

# Maestro

**VICO MAGISTRETTI OF MILAN IS ABOUT TO TURN EIGHTY, BUT RETIREMENT FROM HIS LONG AND ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER AS ARCHITECT AND BROAD-SPECTRUM DESIGNER OF HOME FURNISHINGS DOES NOT SEEM TO BE AN OPTION HE IS CONSIDERING. NOT ONLY ARE MANY OF HIS VINTAGE PIECES STILL IN PRODUCTION, BUT HE ALSO CONTINUES TO CREATE NEW ONES**

For this master of Italian modernism, learning the pedigree of a certain two-centuries-old apartment house in Milan's glossy retail fashion district was a sentimental surprise. In 1985, just as designer-architect Vico Magistretti (opposite) was finishing the building's exhaustive renovation, he discovered it had been designed by his own great-great-great-grandfather, an important 19th-century architect remembered for the typical Milanese severity of his work. It became impossible for Magistretti to see living there as anything but destiny, so he claimed an apartment for himself.

He chose a labyrinthine flat under the eaves with handsome views across a tangle of canal-tiled roofs to the elegant spires of the Duomo and the bell tower of the Church of San Carlo. Magistretti took advantage of his position as architect in charge of the restoration to customize his own space, enlarging a number of windows and adding warm wide-plank teak flooring and a discreet fireplace of granite and his favorite beechwood. He painted every wall, ceiling, and door flat white, the only interior color this designer ever considers, whether for himself or clients.

"Milan is a city that spends much of the year under a wet gray blanket," he says. "The apartment's lightness and openness makes the climate bearable." With the plain and honest backgrounds set, Magistretti went on to fill the place largely with furniture and lighting that trace his more than fifty-year career as one of Italy's most influential and enduring designers. Represented are many of his "greatest hits," typically sculptural or organic in form, manufactured by forward-thinking Italian companies like De Padova, Cassina, O-Luce, Artemide, Flou, and Kartell. And all comply with the credo articulated by their unpretentious creator.

"I think that an object of good design should last forever and should be an archetype of permanent validity, not an object of fashion. The production of 'fashionable' articles... is a fine way to kill the image of Italian design. We now have to design for a changed world which has no use for the provisional or the throwaway."

In the living room, Magistretti's iconic Atollo table lamp—an aluminum cylinder that finishes in a cone, topped by a hemispherical shade in the same material—looks as fresh and relevant as the day it debuted in 1977. (Atollo is among twelve of his works in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art.) A prototype for a recent daybed in the same room still has the cradlelike wooden blocks he experimented with to hold the bolsters in place; in the commercialized version of the daybed, the blocks were replaced by a more efficient system of straps. Across the room a 1980 sofa winks at the convention of throwing a blanket over worn upholstery—except that the loosely draped leather-trimmed horse blanket is the actual covering, held in place with Velcro and unseen clips.

Throughout the apartment, Magistretti's designs are stirred in with a handful of family pieces, including his father's sturdy oak desk, plus colorful kilims, breathtaking 13th-century Khmer sculptures, and ethnic handcrafts. The massive, deeply tufted ottoman in caramel leather is right out of Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, the decorative equivalent of a curve ball.

"Designing is something I need to do, and I'm lucky enough to have people who want to produce what I design," says Magistretti. "Still, if I have one fault, it's that I design too much. But I believe that one must be generous. Out of fifty chair designs that I do, only ten will make it. Yet I am quite sure that the other forty are a necessary part of the process."





Vico Magistretti's library (opposite) is contiguous with the living room (this page). He designed the collapsible beechwood bookcase for Cassina, plastic chair with steel legs for Kartell, and—seen on the far side of the oak desk—the bentwood chair for De Padova. Magistretti placed the antique six-foot-square ottoman so guests won't hit their heads on the sloping ceiling. Top: The living room stars Magistretti's daybed, Atollo lamp, blanket-covered sofa, and console that holds Khmer bust. Above: Also by the designer are the coffee table (actually his dining table top posed on his plastic table) and sectional sofa.





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