

# The Phenomenon of Italian Design

*Katerina Helwig for Jewellery Review, 9/2009*

*The design should be sexual and purely intuitive, like a beautiful woman. It must not be understood or interpreted. Its message is*

*clear and sensitive.*

*Tonino Lamborghini*

In the epoch of globalisation, national identification disappears, and the frames of perception of surrounding world and attitude to events are erased. The design, being one of the most advanced environment-determining disciplines, is the most suspected to globalisation. Modern trends in design are world-wide and lose their national colour. Only an extremely strong charisma makes it possible to be singled out from the general flow, occupy a leading position, and dictate trends. Italian design has self-identified and deviated from the "rest of design" long ago; moreover, the term Italian design represents a perfect brand, with all intrinsic attributes: target audience, philosophy, slogan, and visual assets.

What are the values of this brand?

If we try to characterise the Italian design in one word, it will be emotional design. Italian design is, first of all, emotions and perception, and then technologies. The feeling of perfect is intrinsic to the majority of Italians, even if they are not related to design or art in their everyday activity. The hedonistic way of life and thousands-year-old cultural environment advance the perception of harmony at the intuitive level. Architectural monuments and art masterpieces of extreme beauty representing almost three thousand years of history form the

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environment and make it possible to touch the most valuable heritage of Western civilisation every day.

The term Italian design refers in a full extend to jewellery and watch design. When a subject has a nice target to be placed on an elegant hand, the Italian design is manifested without any limitations. Recent collections were inspired by various styles and directions, but they are united by creativity and the aforementioned Italian style.

## Antiquity: the modules of harmony

The antiquity formed the basic modules of classic harmony. The art history is said to be a great stylisation. Infinite appellations to the culture of Ancient Rome take place now, as well, but new perception and interpretation allow designers to create a new self-sufficient art value every time. This was the case in 14th – 16th centuries when great humanistic ideas found their incarnation in the artefacts of Italian Renaissance. However, Italy gave the world other historical styles, such as Roman or baroque ones.

### *Components:*

Antique decoration

Meanders

Medallions

Stripes

Antique talismans

Micromosaic

Mediterranean style

Ovals

Cameos

Canapé

Vintage fragments

Classics

Elegance

Floristic motives

Brilliant paves

### *Illustrations:*

Versace: meanders, medallion with the head of Medusa the Gorgon.

Tagliamonte: cameos

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Stripes

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Ovals

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# Technological style, High-tech

One could expect that the nation possessing the richest achievements in culture and art would have “enclosed” itself in these frames. However, in the 20th century, Italy gave birth to the futurism, which influenced all modern art and design. Being founded by Filippo Tomaso Marinetti, Giacomo Balla, and Fortunato Depero, the futurism glorified technical progress, power, and dynamism of the new era. Today, the ideas of futurism found their development in the High-tech style. The subject designed in this style possess a bright emotional colour.

# Post-modernism as a Protest against Rationalism

In 1960s, the post-modernism began to develop in Italy. This direction in art appeared as the response to designer rationalism of Art Nouveau. Post-modernists Ettore Sottsass, Alessandro Mendini, and Fortunato Depero stood for the merging of fine

## *Components:*

Dynamics  
Sports  
Technical aesthetics  
Actively expressed constructions (belt-fixing screws)  
Module construction  
Elements of car design  
Pure lines, geometrical primitives  
Innovative design  
Non-standard solutions  
Combination of modern materials and precious metals  
Carbon  
Big size, cut expressive forms

## *Illustration:*

Carlo Ferrara: Technical aesthetics, sports, high-technological materials  
Tonino Lamborghini: non-standard dynamic form (triangle watch), technical aesthetics, actively expressed construction, elements of car design.

## *Components:*

Modern art for everyday luxury  
Expressive images and forms  
Sculpture forms  
Expressed grotesque details and active accents  
Big size  
Abstract forms  
Sharp facets  
Graphic character

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Sports

Technic

Actively

screws

Module

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Carbon

Big size

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arts and mass culture, elite and popular art. Main features of post-modernism are the rejection of industrial production, surface decoration, merging of styles, game, irony, bright colour, illogical character, eccentric details, and symbolism.

## Organic Design and Aerodynamic Style

Italian designers work successfully in the aerodynamic style and organic design. Curvilinear biomorphous counters intrinsic to these styles make it possible to create emotional products. Probably, a positive attitude to life and a sensitive Mediterranean nature itself provoke it.

Contrast

Saturated colour

Contrast between black and white (enamel, ceramics)

Large coloured cabochons

Ornaments

Stripes

Geometric ornaments

Multicolour graphic ornaments

Game and humour

Unexpected details

Non-standard solutions

Merging of styles

*Illustrations*

Bulgari: Expressive images, unexpected solutions, graphic character, and colour contrasts.

Adolfo Courrier: unexpected details – a small lizard.

Gerald Genta: expressive forms, complicated composition, sharp facets, bright colour, graphic ornaments, and decorative surfaces.

Zannetti: expressive forms, big size, expressed details, sharp facets, and ornaments.

*Components:*

Streamlined forms

Anatomic design

Toroidal ring with a gentle bulge of a frontal part

Cabochons rising from a streamlined surface like water drops

Biomorphous patterns

Gradients from jewellery stones of various tints

Diamond paves produce a living, vibrating structure resembling the skin of a magic beast

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graphic

Diamond paves: black, white, and yellow diamonds

Stylisation of animal motives

Snakes and reptiles

Floristic and marine motives styled up to geometric abstractions (shells as spirals, stars)

*Illustration:*

Pomellato: streamlined forms, marine theme, biomorphous patterns, toroidal earrings with a gentle bulge of a frontal part

Porrati: Cabochons rising from a streamlined surface like water drops, the ring with a gentle bulge of a frontal part. Diamond paves, stone gradients, floristic ornaments.

Bibibgi': Stylisation of natural motives, curvilinear forms, paves.

Marco Bicego: everyday luxury, streamlined forms, colour cabochons of irregular form

*Components*

Amulet

Animals as symbol or amulet but not as form

Stars

Hearts

*Illustration:*

La Nouvelle bague: Ethnographic design, heart-shaped amulets, horns, ox image

Pasquale Bruni: snake-shaped talisman

## Totem Style

In ancient times, jewellery had practical designation: protection against evil spirits, magi. Whether our actual attitude to old superstitions is ironic or serious, we get pleasure of wearing small things made in the form of amulets and different favouring signs. The element of play and archaic epochs gives these subjects some charm.

Italian design is a materialised Dolce Vita, therefore, it delights, strikes, and lets nobody indifferent.