

Interiors



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Twenty years ago, Philippe Starck was the most influential designer in the world. Ruffled, stubby, and angst-free, the Frenchman was famous for producing a kettle of questionable utility that looked much like an artillery shell, and chairs with three legs. It was Starck (now aged 65) who established the phenomenon of the designer celebrity virtually single-handedly.



1: Antonio Citterio

Designers now talk about making design invisible, about working with what already exists, rather than inventing things just for the sake of it. They are more interested in trying to give machine-made objects the qualities of handcraft than in dazzling us with technology. This is a natural reaction. As in fashion, monochrome succeeds colour, simplicity displaces complexity and the qualities of imperfection seem more appealing after too much slick styling.

But something else is happening. Simplicity is a response to a world that appears to be changing uncomfortably quickly. A generation that never handled a photographic negative, used a landline phone, or typed a letter, has rediscovered the qualities of vinyl records, and the charms of Polaroid film. Against this background, designers have moved in a range of directions, from Antonio Citterio and his faith in the kind of simple



3: Jasper Morrison

luxury that embodies the continuing appeal of Italian style, to Martino Gamper and his experiments with creative scavenging that reflect the adventurous approach of a new generation.

This is a selection of 10 designers from three generations that define the landscape of contemporary design. Each is working against a background of accelerating change, while looking for ways to provide a sense of familiarity.

Updating the classics

Antonio Citterio (64) began his career as a furniture designer and architect in the 1970s, when Italy dominated contemporary design. He represents the transition between the historical greats and the present day. Citterio has made minimalism a synonym for a modern version of luxury. He designs domestic furniture for the Italian design company B&B Italia, office furniture for the Swiss group Vitra, and has set the agenda for what might be described as the kind of impeccably well-mannered Italian design that will not date, with projects such as his Kelvin table lamp (1) for Flos (priced from £275).

Another of B&B's stable is **Patricia Urquiola** (53). Spanish born, Milan-based Urquiola, like Citterio,



2: Patricia Urquiola



4: Sam Hecht



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Both Hecht and Fukasawa design objects that try to remind us of those days when technology was simpler. Fukasawa's work with the Japanese company Plus Minus Zero and products such as his wall-mounted CD player for Muji look like the sort of thing Dieter Rams might have designed for Braun, the German consumer products company. And when Jasper Morrison designs an object for Vitra (such as the Rotary tray, (3) £39), or tableware for Alessi, he takes shapes and forms that are already familiar and works on getting the details just a bit better.

The pursuit of imperfection

Ronan (43) and **Erwan Bouroullec** (38), from France, and **Hella Jongerius** (50), from the Netherlands have explored ways to give mass-produced objects some of the distinctive, individual qualities of the handmade.

The Bouroullec brothers have worked from the high-end – a chandelier for Swarovski – to the lower-end, producing their £300 Vegetal plastic chair, and Joyn office system (7), for Vitra. Jongerius has done a lot to redefine the way that we see colour in her work, which ranges from textiles for furniture, to limited-edition ceramics (8) (Coloured Vases series 3, €1,199 each).



7: Erwan and Ronan Bouroullec

The extra ordinary

Deyan Sudjic picks 10 designers who shaped today's simple aesthetic



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8: Hella Jongerius



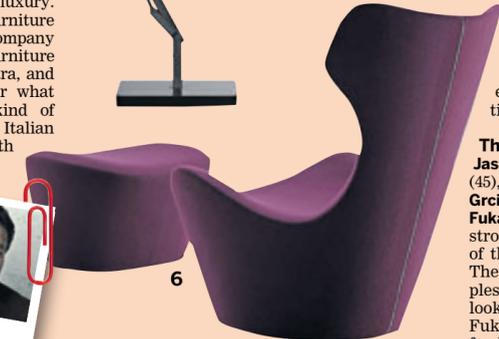
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belongs to a generation that looks back to the masters of the Italian postwar explosion of design talent. Urquiola has designed ceramics, furniture and interiors, such as her collections for Mutina (2), which are not afraid to be comfortable as well as stylish. She has recently launched a kitchen system for Boffi that drops the conventional iceberg look and features an exposed metal structure with solid timber and stone surfaces.

The new puritans
Jasper Morrison (55) and **Sam Hecht** (45), both born in Britain, **Konstantin Grcic** (49), who is German, and **Naoto Fukasawa** (58), from Japan, all reacted strongly against the signature designs of the generation that preceded them. They refine design down to its simplest essence, so they are less likely to look dated in the short term, such as Fukasawa's Grande Papilio chair (6) for B&B Italia (from £1,680).

For Morrison and Hecht, the challenge of design is not to look for originality for its own sake, but to simplify and clarify the ordinary things. All but Fukasawa are graduates of the Royal College of Art in London. All but Grcic are now closely involved with the Japanese company Muji.

Grcic's designs take some getting used to. With projects like Chair One (5), his stacking chair for Magis (from £262), and more recently the Rival chair for Artek, and exhibitions he has curated, he has established a reputation as one of the most consistently interesting designers of his generation.

Hecht is now primarily an industrial designer. He has designed office furniture for Herman Miller, as well as cutlery, computer hardware, and the intriguing Branca chair (4), which looks like a craftsman-made piece, but which actually depends on high-tech digital milling techniques (priced at \$1,449).

The next generation
The preoccupations of the next generation of designers are represented by **Martino Gamper** (43), who was born in northern Italy. His standout project as a student of Ron Arad at the RCA was the marathon task of coming up with a new chair every day for 100 days, mostly on the basis of recycling

or adapting objects that he found in the street, such as the Barbapapa chair (9). His mix of craft skills, and his interest in contemporary art suggest a new approach to the essentials of domestic life. He is now moving into mass-produced, mainstream items, with a chair for Magis.

Michael Anastassiades (47), from Cyprus, was a student of Tony Dunne and Fiona Raby, who encouraged their students to treat design as a matter of asking questions, as much as trying to answer them. Anastassiades emerged to produce immaculately crafted, one-off pieces and limited editions, then moved into mass production with his lights for Flos, such as the

Ball light (10). In their own way, each of these designers tried to reflect on the way that the world is changing. Their work creates objects that shape our daily lives, and allows us to feel perhaps a little more comfortable about the rituals of the everyday.

Deyan Sudjic is the director of the London Design Museum



9: Martino Gamper



10: Michael Anastassiades



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