



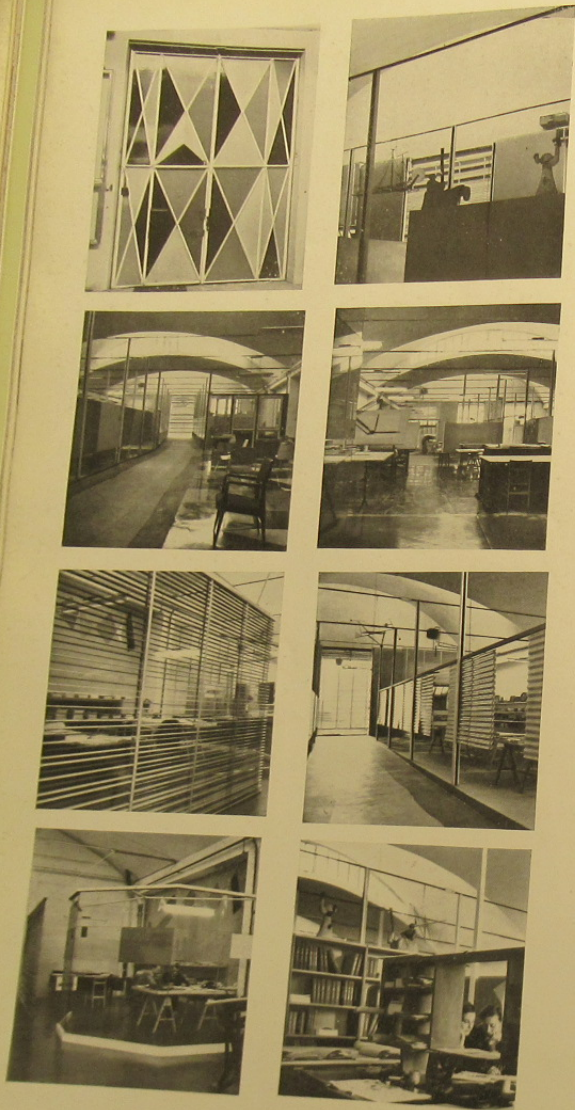
Why all the fuss about these Italians? Disillusioned tourists hurry to inform us that the interiors we see in photographs give a false picture—that such pearls are exasperatingly rare in the vulgar masses of prevailing taste.

Rival designers in other countries do not always betray their envy with such blatantly chauvinistic growls. Some concede the exuberance, vitality. Some concede the brilliance of Italy's architects (who are also its interior-industrial designers). In subtler, more solemn criticism, they bite with learned misgivings at Italian inconsistency, intemperance, impurity—or what they call *eclecticism* in academic language. The Italians have in fact become targets for the crossfire of two enemy camps—too cold and stark for one, too theatrically florid for the other. But admiration is hard to disguise. We watch, buy from, and imitate the Italians—goggle-eyed as each visit shows the new renaissance gaining momentum. A comparison between the collection in our July 1948 issue and this one, recently gathered by our art director Roberto Mango, discloses the speed of the development and its underlying integrity. Integrity, we say—leading off with two violently contrasting interiors by Gio Ponti. Ponti designs large housing projects, hotels, furniture, and mass-produced machinery, advises many craft industries, edits *Domus* magazine, and is a professor of architecture at the University of Milan—being only slightly more versatile than his colleagues. The small photographs at left show Ponti's new offices, headquarters both of his magazine, and of his architectural practice. In a pristine concrete building lighted by clerestories in the deep ribs of the barrel-vaulted roof, this oddly religious space, originally built to be a garage, has been consecrated for its work with a system of thin steel H-beams soaring through the great height between floor and ceiling. Glass partitions supported by these posts are partially shielded with

GIO PONTI — ARCHITECT, EDITOR, PROFESSOR



ascetic and sybarite: the masks of Ponti



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Above: formal wall, dining room.

Below: invitation, living room.



*Fornasetti prints are Ponti's current obsession. Weights and volumes are magically destroyed by designs directly applied and specially designed for each piece of furniture, fabric, wall. The client accepted the fantasy.*

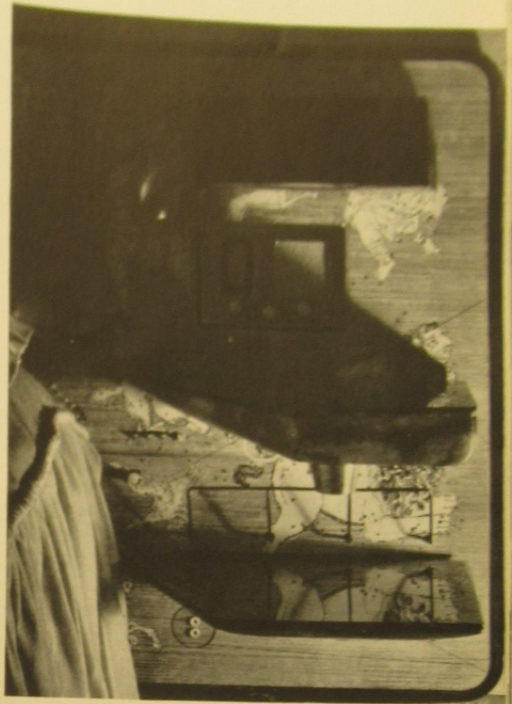
movable venetian blinds and sliding, track-hung sheets of corrugated transite—perforated planes sufficient to divide the space into editorial and architectural offices flanking an aisle through which automobiles once were driven.

Momentary distractions—mobiles, statuettes, painted triangles on the door—do not alter its purposeful austerity.

The Ponti-designed apartment on the next three pages is the opposite of austere. A wilful, luxurious extreme of surface decoration, it plays a game of views. As one looks in one sees richly burlled wood furniture (by Ponti, naturally). Looking out, every surface *now*—is covered with Fornasetti prints. Not quite *trompe l'oeil*, they lend an air of evocative, poetic insubstantiality. It is hard to tell that the book on the shelf is real, that the fan on the lady's armchair is not.

Surprisingly, the effect is not too busy, thanks to Ponti's control, and the basic coherence of his taste. It is this mastery of design and confidence in what they want to say that enables the better Italian designers to make bold ventures in serious and playful directions both. That is why we watch them.—O.G.





Root burls on the desk and bar (which also contains a miniature stage, lighted and curtained), have a golden tone keyed to the yellow carpet, the predominant yellow of the multicolored prints. The headboard (above) which extends to the side of the bed, is natural-finished wood on which Japanese hunters, drawn and printed by Fornasetti, scurry energetically around a lamp, night light, ash tray, cigarette lighter, and book rack.

