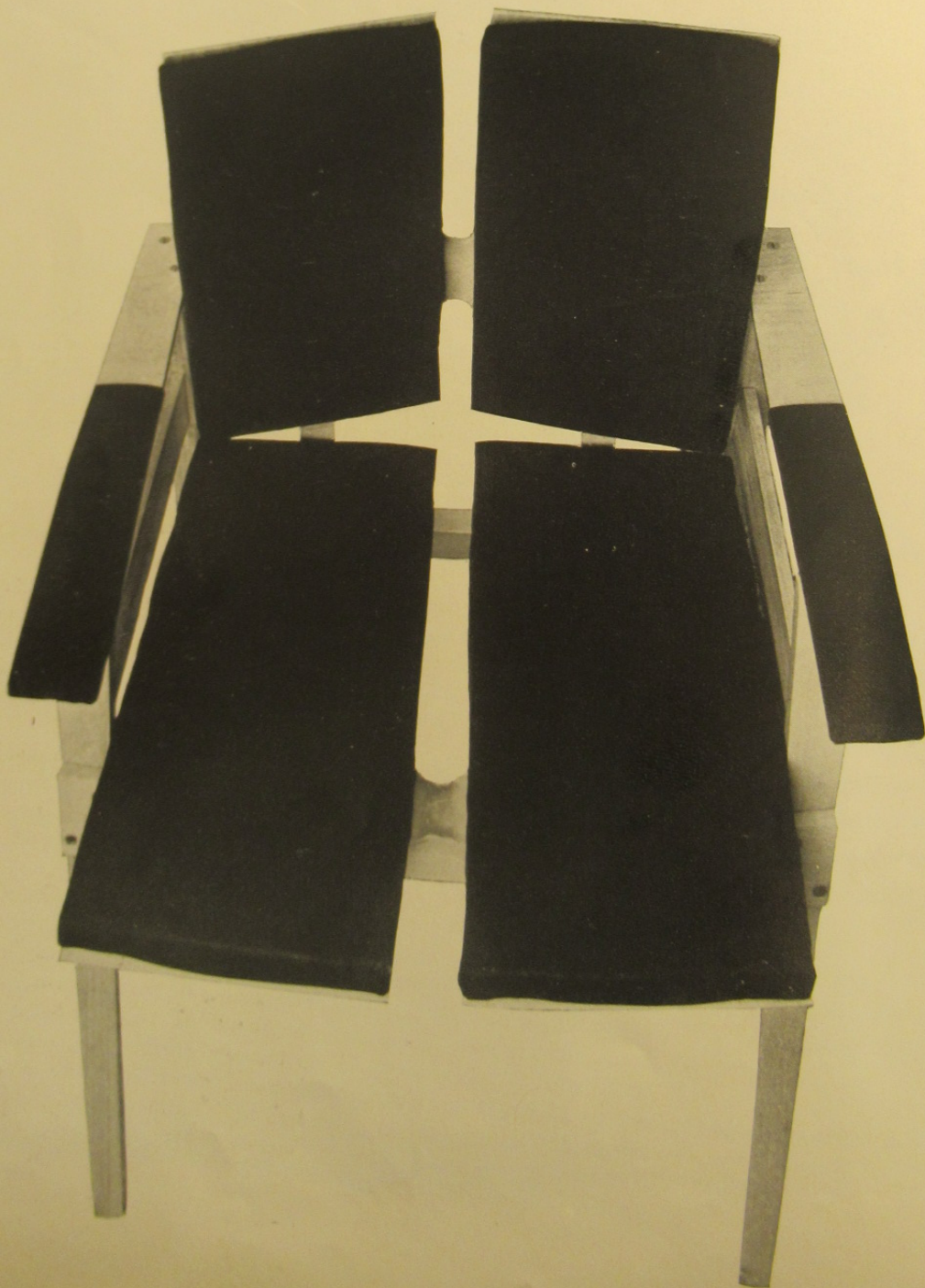




Steps toward mechanization in Milan





The two chair models on these pages were not the most dazzling exhibits at the ninth Triennale, and the team who designed them, Albini, Colombini, and Sgrelli, modestly omitted programme notes explaining their industrial significance. Their supple plywood backs and seats suspended in light frames so as to conform to the body they support, represent a fourth step in the progression of technological efforts to produce flexible seating.

The method uses less machinery, achieves greater flexibility than its predecessors—(1) an anonymous American bent plywood train bench, (2) the Aalto chair, and (3) the Eames chair. But it is suited to mass production; parts can be machine cut, assembled without fuss. The architects eschewed carving and other hand work, relied for beauty on proportion, simple outlines, and the contrast of sturdy supports against paper-thin plywood.

The chairs are part of a Triennale collection sponsored by Milan's La Rinascente department store. Some pieces were shown in model apartments, one by Carlo Pagani, architect of La Rinascente itself. As reported in our November issue, Pagani prepared for the design of La Rinascente by touring the United States in a first-hand study of American store planning. The same thorough approach to practical problems characterizes the model apartments. The furniture is actually available in the store at reasonable prices. All pieces are functional, that is, do their jobs efficiently, but not all involve technological innovations, nor is structure always paraded before the eye. Upholstered pieces have amorphous outlines.

The most inventive structural experiments after the plywood chairs were the storage pieces shown on the next page, and de-



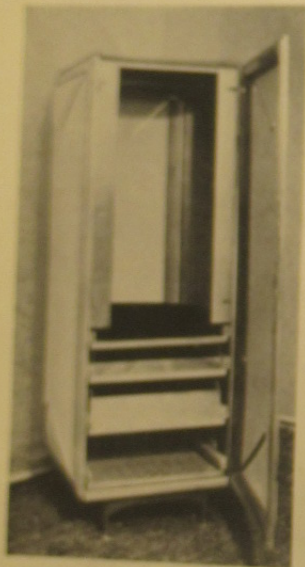
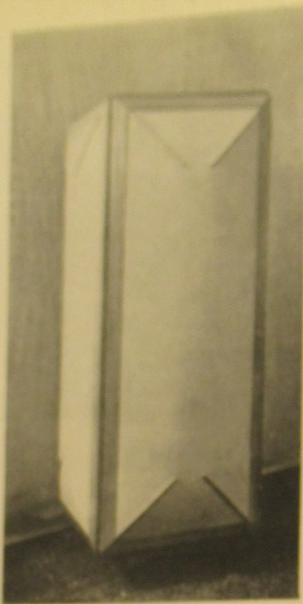
The folding chair's birch plywood seat rests on but one cross bar of the iron cradle and two leather straps hanging from the plywood back. Not only does the seat flex under the occupant, but the back, fixed only to a bar coinciding with the small of her back, bends to both her shoulders and hips. In this chair, as in the demountable

walnut-framed armchair, the projection of the plywood seat beyond the cross bar allows it to bend under the fore-part of the thighs so as to provide full support without pressure. Leather straps enable the halved plywood back and seat of the armchair to move in its frame. Black wool covers the foam rubber pads. The team of Franco Albini, Luigi Colombini, and Ezio Sgrelli designed both.



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Convex plywood skins are held in tension of the completely demountable wardrobe.



Steel feet of wardrobes and bookcases screw into triangular bases, adjust individually to uneven floors.

signed by the same team. They too use plywood in a new way. Demountable, adaptable to varied interior storage arrangements and also to varied decorative treatments—the plywood surfaces can be varnished, painted, or left bare—they differ from most demountable case pieces in that the side, back, and front panels are not supports. They are not essential but voluntary elements, sliding into grooves and held rigid by strong wood frames that carry the weight of the contents. To multiply either wardrobe or bookcase, one adds another set of frames with or without inserting intermediate panels. Frames, bases, tops, sides, backs, doors (a choice of wood or glass, on the bookcase), grooves, and a multiplicity of shelves, drawers, and hanger rods, are separate pieces.

Plywood panels of the bookcase are planes, but those of the wardrobe are convex stressed skins reinforced with brass bars extending from frame corners. Readers may recognize these units as developments of designs entered in The Museum of Modern Art's international low-cost furniture competition. It made pre-requisites of low cost and technological innovation, while the Triennale collection is medium-priced and not revolutionary throughout. But what structural inventions the Triennale designers did propose do not necessitate big initial investments in machinery for each model—the great barrier to design progress in industrially made furniture. Moreover the collection as a whole maintains high standards of design and workmanship. It may be that without presuming to do so, the Rinascente group comes closer to solving the furniture problem.—O.G.



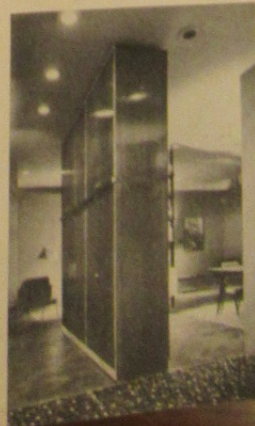
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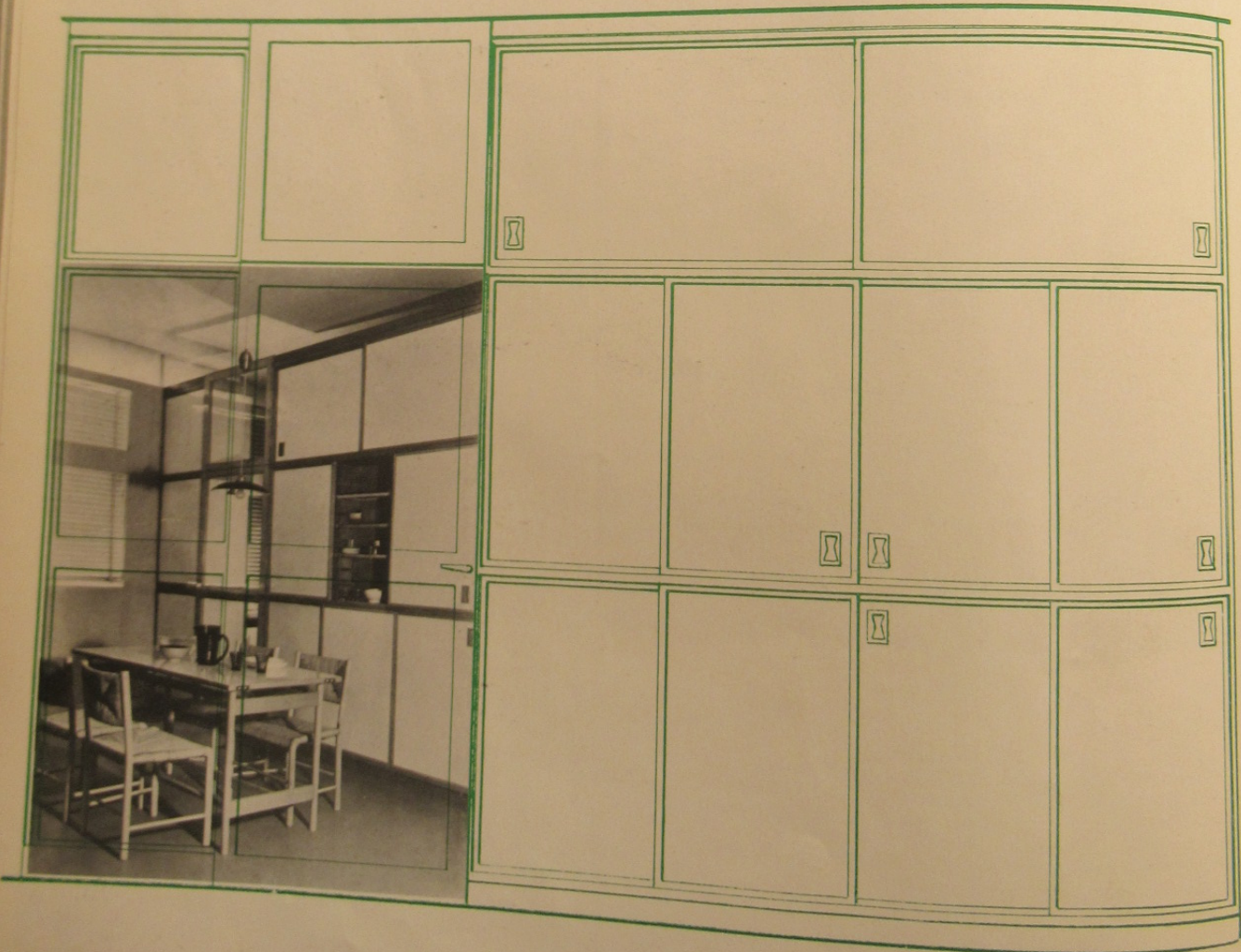
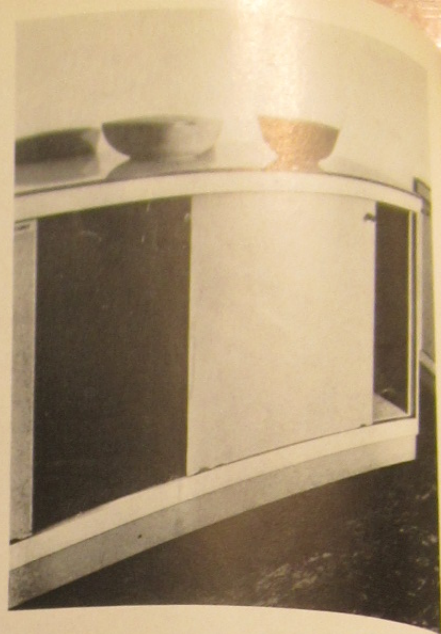
Exposante-sponsored model apartment, by architect Carlo Pagani of the Triennale, has walls only around bathroom and bedrooms. Movable storage units partition the other areas. Imaginatively shaped multipurpose bookcase supports are demountable; the shelves and panels can be rearranged on brass pegs. Mass produced steel-legged low rubber upholstered furniture is scaled for small rooms.



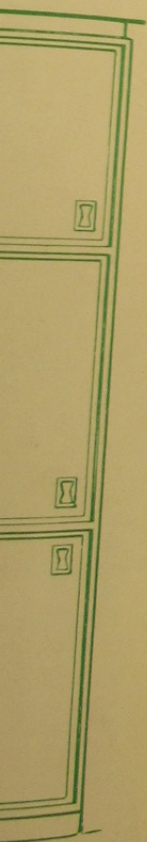
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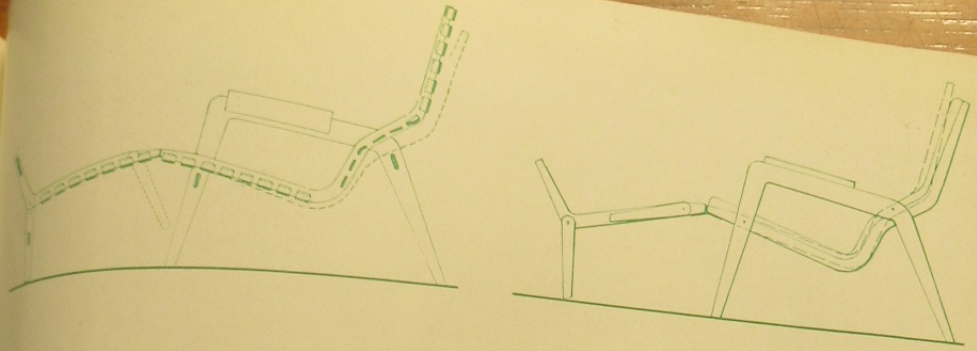
Kitchen units provided by landlord or appliance manufacturer are as unknown to Italy as the built-in closet we take for granted here. Therefore, like wardrobes, they are furniture items. These are from a 1933 Triennale model kitchen by architect Alberto Rosselli. Panels of white, yellow, and red safety glass slide in metal grooves. Rubber-sheathed pulls are so placed as to avoid hitting the glass. Tops, shelves are also glass.



Dining room by architects Rita Bravi and Luisa Castiglioni is divided from the kitchen by a storage partition which, despite fine detail, is made of separate components. The strong wooden frames hold storage units faced with white plastic and also opening to the kitchen, a kitchen pass-through, and a glass-paneled door.



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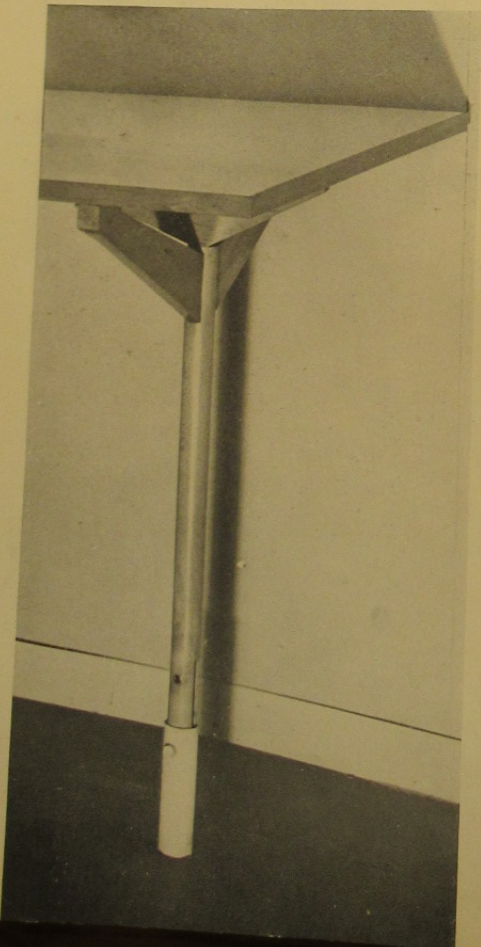
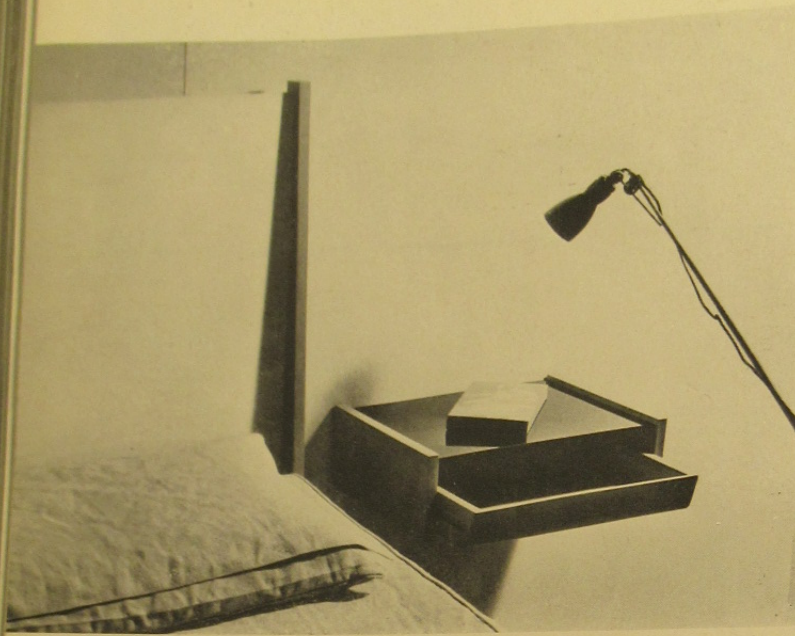


An armchair becomes a chaise when the footstool hooks on and folds back its front legs. It can be set at two chaise angles, a third more upright one.



Architects Bravi and Castiglioni produced the design with mass production in mind. Laminated plywood sides are easily cut, molded back pieces are uniform, arm rests screwed on. Brass adjusting screws and hooks are exposed and handsome in themselves. Henna cloth upholsters the foam rubber pads.

Simply-cut bedroom furniture for mass production by Bravi and Castiglioni. Headboard and table top are covered with laminated plastic.



A winged buttress bifurcating the top of the solitary leg enables it to hold the retractable top of the work table securely.

The whole unit. Storage cabinet has space for the sewing machine. Work flap and its leg can be detached, hooked on to dining table.



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Another variation on the storage partition theme by architects Bravi and Castiglioni appears between a model living room and dining room at the Triennale. A solid wooden frame with broad cross pieces at top and bottom and trestle feet (out of sight in this photograph) is the basis of the system. Two such frames are used in this partition. Rows of peg holes make it easy to insert all sorts of fillers. The black and white box is a bar which also opens on the dining room side. The shelves suspended from white-enameled metal wires are supported via the peg-holes. The back panels could be dispensed with should one desire a partition that is not completely solid.