); Aldo Magnelli, *MP1*, Olivetti (1932); Marcello Nizzoli, *Lexicon 80*, Olivetti (1948); Marcello Nizzoli, *Lettera 22 portable typewriter* (1950); [b] Marcello Nizzoli, *Elettrosomma*, Olivetti (1946); Marcello Nizzoli, *Divisumma 24*, Olivetti (1956); Marcello Nizzoli, *Quanta*, Olivetti (1959); Ettore Sottsass, *Logos 27*, Olivetti (1965)

**descendants:** [a] Ettore Sottsass, *Lettera 36*, Olivetti (1970); Mario Bellini, *Lettera 25*, Olivetti (1974); Mario Bellini, *Lettera 35*, Olivetti (1974); Mario Bellini, *Lexicon 82*, Olivetti (1975); Mario Bellini, *ETP 55 portable typewriter*, Olivetti (1985) [b] Mario Bellini, *Logos 42*, Olivetti (1977); Mario Bellini, *Logos 3*, Olivetti (1978); Mario Bellini, *Logos 7*, Olivetti (1978); Mario Bellini, *Logos 9*, Olivetti (1980); Mario Bellini, *Logos 80*, Olivetti (1980)

**related objects:** [b] Mario Bellini, *Programma 101*, Olivetti (1965); Mario Bellini, *TCV 250 video display terminal*, Olivetti (1966); Mario Bellini, *Logos 50-60*, Olivetti (1973); Mario Bellini, *Divisumma 28*, Olivetti (1973)

**readings:** Cara McCarthy, *Mario Bellini designer*, (New York: MOMA, 1987); case studies from Sibylle Kicherer, *Olivetti – A Study of the Corporate Management of Design*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), pp. 125-162.

**links:** [www.computermuseum.it](http://www.computermuseum.it)

**VIEWING**

2007 -- Valerio Cometti, *Brion Vega Alpha design lcd tv, SuperFluo*

**predecessors:** Dario Montagni, Sergio Berizzi, Cesare Butté, *Phonola tv modello 1718*, Phonola (1956); Marco Zanuso, Richard Sapper, *Doney tv*, Brionvega (1962); Marco Zanuso, Richard Sapper, *Algol 11*, Brionvega (1964); Marco Zanuso, Richard Sapper, *Black 201*, Brionvega (1969); Mario Bellini, *Alta Fedeltà* (1979); Mario Bellini, *Cuboglass*, Brionvega (1992)

**readings:** selected excerpts from Anne Friedberg's *The Virtual Window*, (London: MIT Press, 2006); other readings [tbd]

**links:** <http://www.tvhistory.tv/>; <http://www.earlytelevision.org/>;  
<http://www.visual-media.be/television.html>; <http://www.movingimage.us>;



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Nally Bellati, *New Italian design*. New York: Rizzoli, 1990.

Nina Börnsen-Holtmann, *Italian design*. Cologne: Taschen, 1994.

Andrea Branzi, *The hot house: Italian new wave design*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984.

Enzo Fratelli, *Il disegno industriale italiano, 1928-1981*. Turin: CELID, 1983.

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Anty Pansera, *Il Design del Mobile Italiano dal 1946 a Oggi*. Rome, 1990.

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### V) **General texts on Italian history and culture**

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