

## VICO MAGISTRETTI

He is one of the masters of Italian design and architecture of the 20th century. He was born in 1920.

Professor was astonished of how these artists wanted to move from one field to another; from designing buildings to designing interiors, from designing lamps or furniture to design graphics or also massive plans and industrial buildings. It is a proof that there was a sort of method learnt from the other masters (older ones) like Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe. This polytechnic approach allowed a lot of people (many of these architects born around the 1920, like him) to move from one field to another in order to design "from the spoon to the city" (*dal cucchiaino alla città*), which was a famous definition for the work of designers in the whole sense of the term, able to design everything (they had a method and through it, they could think of the whole environment).

The work of Vico Magistretti is emblematic for this kind of approach/capacity of moving from one field to another. His work on interior design was connected on the one hand to the work of designing entire buildings such as architectural structures and on the other hand with the field of industrial design or craftsmanship (which was increasing in Italy in the 50s and 60s in particular). We have two poles: one is the architecture (buildings) and the other one industrial design. In the middle you can find many different shades and declinations of his works.

There is plenty of material to look at and research upon. First of all, his digital archive, which was made possible by the Magistretti Archive and Foundation. This is an amazing and huge universe for us to dig into his work. <https://archivio.vicomagistretti.it/magistretti/?lang=en> It contains a digitalization of about 400 (or even more) projects designed by Vico Magistretti from 1945 to 2006. He studied in Politecnico di Milano and during the war he moved to Switzerland to protect himself from all the bad things happening in Italy. That is where he met Ernesto Nathan Rogers, who was a great intellectual and architect, part of the Architectural office BBPR, probably its most famous building is the Velasca Tower (*Torre Velasca*) in Milan. After this swiss period, he was back to Italy and started his career in 1945 in a very particular landscape situation.

In the digital archive, we have a timeline where we can browse through all his projects (a lot) and find all the information about them. This is an amazing tool to dig into his work. There is also a "pre-fab" thematic path in the section called Itineraries.

There are a lot of material and interviews of Vico Magistretti such as this one:

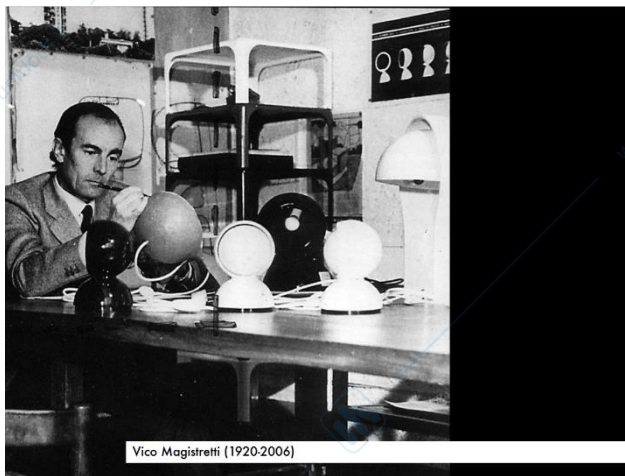
[Video: [20 years of designboom – vico magistretti]

This video presents his attitude, approach and way of thinking about design and hints for our work.

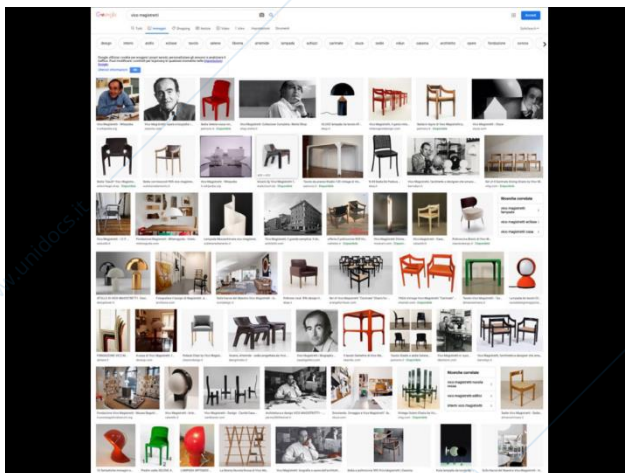
Reality is an important word for Vico because he always had a pragmatic approach to architecture and design. He was not an architect thinking of utopian projects or strange visions, like doing theoretical projects for a better world or for some wide sheet of paper. He was rather always involved in reality, dealing with concrete and real activities with clients; with real projects with lots of plans, production lines and situations. He tells us how he was always searching for a sort of materiality of his projects; how the real condition of a single project was the starting point for his work. This is something that is different for many other architects. Many other architects had an attitude towards the idea of creating a theoretical project, utopistic projects, that probably could not be build but were suggesting something for the future. In this case Magistretti is grounded on reality and on the specific conditions and clients.



This is the icon of his centennial.



This is a picture of Vico designing one of his plastic lamps, perfecting one of his masterpieces of the 1960s.



This is an overall picture taken from a simple research on google images. We can see a sort of mosaic of Vico's production, which is according to it, quite limited to his activity in industrial design because of course, online, all the market driven by companies or galleries give the idea of Vico as an industrial designer (of lamps or furniture, chairs in particular). His landscape is broader because it is not limited to some icons but rather moving from "the spoon to the city" (from small projects to masterplans or urban ideas for real cities).



quite famous in Milan in the period between the two world wars). The father died suddenly in 1945 (same year when Vico moved back to Milan and started his activity in his father's office).



He started his activity in the building of the corner of this street (Via Conservatorio), not so far away of San Babila and Duomo, close to the church of *La Passione*. On the left-hand side, next to where the three arches are, there is a white basement building, which was built by Pierre Magistretti. The windows of the first floor facing the street are part of the office, that today is the headquarter of the *Fondazione Vico Magistretti*, which is always creating exhibitions and keeping this place alive. On the corner of the street there is the building by Pierre Magistretti, but next to it (the one that is in the middle of the image, there is a building by Vico Magistretti (father & son in the same street). Actually, if you would like further, on the right-hand side of the street you would be able to see another building by Gaetano Besia, who was an old relative of Vico Magistretti. You can see how Vico's family was a family of architects with a cultural tradition of practising architecture. He was really proud of this heritage. These different shades of tradition are something that we can find in his work.

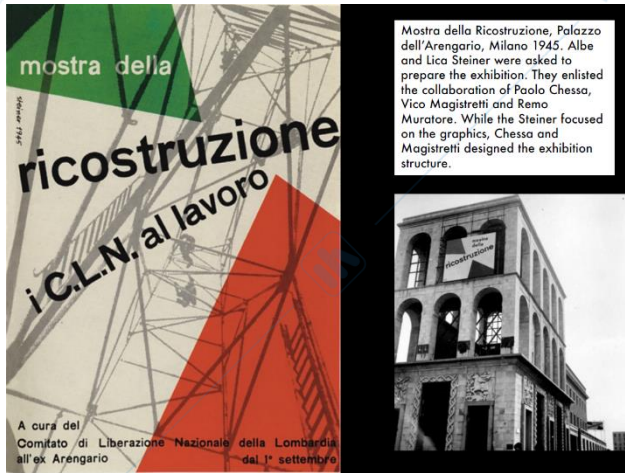


At the end of the second world war, the reconstruction period in Milan, it was a moment in which there were many problems and there was an urgency of rebuilding and rethinking the city (also the building culture) and so to have a new society. It was a very fertile period, rich of energy. Tragic for the legacy left from all the loses of the war but also a stimulating period for those like Magistretti who was about 25-26. Vico Magistretti is smiling on the left side of the photo; young architect who took over the office of his father, who was also an architect (Pierre Giulio Magistretti,

Pierre Giulio Magistretti, quite famous in Milan in the period between the two world wars). The father died suddenly in 1945 (same year when Vico moved back to Milan and started his activity in his father's office).

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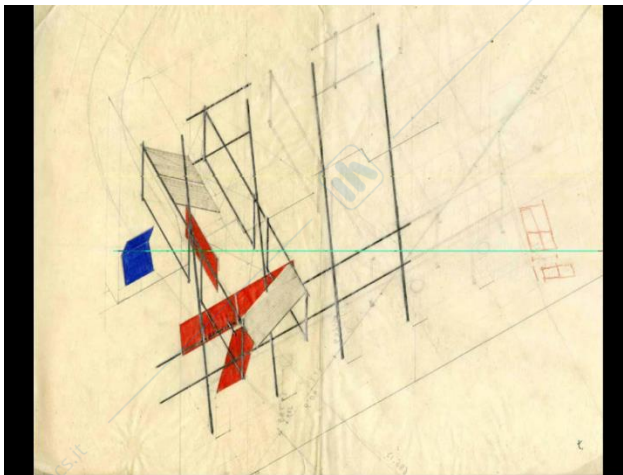
Portaluppi, Griffini, Muzio and Pier Giulio Magistretti designed for a competition the *Palazzo dell'Arengario* in Milan. It is a public palace in *Piazza del Duomo*, being a wing of the Museo del Novecento. The building was designed by the father, Pier Giulio and probably not by chance, this was a place in which Vico started his career. This was probably not the first but the second project he took part in after he became an architect in 1945.



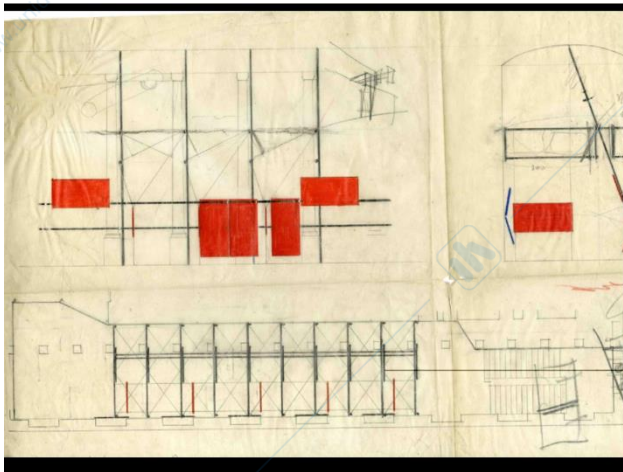
The project was the *Mostra della Ricostruzione*; exhibition of the reconstruction from all the losses and the construction of the world war II. This was an exhibition celebrating the freedom and relief of Italy after the oppression of fascism and the Nazi army. In 1945, this was an interesting occasion for him to join because he collaborated with Albe and Lica Steiner. Also, together with Paolo Chessa and Remo Muratore. This young architects and designers designed the exhibition structure (set design).

## RICOSTRUIRE

The theme of the exhibition was reconstruct: so to rebuild the country and also to explain the situation (new freedom for the country and atmosphere on the one hand of rebuilding (concept of scaffolding to bear the existing/damaged buildings) and on the other, scaffolding for building something new but with a pauperistic approach (cheap aesthetic in the way they chose materials).



These are drawings from Vico Magistretti, taken from the online archive. Wonderful and quite rare, unpublished so far showing these steel frames, with clear analogy to the scaffoldings used in the city at the same time. Also, some panels are put on this structure.



The red colour is often used by Magistretti in his projects.



This is a picture of the exhibition where there can be seen really simple and poor use of materials (frame and panels with pictures/graphics of different kinds).



This is the main hall of the *Arengario* where you can again find the scaffoldings which give you the idea of a place which is going to be rebuilt and so there is something ongoing, in progress. It is a situation of movement towards the reconstruction of the country.

You also would appreciate or link this aesthetics not only in terms of scarcity of means in this moment for Italy, just released from the war and bombing, from damages and loses, but at the same time a dynamism which is connected with the language of the avantgarde like the neoclassicism or

other styles in Europe before the world war II. So, there is a connection with other artistic architectural movements.



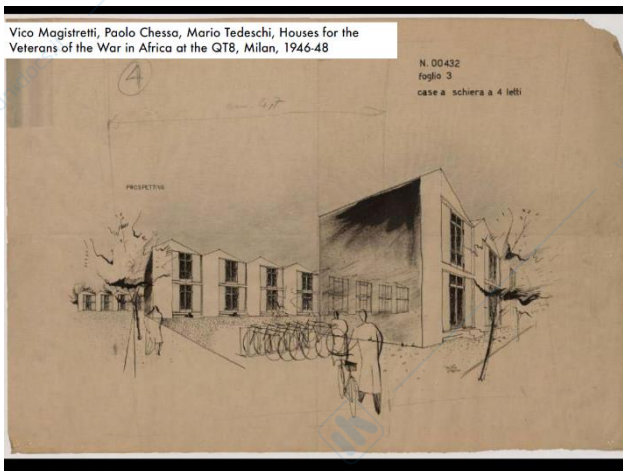
Same atmosphere, same period, same effort, same challenges: how to rebuild the country? How to build a new city after this break (after world war II)? You see on the one hand the lesson learned by the masters of the 1920-30-40s but at the same time with a new attitude and probably considering more factors, elements, aspects and perspectives of a world which is different from the world before the war. The *ottava Triennale di Milano* (8<sup>th</sup> triennial exhibition in Milan) was and still is a great international exhibition and event organized by the *Fondazione Triennale di Milano*

(Triennial Foundation of Milan) in the *Palazzo dell'Arte* but also outside, which every 3 years tries to show the state of the art of architecture, design, decorative arts and arts in general. In 1947 there was this 8<sup>th</sup> Triennale that was particularly important because it was the first one after the war. The architectural and design culture was charged of the idea of showing people what to do, how to build a new city and country, of course according to the most updated logics and theories in the field of modern architecture and design.



Quartiere Triennale Ottava, QT8, Milano

This is the *Quartiere Triennale Ottava*, QT8, a model neighbourhood designed by several modern architects with the direction of Piero Bottoni (great architect and also urbanist). He managed to direct the whole design of this neighbourhood in the north-west part of Milan, close to San Siro and Magistretti joined this theme. He was asked to design different projects.



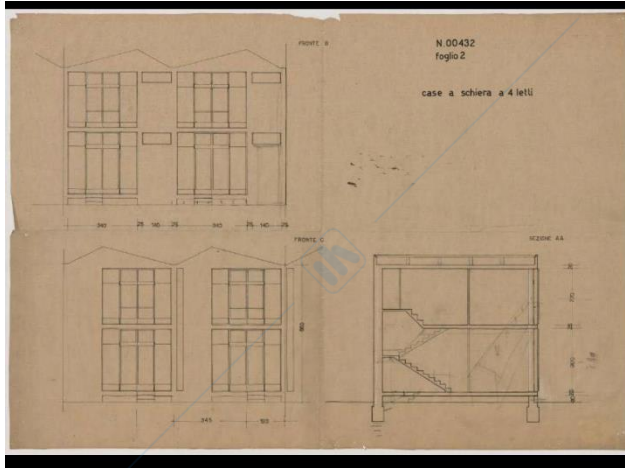
Vico Magistretti, Paolo Chessa, Mario Tedeschi, Houses for the Veterans of the War in Africa at the QT8, Milan, 1946-48

Magistretti has become famous not only for his great projects for the industrial bourgeoisie in Milan or certain affluent part of the city, because of his villas in Brianza, in Lombardy or wealthy apartments and houses in Milan and other regions. He became also famous for a certain kind of clients who exploited his great hand and mind for the projects. At the same time, (this is probably more hidden in what people knows about Magistretti) he carried on for his entire work and life, a special attention for the design of what we may could house for all; good design solutions in particular for

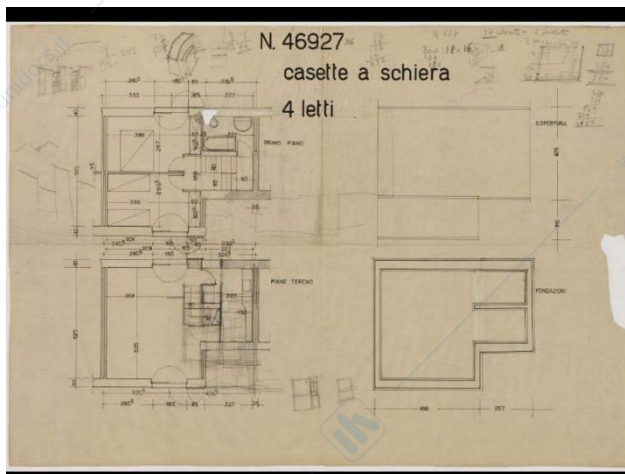
the design of the interior (small and standardized dimensions). The idea of designing something which also with less money and means could be a good solution for a larger path of the population. This small team of architects designed some houses for the veterans of the war in Africa who came back of the war in this neighbourhood QT8 in the late 1940s. So, you see really simple houses, quite abstract in their volumes.



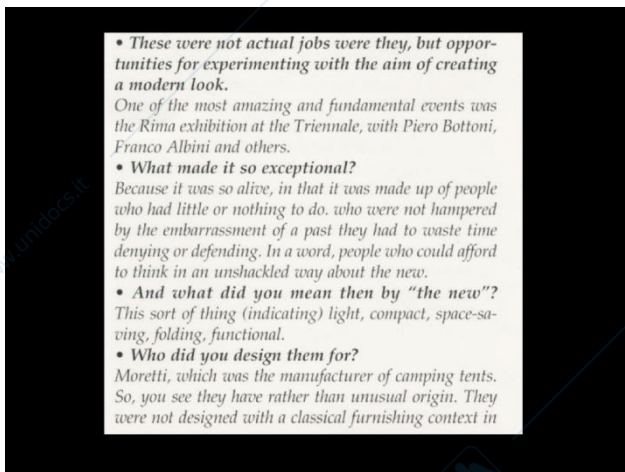
This are the realized houses. You can find both a modern approach (process of abstraction, cutting every kind of decoration) and at the same time the use of a steep roof, not a flat roof like many other modern architects of the time did. The idea instead of searching for a dialogue/balance between a great modernity/simplicity/poverty (in a good sense) and giving the idea not of a white box but of "real" house. This steep house creates a sort of skyline giving you the idea of movement and probably more "emotional" qualities to this very simple and cheap houses.



On the inside they are quite simple and schematic in their section.



These are four beds apartments. Even in plan this is a very simple and poor plan built in 1946-48 for these veterans coming from the front.



This is an interview to Magistretti:

*Question: These were not actual hobs were they, but opportunities for experimenting with the aim of creating a modern look.*

*Answer: One of the most amazing and fundamental events was the Rima exhibition at the Triennale, with Piero Bottoni, Franco Albini and others.*

Rima exhibition was an exhibition held at the *Palazzo dell'Arte*, so at the headquarters of the Triennale, within the *Parco Sempione* organized by the

*Riunione italiana per le mostre di arredamento*. This was a cluster of people studying, producing and exhibiting furniture in this years in which these architects (Magistretti was one of the youngest's) were asked to design/ create some prototypes of very simple and cheap pieces of furniture that where needed in this period in Italy. At that time, in Italy there was a lack of 80 million of rooms/apartments. The idea was: how can we provide an answer to this lack of furniture in Italian houses? It was an exhibition organized in order to give an answer, with cheap and flexible, wood-made pieces of furniture for a re-starting country (not luxury items). Poor but clever and smart pieces of furniture.

*Question: What made it so exceptional?*

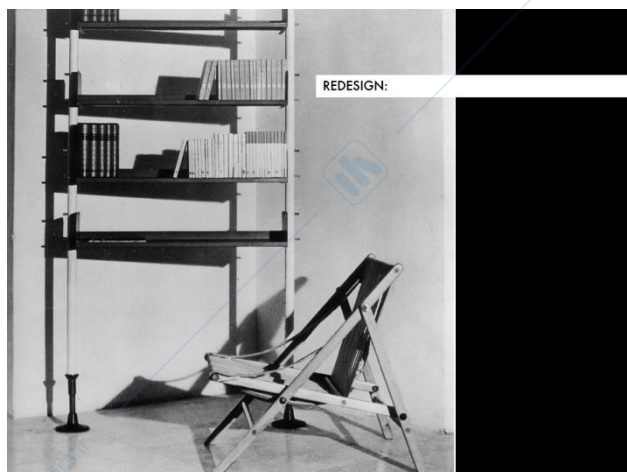
Answer: Because it was so alive, in that it was made up of people who had little or nothing to do, who were not hampered by the embarrassment of a past they had to waste time denying or defending. In a word, people who could afford to think in an unshackled way about the new.

This idea, which is common in Vico, about the recurring idea of looking towards the future but at the same time not forgetting the past; double movement towards the future (designing modernity, modern) but at the same time not to forget the past (tradition).



This is what we can see in his pieces of furniture for this RIMA exhibition 1946. It is a very poor folding chair covered with a stretched cloth. This is the re-design (re-interpretation) of a folding chair which was quite common in Italy (not only) at that time. The idea was to have a cheap object, flexible, foldable so you can easily remove, clean etc. There are many hints for his future activity/work. The idea of reconsidering an archetypical way of solving the problem of sitting down. Vico is starting from something that is already existing and then on this substance of existing pace to be able to make

transformations, to perfect the substance of, in this case, this chair.



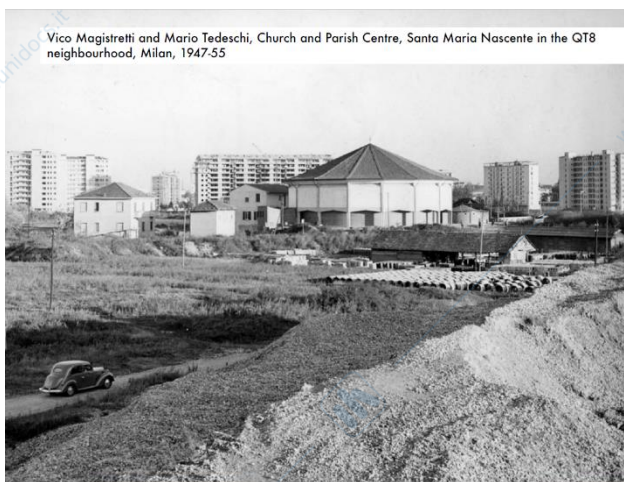
In this picture there is the Piccy folding chair but also a really flexible library, made out of shelves that can be adapted in height and the position of the boards. Again, we have got the idea of using very poor materials and a quite simple design in order to create something flexible and fitting the present situation (of emergency, lack of money and production possibilities).

At that time, Italy didn't have a system of production and distribution (what we call the system of Italian design like we have today). There wasn't a network of big companies but rather very small laboratories/craftsmanship in which wood and in particular in Brianza (Lombardy) there were very small realities that weren't like we think of design today; they were small and limited realities only able to produce very small series of furniture and not through industrialized processes. We had to wait few years before having a bigger spread of the condition of industrialization of Italian design. Something that we must consider when we look at the design of Vico Magistretti and his work, because in this moment the "ground" was not ready for a real development of the Italian industrial design as we know it today. That is also why Magistretti, who is an architect, by training designed some furniture but mainly designing buildings.



him in these years.

The man on the left-hand side of the picture is Ernesto Nathan Rogers; Saint Ernesto because he was the most important master of Vico Magistretti. They met in Lausanne (Switzerland) during the war and he trained Vico and he learnt a lot from Ernesto. It is interesting the process of public exposure of Vico Magistretti and the way he become a quite famous and later a celebrated architect and designer. One of these paths was stimulated by Ernesto Nathan Rogers, who published this furniture (Piccy and bookshelf) in the Domus magazine, which was directed by

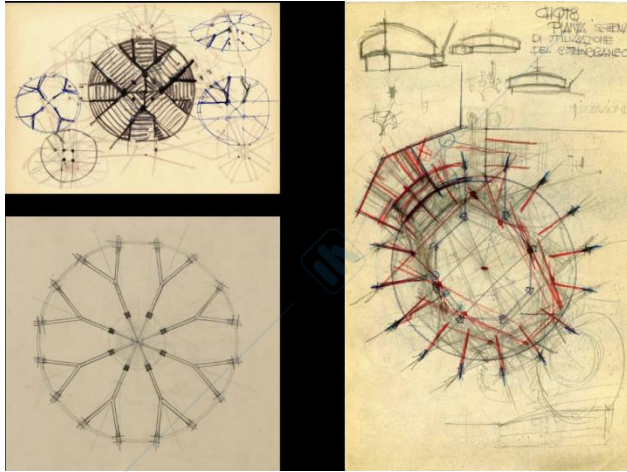


Vico Magistretti and Mario Tedeschi, Church and Parish Centre, Santa Maria Nascente in the QT8 neighbourhood, Milan, 1947-55

Looking at the architecture again, at the QT8 Vico Magistretti with his colleague Mario Tedeschi won a competition for a Church and Parish Centre, *Santa Maria Nascente*. It is an interesting building because it is a church in the middle of nowhere, at that time outskirts of the city with a lot of buildings growing up around.



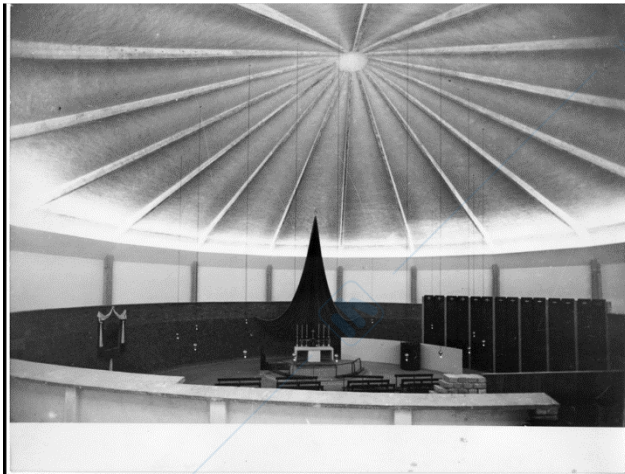
Apart from that, the building is the same economic, social and productive context because it is poor, made out of very simple materials (reinforced concrete structure and bricks).



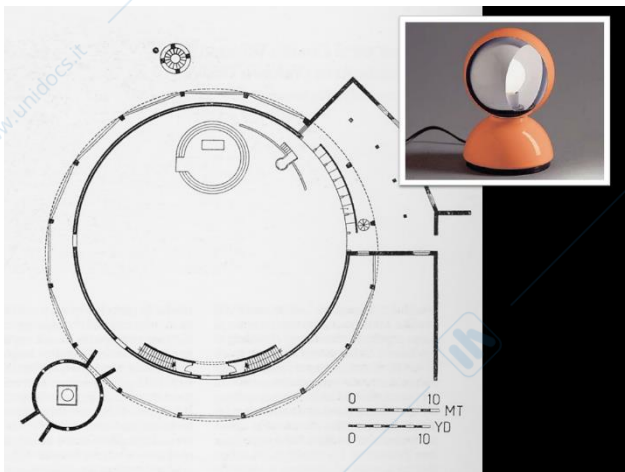
These sketches (studies) are interesting because they show Magistretti working on the perfection of the shape. This would connect to the history of religious spaces (the theme of the central plan in the history of architecture). He is exploring the way this structure is made and what is the relationship between the space and structure of this building. It seems he is searching for a round gothic structure with these beams and pillars (skeleton-like structure) which is supporting the roof (cupola) but again, in quite a poor way (need for really cheap materials and buildings). The building's

aesthetics is something that came out of this condition.

These projects are completely within the situation, embed in this social and economical bankrupt.



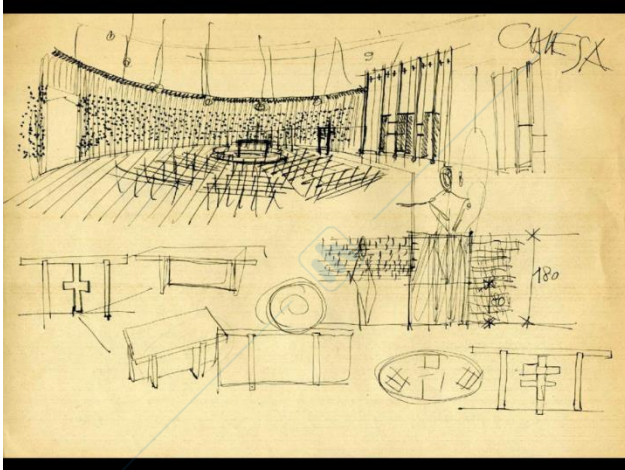
This is the main space, the great hall with the synthetic structure that you can see and experience from the ground.



This is the plan; very simple one. There is a sort of dialogue with a project of Vico Magistretti designed many years later (the end of the 1960s) which is the famous *Eclisse* Lamp. This is a small table lamp to read before sleeping. It is interesting the analogies that can be traced between both projects in the way there is a search for simplicity: on the one hand due to poverty coming from the context of the end of the 40s, but at the same time simplicity in the search of abstraction.

They are different projects, periods, scale, material and users, but these play of

circles/spheres and simple shapes intertwined one within the other is something interesting to be pointed out and collect in a sort of unconscious atlas of forms/shapes that Magistretti (like many other designers and architects) had in his pocket.

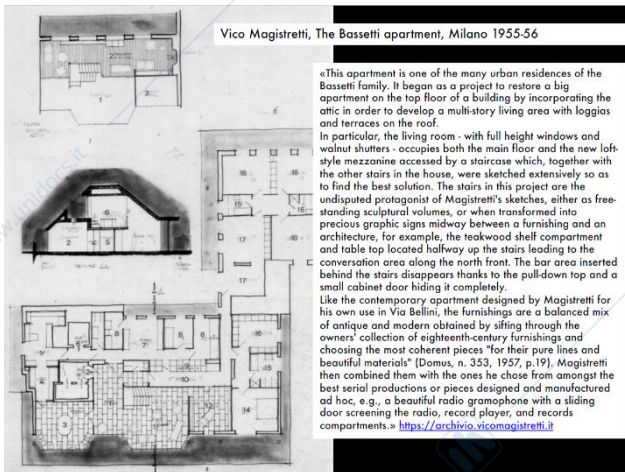


Again, these sketches by Vico studying the interior space of this church; the idea of the central space, hanging lamps from the ceiling and again the idea of a circle/sphere (like a dialogue between the scale of a simple lamp and the big scale of the building/structure).



Also, the play on the texture of the interior space with the pattern of bricks and shadow and light.

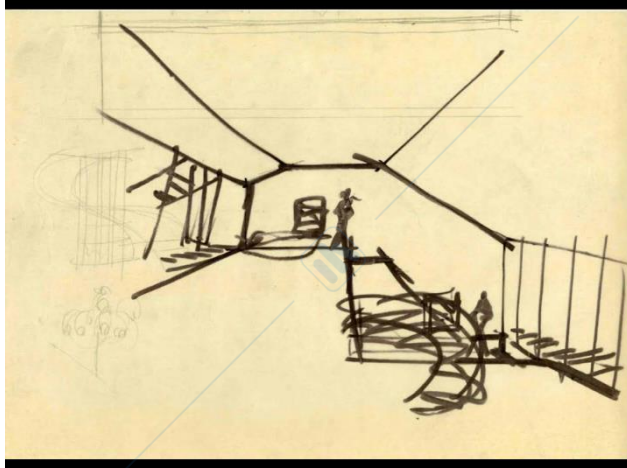
TRADITION AND MODERNITY



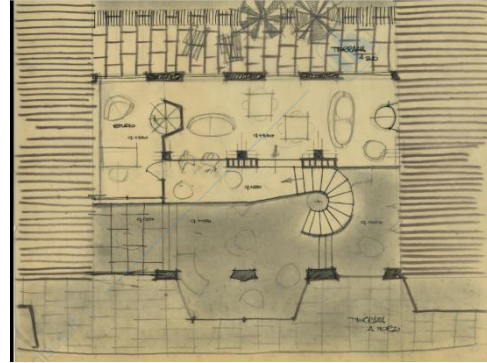
Here we are in the years 1955-56, in the middle of a great ride towards the economic boom/miracle of those years when society was evolving and the industrial production was running, good moment for companies and people to create new things.

Vico became one of the most appreciated architects for part of the wealthier class of the Milanese society. Families like the Bassetti or other family collected with local industry chose Magistretti to design their apartments, which at the same time of being private places they had in the living room space

to host people from the outside such as friends but also clients (spaces in which the idea of privacy was also connected to an idea of showing a certain sober. This is one of the many urban residences that can be found in the Magistretti archive. It is the top floor of the building, also connected to the attic on top.



This is a beautiful sketch by Magistretti, reflecting upon trying to imagine the space (double height space), visual and spatial connection between the first and top floor of the attic of this apartment. Also trying to show the space through a plastic shape like a curved staircase.



In the final version you can see that the curve disappeared and there is a straight staircase with two ramps. Needs to be underlined again, this time not in a building nor an object, the presence of both connections of tradition and modernity.



Magistretti is designing a modern space with simplicity (clear walls, few different materials) together with, on the one hand the transparency allowed by a modern approach to design an apartment (very huge windows giving a great view on the city) and on the other, the presence of pieces of furniture which are connected to a longer tradition, which are part of a heritage (such as the table next to the window) which is composed of objects coming from the past centuries. You can also see a couple of well-known pieces of furniture by Mies van der Rohe.



You can see how there is a sort of dialogue between; on the one hand, the family (sober tradition) and a sort of movement towards modernity (part of the modern movement of a city that is growing economically and also in terms of culture). And in the other hand, Magistretti (modern architect) and Magistretti the guardian of a certain kind of atmosphere in which is able to respect a dialogue between modernity and tradition.



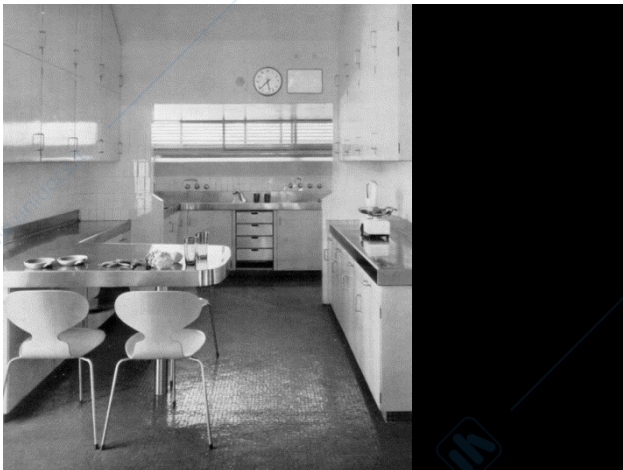
This are really interesting picture because again you can see a modern frame with the large windows (we understand we are not in a 18-19<sup>th</sup> century building or an old neoclassical palace with narrow windows and full of decorations and ornaments. We can see normal ornaments from architecture, but we see chairs which are not chairs by Mies van der Rohe, not by the Bauhaus, but objects coming from a longer tradition from the legacy/heritage of the family.



Vico Magistretti, Amaja Table, 1960 (Azucena / Gavina)

In this picture can be seen some porcelain in the background. Again, a good approach in setting these items in a sort of exhibition (in a light, modern lined shelf. In front of this way of evoking the past and the private collection of the family, there is a really modern table. On the one hand is a really modern piece of furniture called Amaja Table and produced by Azucena/ Gavina (two different companies). On the other hand, at the same time, is also like fitting this kind of atmosphere because its capable of sharing an atmosphere together with this old chairs and Chinese

porcelain. It is a kind of decoration considering both the future and the past (something that was possible but not common before the war).



In the kitchen, we can see a completely different atmosphere. The kitchen should be the most modern place in our house. Here we don't have the need to keep or show a sort of public face of the family (no need of dialogue between tradition-family-modernity) but we can be totally modern with modern materials like aluminium surfaces which are really easy to clean and use. Modern and well-known chairs from northern Europe. We have modern materials and surfaces all around the space. Magistretti was really good from moving from one register to another, it is quite eclectic also

because he is able to move his hand, mind and spirit in different directions.

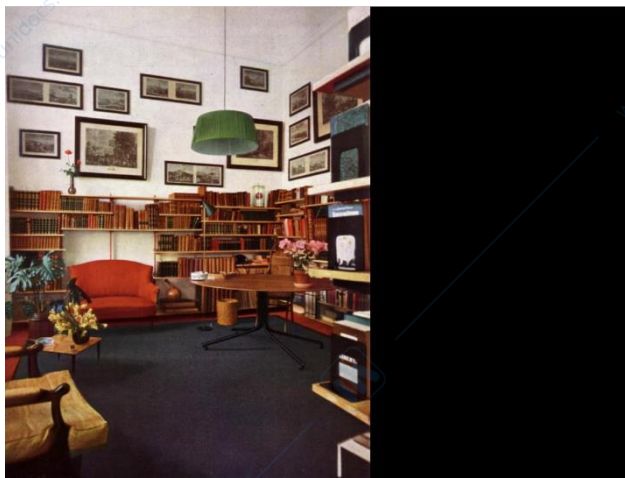


Vico Magistretti, Appartamento Gavazzi, Milano, 1957-58

Again, this relationship between tradition and modernity is visible in this apartment, Gavazzi apartment in Milan from the end of the 50s. It is quite interesting because again we can see the compresence between these two poles and also moments in which he is able to break the rules and experiment with a wider freedom.

This is a study (right hand side) sketch for the living room. Again, in this case we have pieces of furniture which are coming from the past (old clock) and this large frame for this door it is something that is trying to dialogue with a sober

atmosphere of the family and the house.

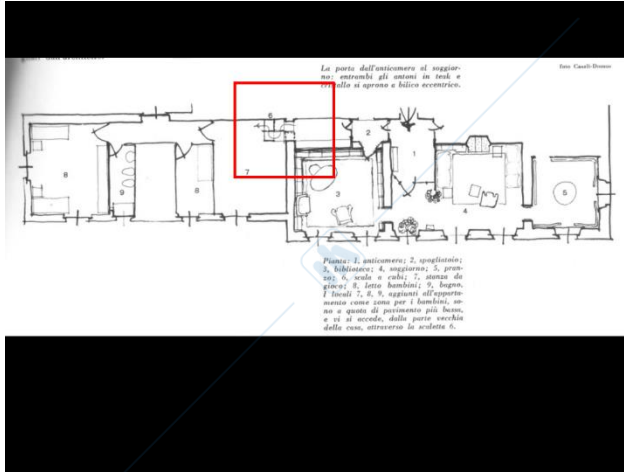


The attitude is probably more visible here, in this room in which you can see the persistence of a comfortable or soft approach to mixing/blending the new and the old. In this case we have these paintings hanged on the wall, books, old armchair, old sofa but at the same time we have like a really dynamic order and movement of these shelves which are, of course made out of wood and not "experimental", but designed and put in place with a certain rhythm, movement, could be connected to some avantgarde experiments of the 1920-30s. You also have the table again, modern with steel

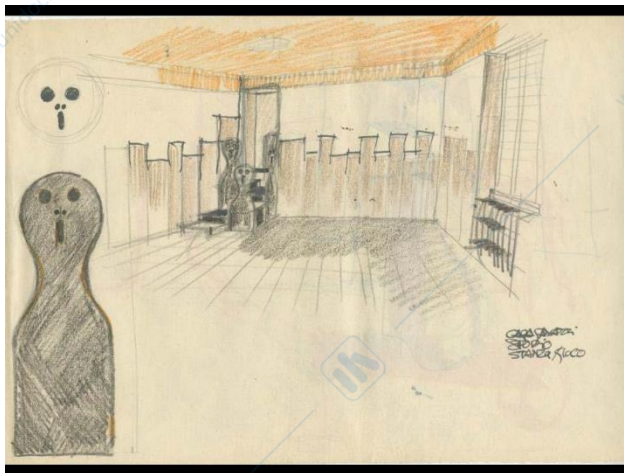
legs (industrial logic) but with the wooden top of the table creating a bigger dialogue with the rest of the space.



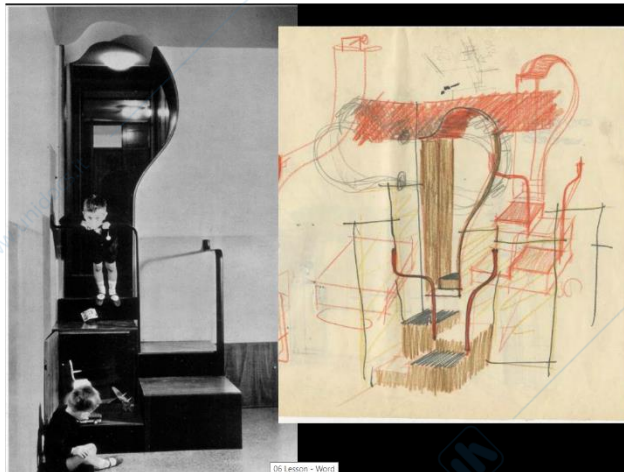
This is another perspective with a sort of Thonet chair (again past and modernity).



moment of freedom for Magistretti, also because these two apartments were on two different levels (difference in height).



Magistretti was studying the right way through sketches to go from one room/apartment to the other. He is experimenting with these shapes which are like ghosts/strange figures (bowling pins) to play with space.



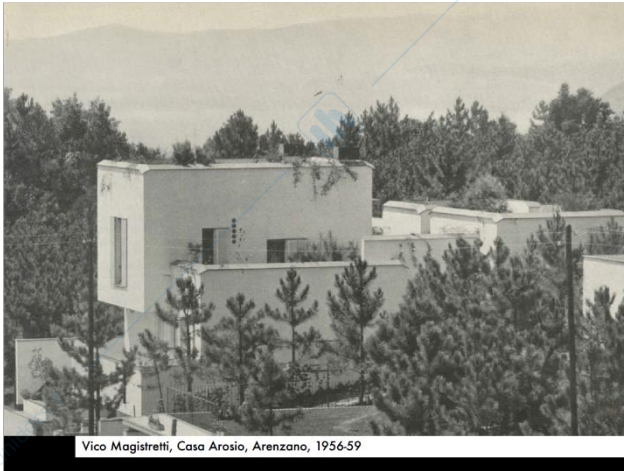
This is the result, which is a small masterpiece organizing the space. You can see on the background one of the two apartments which is on a higher level and he is cutting this wall (bearing wall) keeping a minimal opening in the part where your legs are but enlarging the shape in the upper part, creating a sort of curve (more baroque, expressionist shape) which allows you to have a wider perception of the space when you are coming from the other apartment (at the height of your eyes you can perceive more openness of the space in this passage).

This is a great moment of freedom and also proves that Magistretti is not only the guy of simplicity, not only focused on discipline and simplicity and abstraction, but in this project we can see how is also able to experiment (more organic, baroque, free shape which is not for free, has some visual, spatial and structural reasons). This is a good exercise for him to test his skills in design interiors but also facing structural problems.

The second aspect is this particular small staircase designed for children. It is a sort of playgrounds in which each step is a sort of box able to contain toys and whatever. It is not only a stair but also a piece of furniture, with which children can play and also store their things within this small architecture. This is a meaningful detail showing the originality of Magistretti and also

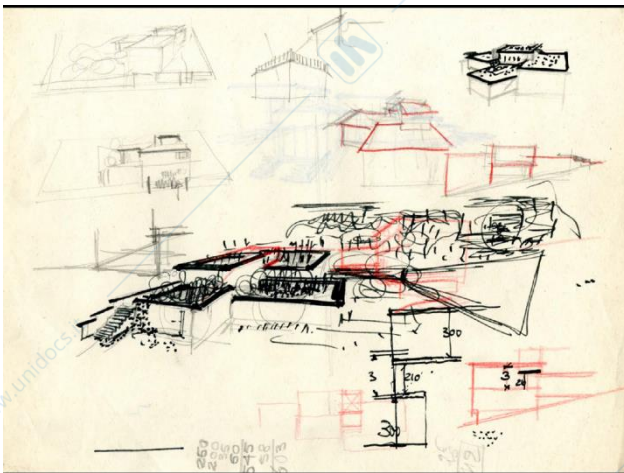
the freedom of his designs in particular facing issues/task of redesigning or refurbishing an interior as this one.

### INNER LANDSCAPE



This is a wonderful house designed by Vico Magistretti in Arenzano, not so far away from Genova. This is a house which was also part of a strong debate about the role and future of modern architecture in the 1950s. It is called *Casa Arosio* (being Arosio the surname of the client), an engineer based in Milan but with this small house in Arenzano, facing the sea. This is a really interesting example of designing the relationship between the inside and the outside. Also, in relationship with the natural landscape or the nature around.

This part is called inner landscape because we can see how Magistretti in the middle of this booming year (the end of the 50s) with the spread of the phenomenon of tourism (people planning and building houses for their holidays on the seaside, like in this case in Arenzano). The main point here from professor's perspective is the way through which Magistretti approached the design of a very small house. Already from the picture you can see the artificial landscape that is created in a dialogue with the typical terraces used in Liguria to cultivate land and an architectural landscape that he built in this house.

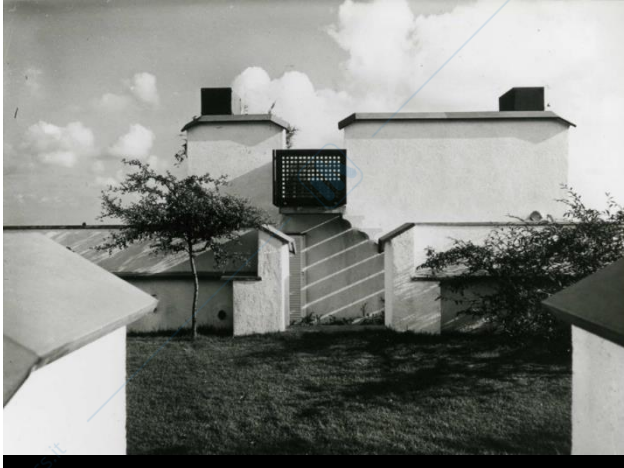


These sketches, (one of the professor's favourites among all of Magistretti's works) show how Vico is trying to plan the house starting with its relationship with the landscape and with the terracing around the house; with a quite pure and traditional technology (means) he imagined this juxtaposition of platforms (terraces) which are of course the platforms outside the houses.

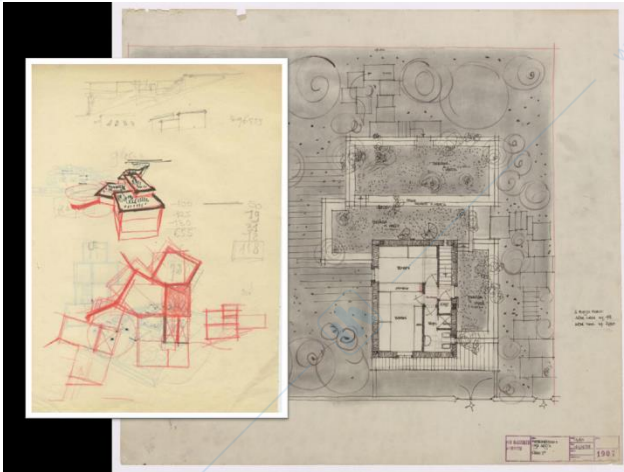


Here you can see some terraces with some heights and walls to contain a distance outside the house but this principle, which is a huge part of the landscape in Liguria (where you have slopes running through mountains and hills or to the sea). This same approach is used and explored within the planning of the interior space. (That's why professor entitled this way "inner landscape, because it's an outer artificial landscape). This concept is absorbed by Magistretti's house (*Casa Arenzano*).

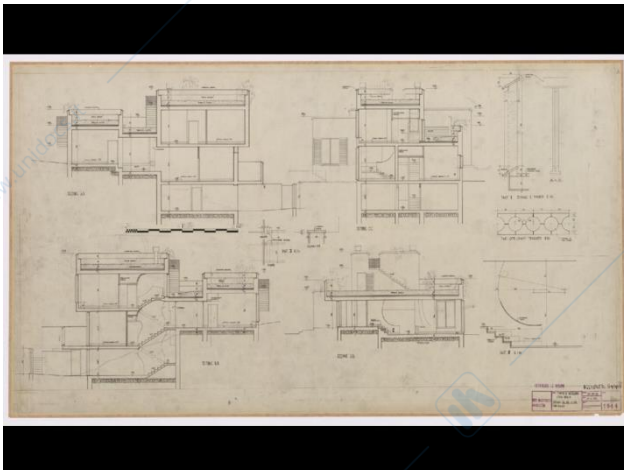
There is a sort of mix of artificial and natural. Nature and artificial are, if not blended, juxtaposed, put side by side or one on top of the other.



This is the roof, top of one of the interior spaces, which is covered with grass. What is it? Is it a roof or is it part of the garden? Is it an interior or exterior? Of course, it is an exterior, but it is conceived and planned as a room. This is a room on top and outside of the house. There are benches and also a staircase that brings you up to the top terrace of this house.

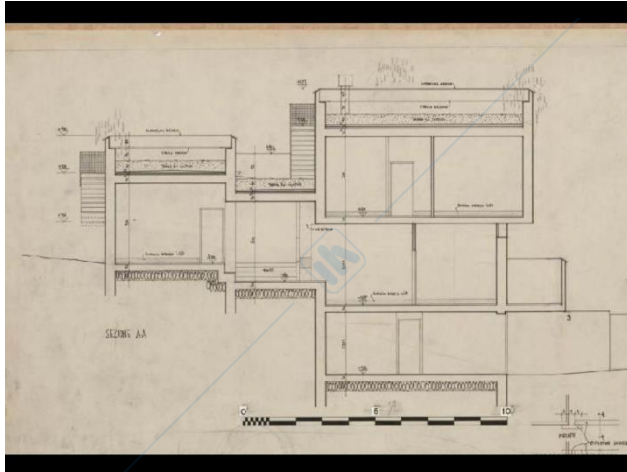


"A house is a society of rooms". In this case we have a society of rooms which are rooms inside the building, inside the house and outside you can also divide into two different spaces: rooms which are terraces or roofs and more open rooms which are the terracing around the house. It is a quite complex strategy.

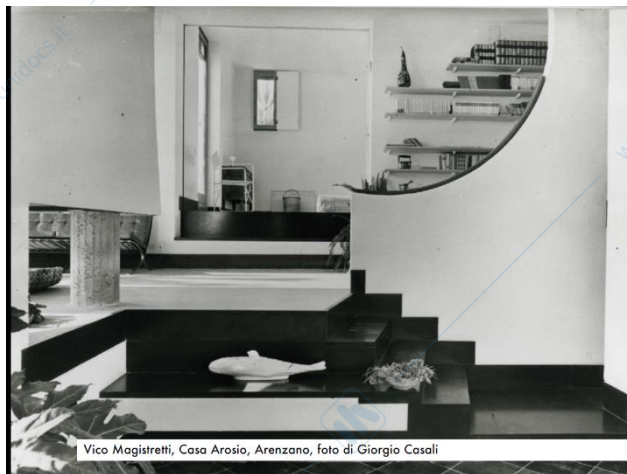


Very tiny but complex house where you see a movement in space in the section with different terraces but also inside with different heights and levels. A complexity in the perception of the space which is fluid (there is a fluency in the organization, planning and design of these spaces).

You will also see if you look at the section on the left hand side, the part with the staircase and find some curves which are quite similar to those we have seen in the Gavazzi apartment (wonderful small detail of the passage between the two apartments).



Again, as a close up on this section of play with heights, we can remember the concept developed by Adolf Loos "Raumplan", having more freedom in the section and also an interconnection between spaces (visual and also emotional/spatial interconnection).

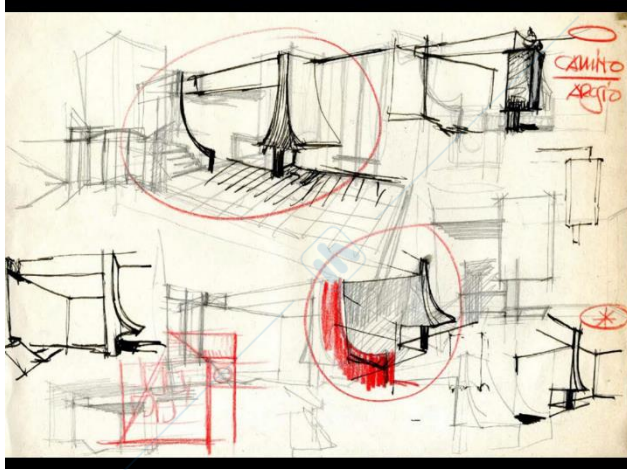


This is a picture of one of the main spaces, it is the living room that is connected to other spaces through stairs such as a small studio or domestic office. He is dividing different spaces with different functions but without just building a wall because it is a tiny house, and you want to have a communication/dialogue between the inside and the outside. This is what he did in order to do so: a sort of separation with different heights and some steps, following according to the terracing outside but keeping the whole space together, a fluency and having a more sophisticated way to divide spaces while maintaining the overall atmosphere.

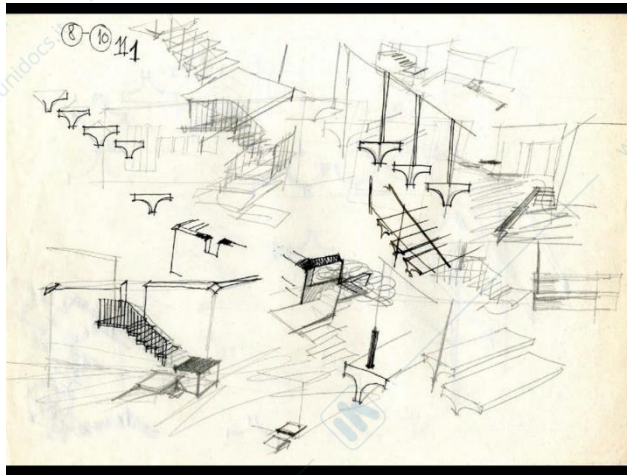
This is not a hint given by Vico: the shape of the separation wall with a sort of curve, dividing two spaces (new version of the curve separating the different apartments Gavazzi). Magistretti will explore and use this kind of shape in many different projects.



It is interesting to look at the perspective Magistretti had for many years in front of his office. This is the church of *Santa Maria della Passione* and you can see part of the baroque façade of the building in which we can find an analogy with the shape of the wall in the previous image and in many other walls by Magistretti.



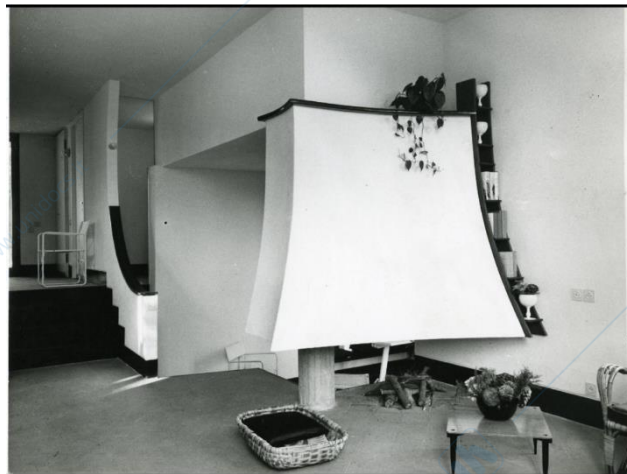
He insists on this shape for separating wall, for this chimney. Chimney is one of the topics you can find from the archive, how to design fireplaces/chimneys (all the system around it) using this curves and organic shapes? Many different examples can be found.

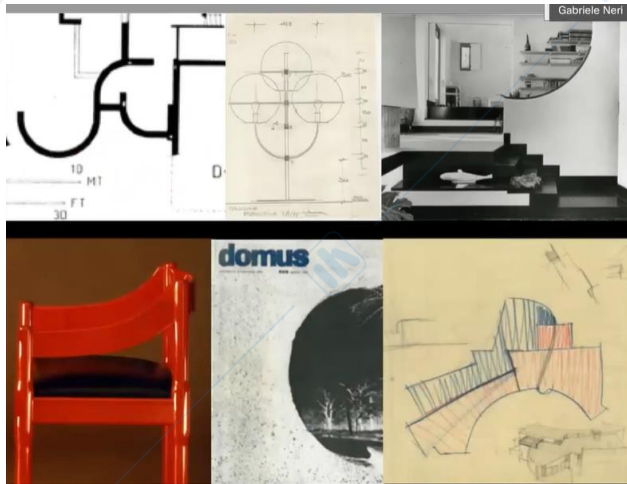


These are other sketches in which probably you can also find this curve, which is part of the circle, in the steps. Also, in the following image:



This is a view of the fireplace, which is again quite modern in its way of showing its concrete reinforcement and at the same time suspending from a sort of tent or a hat with the fireplace below.





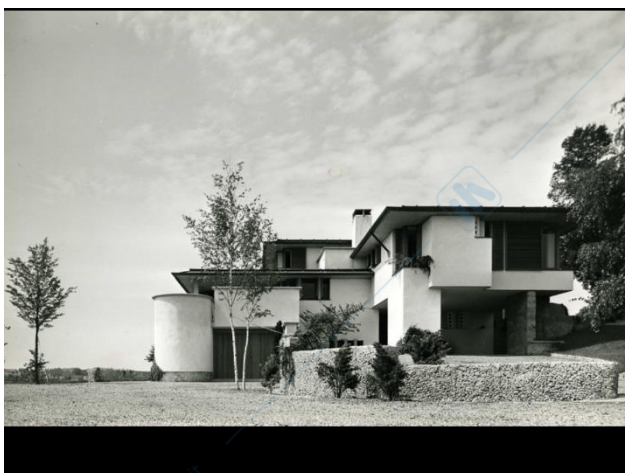
In this picture we can see a collage made out of 6 pictures. You can see how the curve in the *Casa Arosio* (up left hand side) is something we can also find in some design for lamps or in a art of this plan for another wonderful villa, also something similar included in the design of the red armchair, house wall and plan of the house in Brianza.

Some figures/shapes are familiar to Magistretti and he is able to use them in different situations.

We could also reflect upon the use of this kind of curve which is of course something going against the logic of a simple square. Curves are something different, recurring geometry which leads us to the world of an organic architecture, the world of a more emotional approach between natural shapes and industrial geometry. There is again a balance or dialogue in Magistretti between two poles: one which is the one of the perfect geometry (abstraction of perfect elementary volumes) and at the same time, being free to experiment curves and organic shapes of course in dialogue with a specific case study.



This is another wonderful house for the Bassetti family (same family of the previous apartment) in Azzate (close to Varese). You see on the top of a hill, again terracing where Magistretti put this house which is a really complex compenetration play of different volumes.

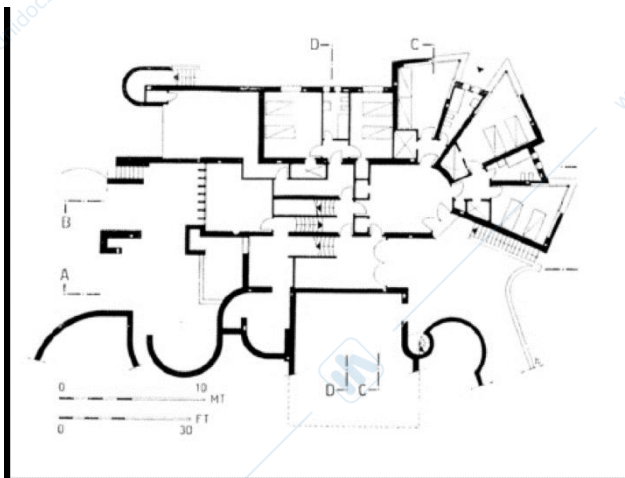


We can see different volumes, spaces, shades... Everything is connecting in order to create not a uniform block, not a single geometrical block, but rather a sort of landscape made out of different shapes; sounds and poses, darkness, shadow and light, black and white. It is again the idea of creating a sort of landscape thanks to a really clever manipulating, managing and mastering architecture shapes, forms, spaces and functions. It was really good at managing all this geometrical and space complexity.



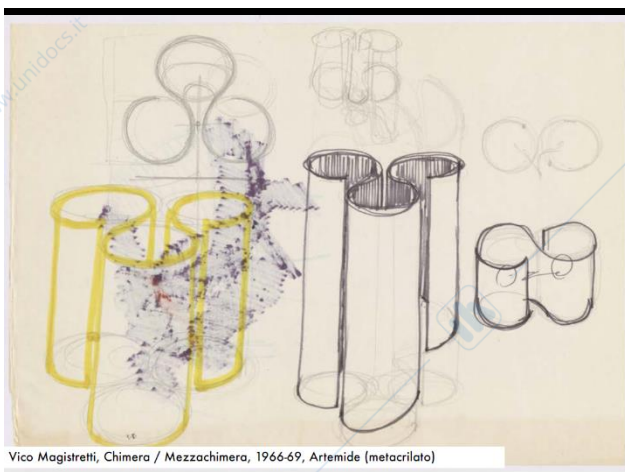
Picture of the inside, in which again we can clearly see this idea already seen in Arenzano of "Raumplan"; this idea of playing with sections of buildings having double, triple or single heights and then also having a visual and spatial connection between all this part. This staircase with the steps free in the air so you can see through them, letting air and also your eyes to perceive the whole volume of this house. The use of wood in contrast with the white of the walls is again suggesting some simplicity with connection to the Nordic and Scandinavian approach. There is also

some Japanese influence in the abstraction of some details and in the contrast between two colours (white and wood).



This is the plan. It is interesting because, again, the idea of Magistretti who wanted always to simplify things is not always true. This is not a simple plan, not a minimalistic one, not a reduction to the minimum of the complexity of a space and a plan but rather a complex space/plan. A plan dealing with, on the one hand, the landscape and terracing; a plan in which you can find his wish to face challenges/problems/issues. He accomplished this mission. The structure of the plan is quite clear; in the middle you have all the staircases and services (sort of core in the centre of the plan), on

the left hand side there is a sort of crown of bedrooms for all the children, on the bottom part of the drawing there are some curves (again, probably we could put them closer to the curves we have already seen). Professor underlines an analogy between these curves in the lower part of the picture and these other ones:



Vico Magistretti, Chimera / Mezzachimera, 1966-69, Artemide (metacrilato)

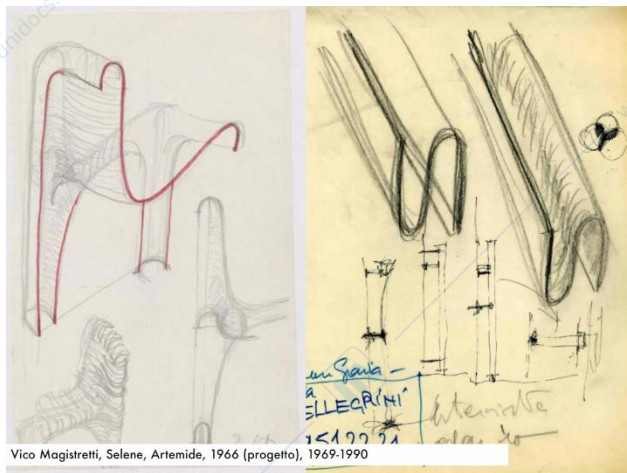
These other shapes were designed in the same period for a completely different task. In this case he is designing lamps and other objects using the potentialities of plastics. In this case he is not designing huge walls to support ground, he is designing something like the following image:



This is the result of this research of curving/bending/shaping plastic in order to get something really light made out of a really thin sheet of plastic.

This is a really clever experiment in what we can call resistance by shape; the idea of using a thin sheet of plastic which, if not bended, it would be self-standing, it would be without any structural property. In this case, bending this thin sheet you can achieve this structural rigidity and so you can have an object like a lamp or also the well-known Selene chair, which was conceived starting from the same approach (bending and

shaping plastic with the use of moulds).

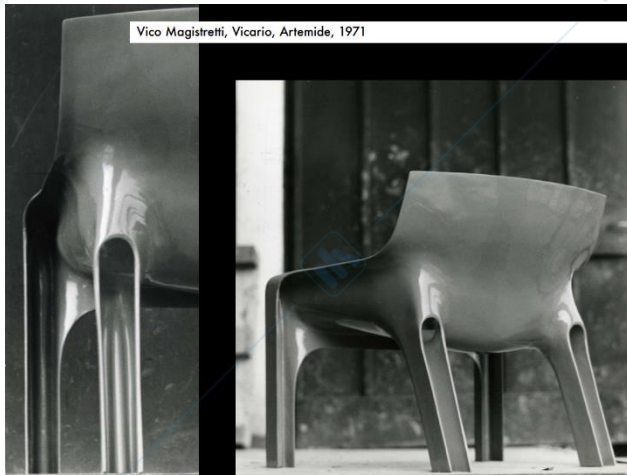


Vico Magistretti, Selene, Artemide, 1966 (progetto), 1969-1990

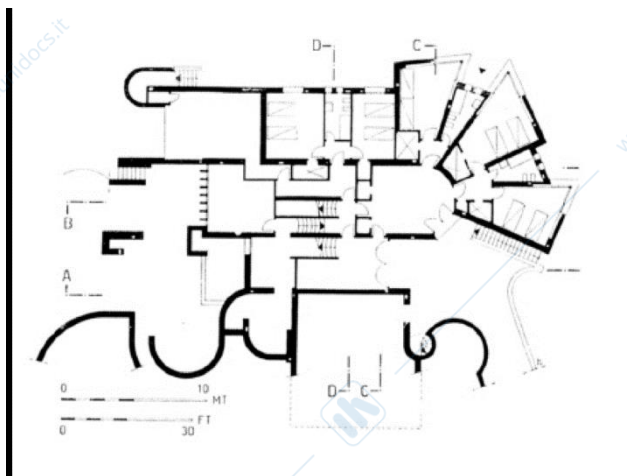
Vico Magistretti, Gaudì, Artemide, 1971 (Reglar. Il buco nella scocca permette di ottenere, con un unico stampo, i braccioli e l'impilabilità delle sedie)



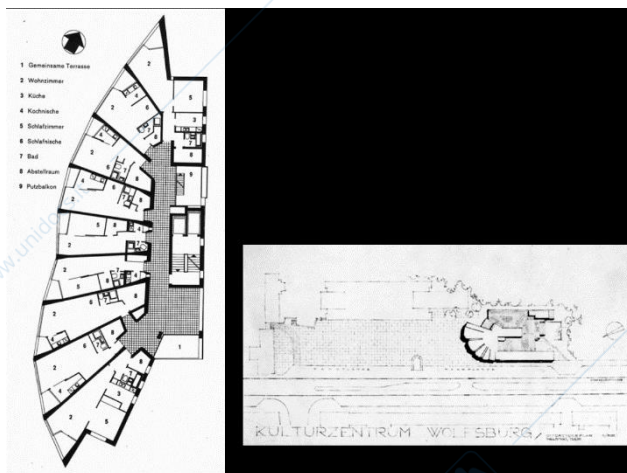
Other interpretation of plastic chairs like the Gaudì in 1971.



Or the wonderful chair Vicario, 1971 as well. This brave details through which Magistretti shows us how is able to work and dialogue together with all the people involved in a really complex industrial process, as well as with people coming from a craftsmanship tradition: mastering both sides of the production; the old traditional use of wood and reflection upon the archetype, legacy and heritage of traditional furniture as well as a new perspective towards modernity industry and mass production.

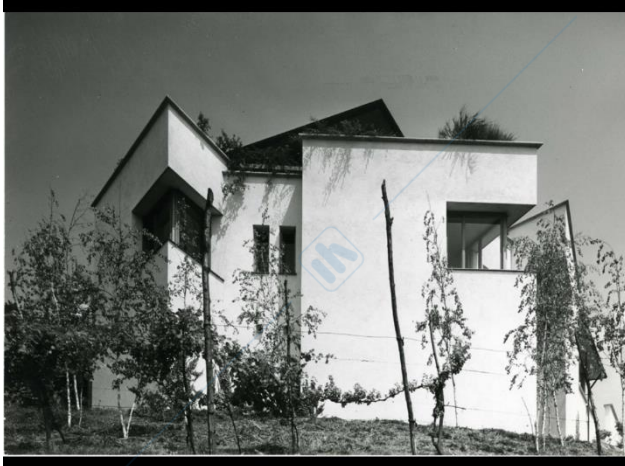


In the right top part, there are like three big triangles and two in between them. Again, in this sort of play, it is interesting the connection with the work of Alvar Aalto.



This is a project of Alvar Aalto in Bremen (Germany), an apartment building in which Alvar Aalto tested and worked around the idea of not having parallel walls (no regular structure) but rather opening and differentiating all the angles, perspectives and visuals for small apartments.

In Magistretti you see the same idea for the previous three bedrooms with bathrooms among them.



Again, here you can see from the outside part of the house, the simplicity (no decoration, no ornamentation) but at the same time the complex manipulation of geometry and relation with the landscape around the house.



Vico Magistretti, Town Hall, Cusano Milanino / Alvar Aalto, Sainatsalo Town Hall

We can also find some precise or explicit references to Alvar Aalto (not only). This is particularly clear looking at the Town Hall of Cusano Milanino (outskirts of Milan), which can remind us other nordic designers for the use of these geometries, inclination for the roof, bricks and so on.



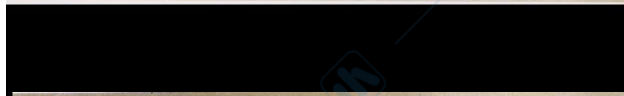
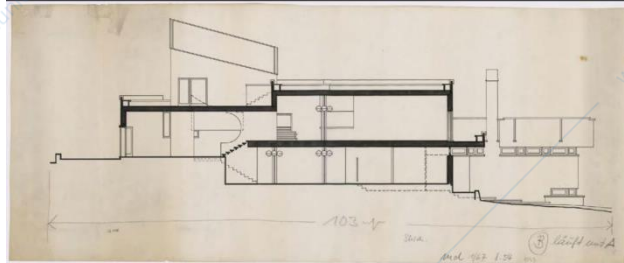
This is clear also looking at Magistretti's work as industrial designer. Here you can see a detail of one of his table's for *De Padova* as well as another chair in curved wood. Of course the art of curving wood is something that came from Alvar Aalto and from the Nord. This is something that thanks to many influences and references such as Maddalena de Padova and Gio Ponti (really involved in this process of importing from the 40s and later on, the wonderful furniture from Scandinavia to Italy).



This is the Golf Club in Carimate, which still is functioning. Again, a building melted in the landscape, a building with strong relationship with its surroundings. Terraces are opening towards the landscape.



Again, inside there is this play between the section with different heights.



Spaces are separated in this sort of English club, of course, the references are clear, but this is a sort of openness of the space rather than close and separate the space through rigid walls. He was able to differentiate the space while using another means like steps and some rails, different materials and heights in order to differentiate without closing perspectives.



This is of course the place where the famous Carimate chair was born. One of the icons of Magistretti's work as designer.

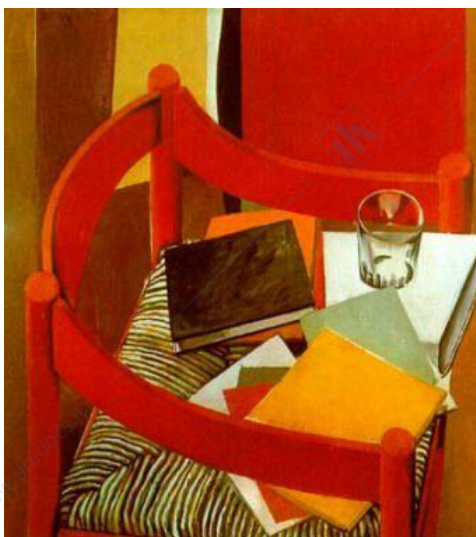


The purpose of the chair was not that of creating a masterpiece. Magistretti created a good chair for the Golf Club's restaurant. Magistretti wanted to use one of Alvar Aalto's but they were too expensive at that time.

It is a very simple chair, again with the idea of redesigning the traditional chair of a *trattoria*. He does not want to create something starting from scratch, he is respectful of tradition and so he is starting from an existing point which is this archetype, the typical *trattoria* chair. He perfects this chair; he is doing small and powerful interventions. One is the

enlargement of the point of the connection between the leg and the seat (he patented it) where all the loads are higher and so you need to have more resistance in the structural system. The second one being for the use of this curve. Third and most evident, use of red paint, which is aniline (substance used to paint toys for children) to refresh the look of this chair.

Again, you can see that we have got two poles; on the one hand there is tradition, the archetype, a soft way to approach furniture design. At the same time, he is doing it with *rosso Ferrari* (very powerful red) giving it a new look. This approach was a winning approach because this very simple piece of furniture became one of his main success in this period (60s) as designer of furniture.



This is a painting by Renato Guttuso, painter and artist of that time, representing/rendering this chair like *natura morta* (still life) of the time with the glass, sketch books and the chair as a new archetype.

Magistretti designing products, many of his products lasted for many years so they are somehow archetypal, they somehow keep their position, function and aesthetics. The objects designed by Magistretti are always valid and have a long-lasting essence/substance. This is probably something that distinguishes Magistretti's design production from what he called *la moda* (the fashion); the idea of always changing fashion, which needs everyday a new look and perspective. In this case he is trying to reach, follow and create pieces and products that will last forever (100 years or more). He always used to say:

"I would like to invent the umbrella. Because the umbrella is a magical object. It is something perfect, quite simple but an object that is more or less always the same. Evergreen object that can be used and seen also in 100 years because it is one of those projects that can survive in our world."



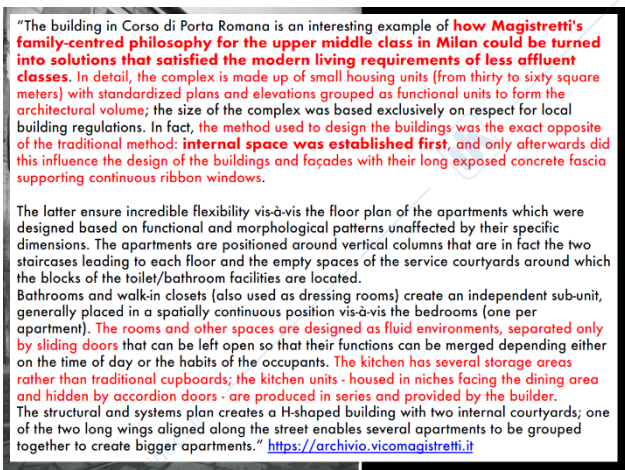
design international also through this movement.

### HOUSE FOR ALL

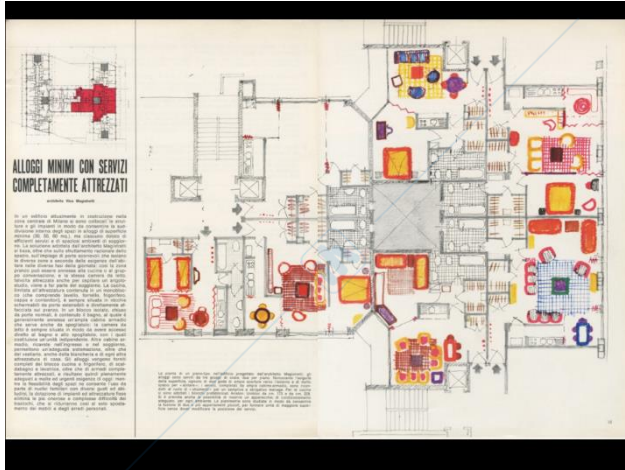
Another aspect/issue we could say about Magistretti would be all the effort spent by him not only in shaping wonderful villas for wealthy people or beautiful apartments with historical collections, but at the same time the idea of creating a sort of connection with that recent tradition of modernity (idea of existence minimum, idea of shaping spaces in the best way even with a reduced amount of square meters, etc). He spent a lot of time designing, studying, testing apartments/living spaces for all (different parts of the society).



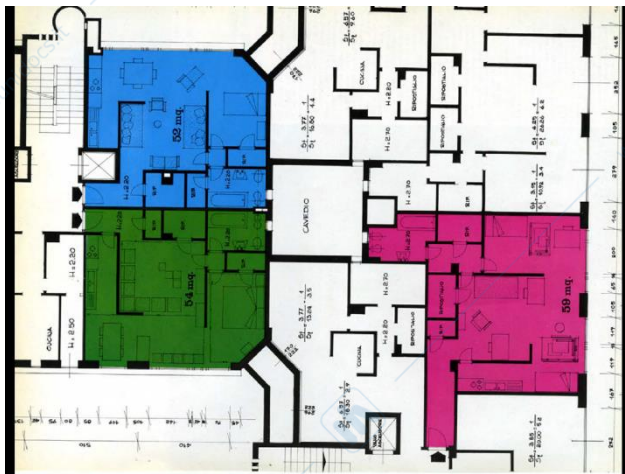
This is an interesting project (apartment building) in *Corso di Porta Romana* in Milan, which was made of small apartments (housing units) from 30-60 m<sup>2</sup> and they have all standardized plans and elevations which are so designed and shaped with less freedom of the villas in the landscape but, at the same time, exploiting the experience of shaping, managing and mastering interior spaces planning for designing smaller units.



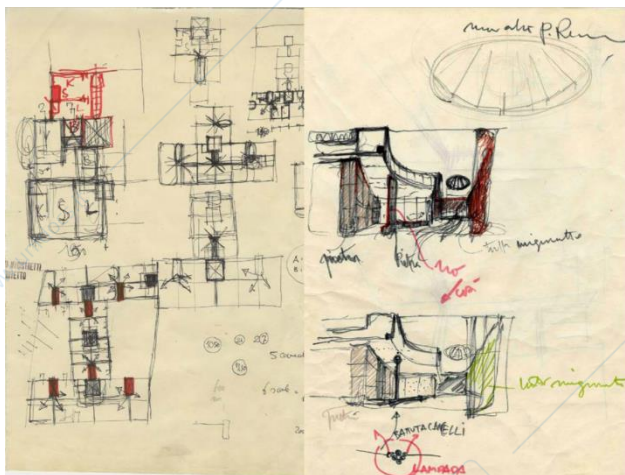
[Important to read this page and analysis from the *Archivio Magistretti*]



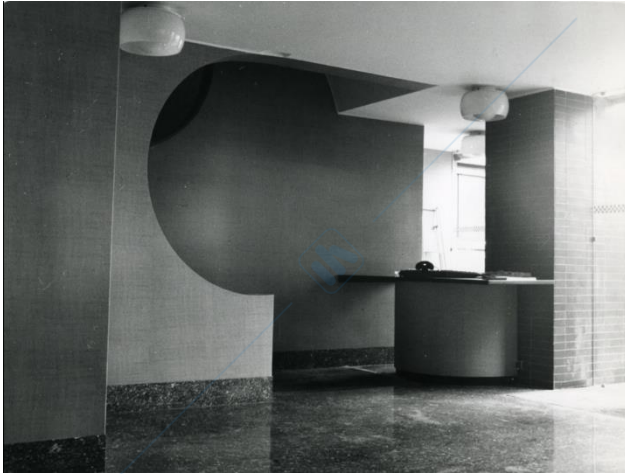
There are also articles taken from newspapers and architectural magazines explaining all the features of these apartments and the relationship/dialogue between a standardized plan (continue in the following slide).



You can see here quite small apartments of 52-54-59 m<sup>2</sup> and the way they have been furnished and organized by Magistretti and other designers and architects.



These are some sketches by Vico Magistretti. Again, this obsession for these curves which can be interpreted as the idea of not making a rigid volume, rather differentiating and giving more possibility in a space like this.



Again another "C", another curve.



Also, in staircases is something that we have already seen in Arenzano and other projects (this experimentation in different directions).



*Mura uguali arredi diversi* (same walls, different furnitures). This was a sort of experiment of designing and furnishing (completing) these apartments by Magistretti with the design of different architects and interior designers. [Article uploaded on Beep]



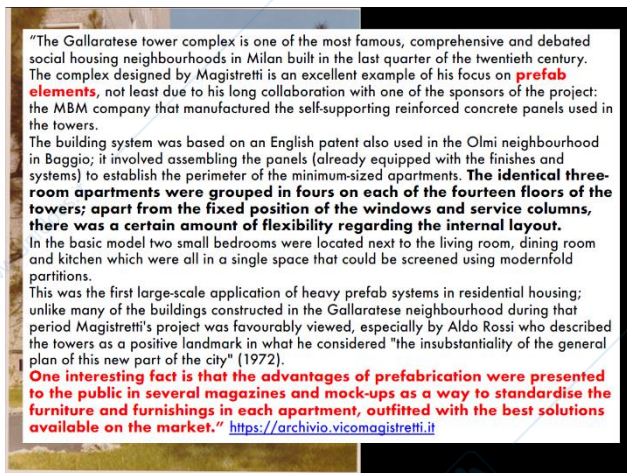
We can see how from the same base, same structure, small unit, these are ways to test this sort of flexibility in small places. You can have different solutions and approaches.

This is a minimum 32 m<sup>2</sup> dwelling (unit) and so the sort of challenge of furnishing and living such a small place, but very well organized.



The same but in another scale was the *una casa per tutti* (a house for all) by Magistretti in the Gallarate neighbourhood (close to the QT8), where he design, developed and built one of the first experiment in using pre-cast/pre-fab elements for building such a housing project. You see in the picture the pre-fab panels hanged by the machine and then put in place in order to build this housing project. A house for all, not only for a few. Very basic/essential living space but really well organized by Vico Magistretti thanks to his experience in shaping, manipulating and mastering

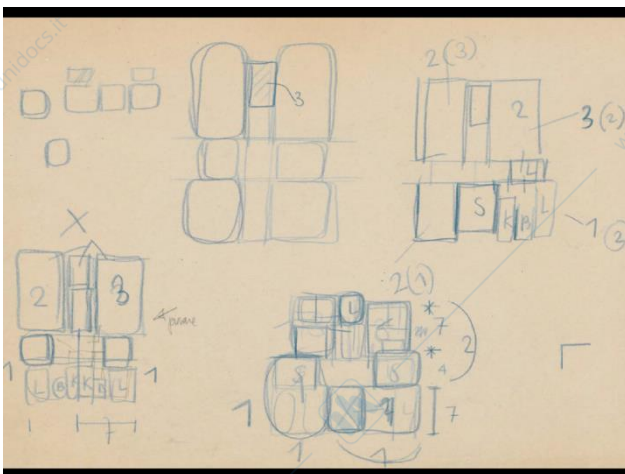
spaces.



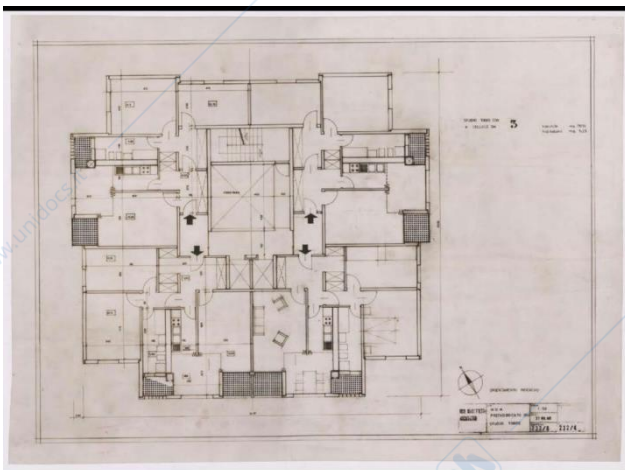
Again, here you will find more information, sketches and drawings about this projects.



Again two poles (probably the entire work of Magistretti can be interpreted looking at this tension between two poles): the maximum luxury bourgeois houses and the houses for all. Design and architecture. Tradition and modernity. These extremes are somehow put in a dialogue and blended by Magistretti in a really meaningful way.



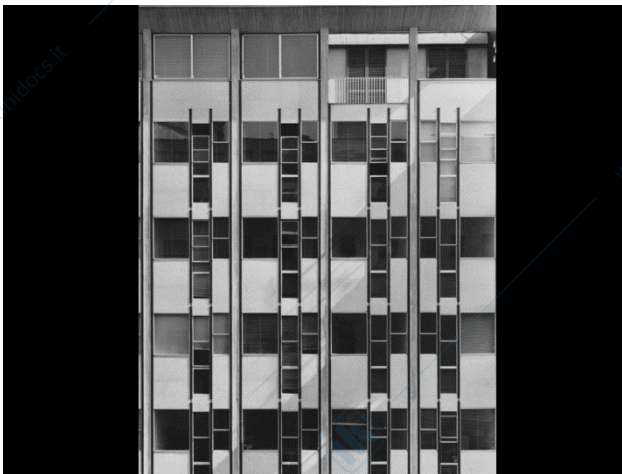
Again some sketches about organizing these spaces.



These are really small apartments but well shaded with small balconies (with a filter between the inside and the outside), with all the circulation optimized and reduced to the minimum but a lot of services and space for your goods. This is the legacy/lesson learnt from the modern architecture which insisted so much in designing good places in reduced spaces.

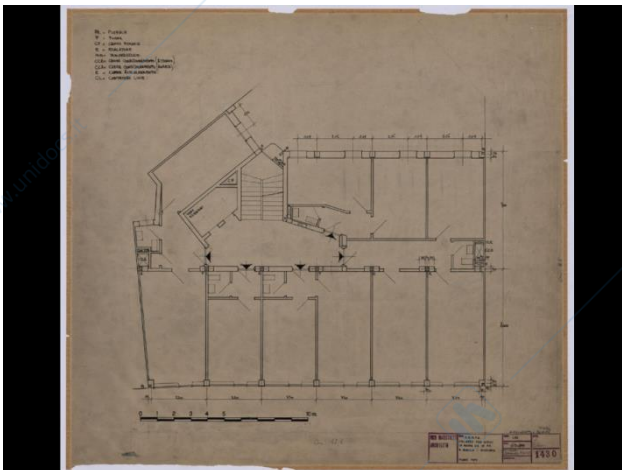


[This one is professor's favourite projects by Magistretti] This is an office building in Corso Europa, close to San Babila (city centre) in a new road opened in the last century after a lot of planning of the new shape for the city centre. Magistretti is planning and designing the office building in the middle of the image.

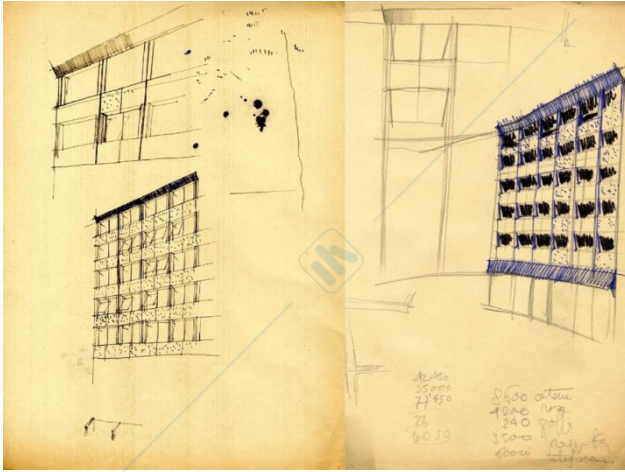


This is the frontal view of the façade. It is amazing the way he is able to realize a prefab industrialized façade. In this case, he is using a foreign and modern typology like a curtain wall, but he is completely reshaping it in a really complex way. There are 4 strips/columns and each part of this façade (divided in 6 according to the previous image) is divided at the same time in 3 kind of ribbons. There is his vertical complex and dynamic movement which could, in a certain way, be seen as a typographical experiment, graphic experiment because it is not a painting but the cover

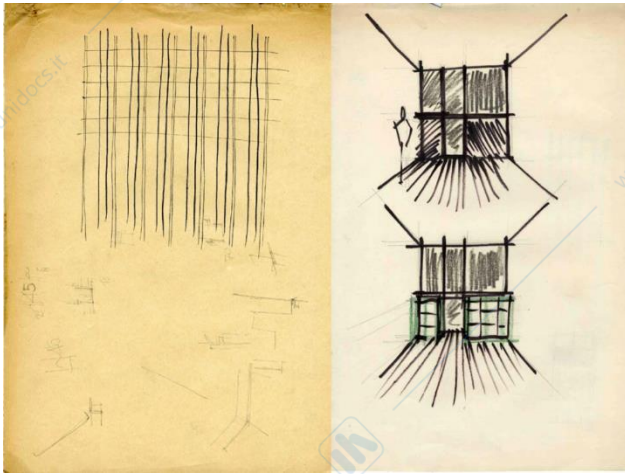
of a book, in which you see you are designing a sort of rhythm made out of larger or smaller vertical ribbons. At the same time, this differentiation in the design of the façade is not used but rather comes from a specific and deep investigation of the interior space.



This is the plan of the building (main façade on the bottom part of the picture). There are some quite traditional rooms.

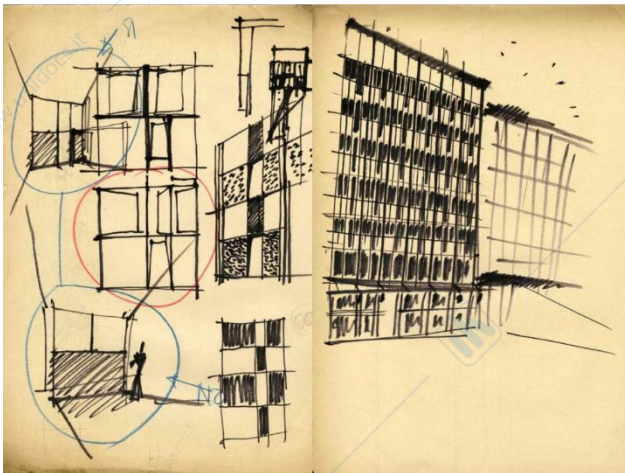
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06 LESSON

These are the first sketches by Magistretti in order to shape the façade. There is the differentiation in 6 parts, at the one in the end of the process but with very different division. There is not a vertical rhythm but mainly horizontal, with a blind part up to more or less 1 meter and then two almost square window openings to give some air. He did not like this idea and tried to work in another direction.



[Professor's favourite drawings] Having these vertical lines with different rhythm (space between them) which is, in the left hand side something that can be compared to an abstract painting of those years and on the right hand side, you can understand which is the logic of this façade and why this façade is a sort of mirror of what is happening inside. Because inside you have an office and he wanted to have some space on the façade free to put some boxes and office furniture in order to be filled. This is a really functional and pragmatic answer: I need space for documents and so on not

only in the walls but also in the façade wall. Having the entire façade fill with office furniture, there would be a visual limitation with the relationship with the outside. What Magistretti did was creating a pause in this rhythm and he opened the entire façade from the floor to the ceiling with this total height window in order to create this triple division. The window is even divided in a more complexity in various parts and different purposes because there are parts that can be opened and fixed ones. Different purposes, perspectives, graphics and geometries.



Here you can see Magistretti discussing about this strategy (si & no).



This is the final result. The idea of having a very complex façade but which is not a celebration of technique, industry and the American kind of curtain wall but rather giving a great example of how to reinterpret starting from something that was already existing (average one) to transform it in something complex/new.

**FLEXIBILITY**

This is another recurring feature of Magistretti's work and approach, both to design and interior design.



One great example is the Broomstick System. It was emblematic for this search for flexibility in Magistretti's work. The story of this object is wellknown; at the end of the 1970s he started teaching at the Royal College of Art in London, where it started a great exchange between Milan and London. In 1979 he was given a small flat in London and so he needed some furniture to live in. He conceived a small series of furniture, starting from a very simple building material which is the broomstick. He said "broomsticks are really cheap but are really strong. I had to furnish this small

flat in London and I designed this small collection of folding furniture, made out of broomsticks and I take them with me in my car." Everything was foldable, transformable, flexible, cheap and really strong. He did an entire collection from chairs, armchairs and even a bed.

This is a funny article online: "Magistretti on a magic broomstick" taken by The Sunday Times of 1980s, telling the story of this strange and with a really small commercial success. It was quite strange and so it was not appreciated by the great public. It was probably too far away from the conventions of the traditional aspects of furniture for that time.

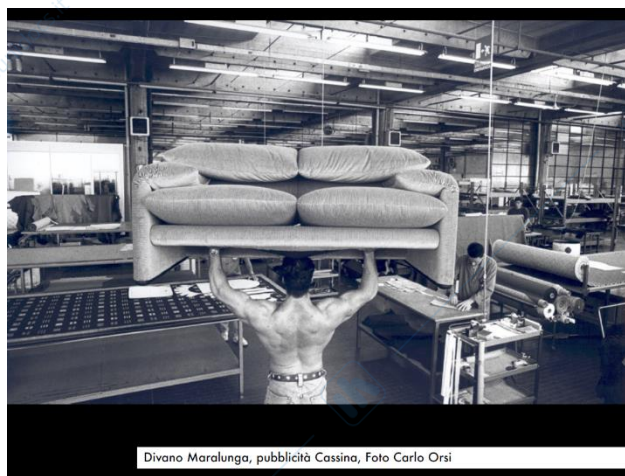


Vico Magistretti, Divano Maralunga, Cassina, 1973 (Compasso d'Oro 1973)  
Imbottito (poliuretano) con schienale che asseconda la postura  
Struttura in acciaio e basi di appoggio in materiale plastico; imbottitura in poliuretano espanso schiumato, rivestimento in pelle o tela

Here we can see these chairs, everything was done with this idea.

Professor proposes an analogy: we may connect these pieces of furniture to the first Piccy and furniture made for the RIMA exhibition in 1946, because we have again a similar approach using cheap material (wood), creating folding furniture but of course with two completely different economic, political and social situations.

It is like somehow in some part for Magistretti's mind, those concepts at the base of the Piccy and of the RIMA exhibition were kept for many years and were rediscovered for these series of furniture.



Divano Maralunga, pubblicità Cassina, Foto Carlo Orsi

Again, on the theme of flexibility, Magistretti did great innovative projects like this sofa for Cassina called Maralunga. This is a picture for an advertisement.

With this sofa, he was able to transform or give a new shape (renew the typology of this sofa).

Some parts of the back of the sofa could be reclined so you can change your position according to the transformable position of the sofa. Again, this means that he was not only a "shape giver" but rather also able to deal with technology, joints, patents and every kind of technical background needed to (re)invent or transform objects like this one. Of course, he should be able to perceive the consequences that this kind of flexibility had/could had on the way we approach interior design.



Kenya, Campeggi

Flexibility and irony, a sort of approach towards a playful idea of having furnitures and also interior landscapes populated by things like this.



Ospite, Campeggi

*Ospite* (host) bed by Campeggi (very friend of Magistretti) designed for when having guests at home, is a flexible solution, transformable and also with a quite simple but clever mechanism and aesthetics.



Steven Guarnaccia, Catalogue covers

With this catalogue (cover designed by Steven Guarnaccia) where we can see some of Magistretti's products like the broomstick and the *Ospite* bed designing a sort of cartoon-like style