

MR PORTER

THE RETURN OF SEVENTIES FURNITURE

As Salone del Mobile 2016 gets into gear, we take a look back at the design greats of Italy's underrated golden age



Interior home decoration by Mr Willy Rizzo. Photograph © WillyRizzo

*Words by Ms Emma O'Kelly, editor-at-large, Wallpaper**

In case you hadn't noticed (and assuming you've not yet read any other MR PORTER articles on the same topic), the 1970s are having something of a moment in the style world. Naturally, that means all things 1970s are now ripe for revisitation and reappropriation, including furniture. If you're from Britain, this should bring to mind some awful stuff: brown floral wallpaper, avocado bathroom suites and woodchip. But there's much more than that to the decade's design.

In Italy in the 1970s, wall-to-wall shagpile, brass, bronze, chrome and glass started to feature on the wish lists (and in the homes) of the stylish elite. "Decorators started working with travertine, brass, briar and leather, and applying lacquers in colours such as orange," says Mr Adriano Albini, founder of Spazio 900, a Milan showroom that specialises in Italian design from 1950 to 1980. "It was a break from the natural wood and Formica of the 1960s, for a more minimalist house." Today, we've reached a similar oversaturation of tasteful, woody, mid-century modernism (the starter flat must-have is no longer a kettle, it's a G-Plan coffee table), so this kind of thing is looking pretty attractive.

The 1970s were a boom time in Italy, a decade of mass production and innovation that signalled the end of the post-war rebuilding programme. Designers made huge quantities of furniture and sold it through department stores such as La Rinascente, Saks and Neiman Marcus – in those pre-Ikea days, such furniture halls carried the ultimate cachet. Almost no one crossed the frontier between design, art and craft. (The design art scene, with its solo makers supplying limited editions and one-offs to galleries, was still 25 years away.)

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As a result, exceptional pieces from the 1970s are in short supply. Most are still in Italy, in Milanese galleries such as Erastudio, Colombari and Robertaebasta. “With their fresh colours and shiny surfaces, pieces from the 1970s are very appealing and very photogenic,” says Mr Mattia Martinelli, director of Robertoebasta. “Those that are museum quality are often very strong and solid, so they can be used in real interiors.”

But despair not. Glorious works from the likes of Messrs Romeo Rega, Gaetano Sciolari and Willy Rizzo are easy to find (and sometimes to live with). Itching to get started? Below, we’ve put together a guide to key designers of the period, some of whom are reissuing classic pieces in 2016. In short, it’s time to fire up [eBay](#) or [1stDibs](#) and type in one of the following names.

<https://www.mrporter.com/en-fr/journal/the-knowledge/the-return-of-seventies-furniture/742?setupsession=false>