



## Sergio Asti

Smashing interiors and industrial design by a modest Milanese whose case may help explain Italy's towering design reputation

Last May, when Design Research staged a show of Sergio Asti-designed products in its New York store, Asti flew in from Italy with his wife—both blond and slim. And both slightly embarrassed for showing up at the party in the casual pullover outfits they had worn on the flight. The airline had mislaid their luggage (lost it for good it turned out), containing not only their clothes for a long visit but a few last-minute additions to the exhibition. With shrugs, joking, Asti made the best of it, good naturedly answering questions:

"With the usual Latin conceit and self-confidence I have crossed the Atlantic loaded with precious and choice objects which I lay at your feet. I avail myself of the best Italian tradition which endeavors to express itself with modern means and materials according to ancient principles. These being: form—the desire to give a product its full expression . . . to invest with meaning that which we create, a meaning beyond that of the object's function and beyond its role as an item in a production/consumer-oriented economy.

"We could talk about technology as a means of expression and not as an end—of the continuous need to invent when designing (of course not at the level of gadgets) to justify the intervention of the designer into the civilization of which we are a part and which we cannot pretend to ignore . . . of man who has always more and more need of imagination and love and less of stagnation."

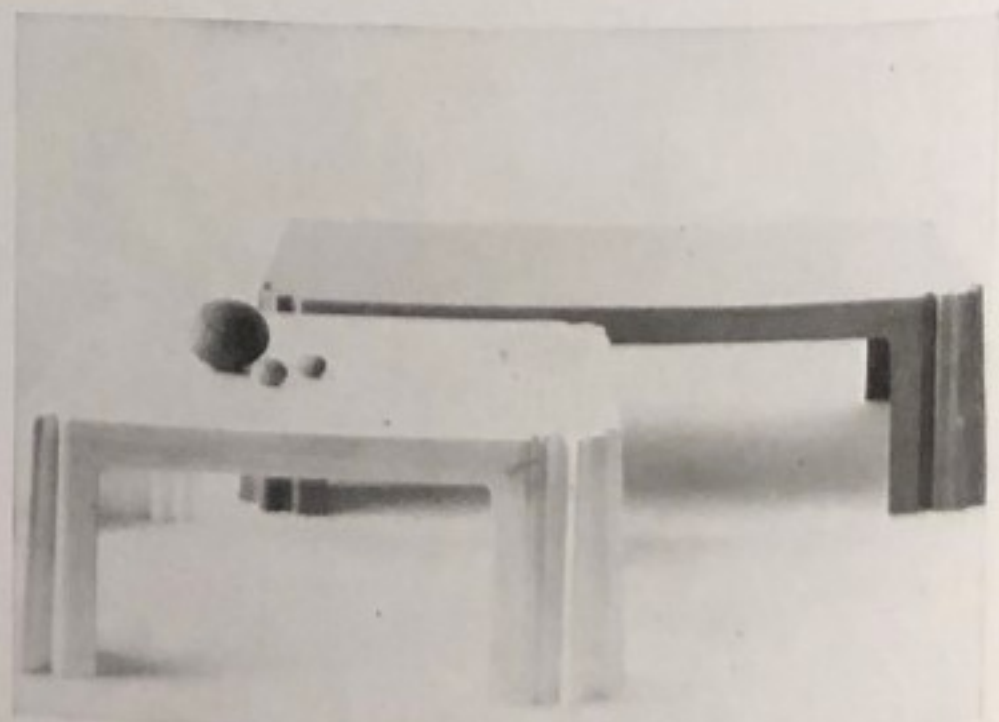
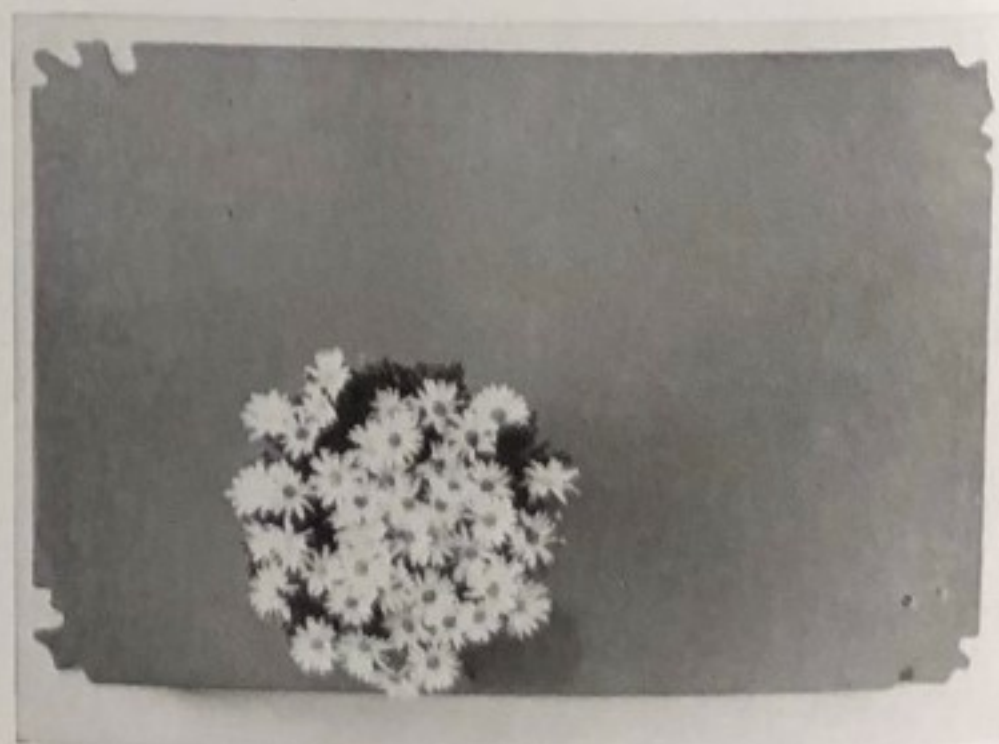
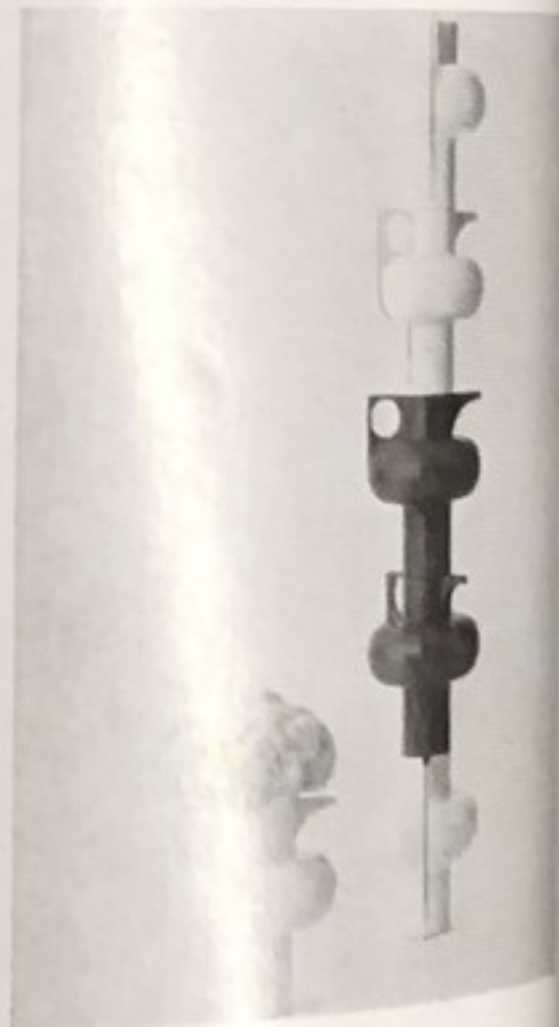
Tired, the Astis collapsed into the fur-covered, white-

lacquered wood double bed on exhibition—a superbly neat and articulated design produced by Stilwood in Modena, Italy. His humor is never out of scale, his attitudes never those of the "great designer" ready to *epater les bourgeois*. There is in fact a distinctly middle-class flavor to his life style: "I live in a 250-square-meter house facing a nice garden, have four little children, a very noble Dachshund, lots of Art Nouveau."

Sergio Asti was born in Milan in 1926. He collected his architectural degree from the Milan Politecnico at the age of 27, presently joining the faculty as an assistant to the "Architecture of Interiors Chair" and beginning a long career of teaching and lecturing which has sent him to Barcelona, Japan, and Portugal. He was active in the Triennales since 1950, has won innumerable competitions.

Even the few photos on these two pages may indicate the apparent paradox of his design, the combination of classic purity of form with humor and inventiveness in the product design, architectural control with virtuosity and showmanship in the interiors. The "Daruma" lamp combines a glass semicircle and sphere, comes in many sizes and colors. The "Cedit" vases stack. The "Fitzgerald" club/discotheque is an art deco dream of velvety twenties furniture and lacquered walls. And the Fiat auto showroom is a tour-de-force of glossy black ceramics, mirrors, and a ceiling line created with hung fixtures that will remind observers of certain ceilings in the '57 Triennale—ceilings by Asti.

—O.G.



photos by studio tre, ballo, falchi & salvadori



