

Photograph by Steve Bicknell



# Magistretti on a magic broomstick

CO MAGISTRETTI is Italian. Very. You could tell this by his rapid hand movements alone. He is also an architect and designer of world renown. Eleven of his furniture and lighting designs are in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York (most of the designs illustrated here are included) and he has won a succession of other accolades. The first-ever chair he designed, a rush-seated one with bright red frame (also illustrated), became as much a symbol of the Sixties as mini skirts and Op Art. It is now a classic, still sold by Habitat.

Although based in Milan, Magistretti was recently elected to spend part of every year in Britain, a decision which coincides with his launching here of his new range of furniture. It is called Broomstick; the basic components are broomstick-shaped and form the legs of laminate-topped tables, supports for canvas-slung chairs and stools, the framework of a hatstand and bookshelves. Each piece folds up and the collection, of which there are 12 designs at the moment, is intended as an inexpensive range as opposed to many of his other designs which, although beautiful, are pricey. Broomstick price tags go from £50 for the hatstand to £153 for the Italian Queen chair in which Magistretti is in the photograph.

He explains the lean lines of his furniture thus: "I think if you have to buy an armchair you have to spend a fortune. I wanted to create furniture at low cost with a strong image. We have to face a power-crisis period so I think people must get used to simple furniture. The foam in upholstery comes from petroleum so there will be a problem. But don't think it is necessarily a sad thing.

On the contrary, to be forced to be comparatively simple will be very good for the design world. A kind of minimalist Crusoe approach — to make from things which are already available." As Magistretti has done with his broomstick designs, although his are in an upmarket Nigerian walnut. "People are bored with plastic. They are surrounded by it in airports, cars, offices. People like to touch wood and live with it."

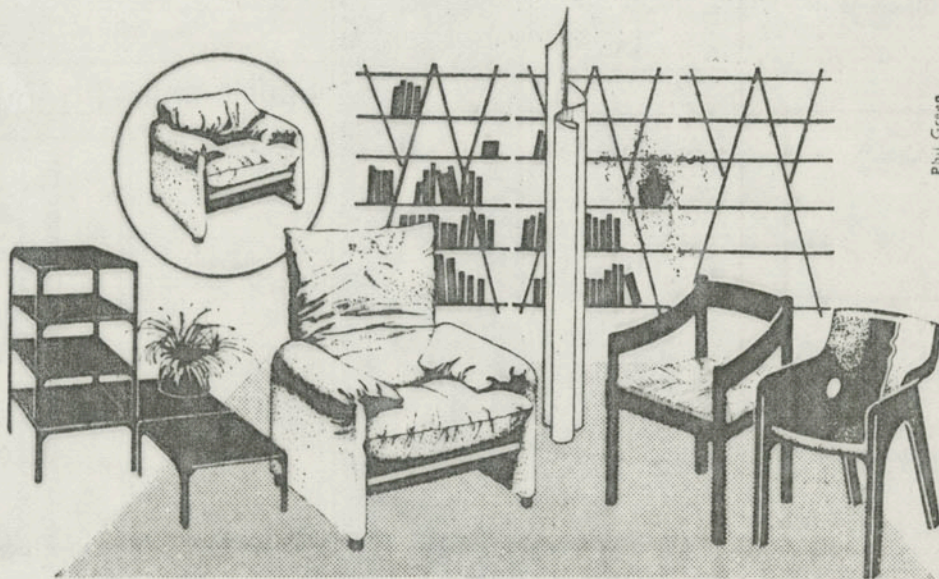
The light in the foreground is also a new Magistretti design, for Artemide (an Italian lighting and furniture company) and is designed with energy-saving in mind, as well as a little "magic": an important element for a designer to include, he emphasises. "It's the job of a designer to transform reality into a little magic. Other like a Magritte painting, he shows small things but with a strange angle."

With the light he has reversed the usual principle of a large lampshade and all base: his light shines down from a small ceramic bowl onto the large round shade and bounces off it. The wattage is only 20 (it dims to five), but unfortunately what you save on electricity you



Vico Magistretti, designer and architect, sitting in ("I like to be kept as in a cuddle") and surrounded by his new range of furniture which is appropriately called Broomstick. Which is

his personal favourite of the many pieces he has designed? That award goes to the bookshelves illustrated below. "I think they have very much the same flavour as the Broomstick range."



Some of Magistretti's past designs, from left: stacking fibreglass and plastic tables, £32 each, by Artemide. Chair with fold-down back (there is also a sofa) from £375, and bookcase in stained or natural beech, from £287. Both by Cassina. Floor standing light, £307 (table version £100), by Artemide. Rush-seated chair with arms, £40, with-

lose when buying it—it costs around £145.

What has Magistretti noted of British design so far? That at international furniture fairs our stands seem to have nothing but reproductions; that good young designers have a very hard time with manufacturers who lack the courage to produce their designs; that the British public is conservative (and poor, "but if you are poor it is not necessary to buy ugly"), that our art school education is impressive (there are no such institutions in Italy, only architectural schools).

He has already been approached by one

British furniture company, Collins & Hayes and has plans to produce some lighting, but design life will be very different here. In Italy the enthusiasm and compact efficiency of many companies meant that he could make a rough sketch of a light and within three days be presented with a prototype. This instant approach keeps a design fresh, alive and exciting. The Broomstick range was conceived, created and launched within nine months, "like a baby." One can't imagine how that could ever happen here.

Maureen Walker

Phil Green