

House and Studio Museums between Art and Design

RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN STRATEGIES

Edited by
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8. Design Practices and Enhancement Projects: from Collezione Giovanni Sacchi at the Triennale di Milano to Fondazione Castiglioni

Mauro Ceconello

Politecnico di Milano

8.1 Castiglioni & Sacchi: *Faber* of Italian Design

Starting from the second post-war, Italian industrial design has been well-acknowledged worldwide. Thanks to some brave and visionary entrepreneurs who invested in the design of their productions, entrusting the work to talented minds, many everyday objects from that period are today guarded in museums as icons of a culture. Though the acquaintance of this world is usually limited to the final product, the entire process that led to a particular shape and the special expertise that distinguished our design masters are a cultural heritage to disclose. Design, understood as cultural heritage, communicates on a large scale the objective value of the product itself and the value system in which it was brought to life. The exhibition of industrial products is undoubtedly an excellent starting point for spreading the design culture, but it is just as valuable in providing an adequate contextualisation. Public institutions and private foundations have created a culture around Design by organising exhibitions

and debates on the subject and offering their spaces as a showcase for promoting *the Italian way of making*. Think of the Design Museum at the Milan Triennale, an exhibition, a visitor attraction and a training centre for future designers, or the ADI Design Museum Compasso d'Oro inaugurated in May 2022. At the same time, Milan provides plenty of professional studios, ateliers and workshops where many documents, models, prototypes, and drawings tell the story of Milanese Design. Through them, it is possible to follow the evolution of some masterpiece and their creation step by step through the work of artists and designers (*faber*).

Among them, two deserve a prominent place in the story of the golden years of Italian design: the Fondazione Achille Castiglioni, a repository of extraordinary creativity with countless drawings, models and inspiration objects, and the model collection of Giovanni Sacchi. Castiglioni and Sacchi embodied the personification of the *faber*: throughout their life, by drawing and modelling, they have given shape to an improved reality with clever designs, paying attention to fundamental matters such as functionality, industrial optimisation and communication. They significantly contributed to the golden period of Italian industrial design in different ways because they played different and interconnected roles.

Achille Castiglioni was an architect and a designer whose education has been influenced by rationalism. As he reported in an interview with Piero Polato, he was not interested in being associated with a particular style. Instead, he was trying to design with no preconceptions but continuously asking himself the reasons for his actions. As long as they responded to the easiness of production or handling or if the aim was to trigger a particular behaviour or meaning, these were acceptable explanations; on the contrary, subjective motivations had to be avoided (Polato, 1991). Accordingly, Polano (2000-2002) states that Castiglioni was fascinated by the anonymous design of common objects, and a significant part of his work was dedicated to projects in which the subjective design coincides with the objective processes that usually inform and define common things, a practice that the author calls *undesign*. The world was his inspiration; indeed, he used to say that design demands observation (Antonelli, 2000). From this starting point, his iterative design process developed on paper with

plasticine and plaster. Drawing and modelling were his way of reasoning. In particular, prototypes were important steps to confront and test the tridimensional shape of the objects he was designing. For this reason, collaboratively working with Sacchi was crucial in many cases.

Sacchi was not a designer and came to this world almost by chance. As a kid, he was trained and became a foundry model maker, and despite the difficulties caused by the Second World War, he managed to have his shop for mechanical models until he first met Nizzoli (Polato, 1991). That moment marked the transition to a different approach: no more models with precise measures for the mechanical industry, yet architects and designers needed prototypes to work with, to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their designs better, but also to present their ideas to the committers concretely. In this way, he realised models of study, verification and presentation (Maldonado, 1987; Salvarani, 1992; Consalez & Bertazzoni, 1998) and contributed greatly to Italian industrial design by cultivating and sharing his experience along the entire design process. It is no coincidence that many professionals of the time supported his candidacy for Compasso d'Oro, which he received in 1998 for his career. He was involved at all stages of the design process, and he was not a silent executor: he used to identify and correct the criticalities of a project, and he could understand and speak the same language of the designers even beyond what they were saying or drawing (Polato, 1991). Moreover, in the end, his models were so accurate that they fooled people and have been used even for commercial campaigns.

With such flourishing careers, they worked on several projects, producing an immense amount of materials able to uncover their authors' expertise and thoughts. Many remained in their former workplaces, composing a valuable heritage. In 2006, the heirs of Achille Castiglioni signed a five-year agreement with Triennale di Milano, and Studio Museo Achille Castiglioni opened to the public as an archive. Then, in 2011, Fondazione Achille Castiglioni was created so the family could continue sharing the place and the stories it contains with visitors. The foundation's main purpose is to catalogue, archive and diffuse drawings, photos, models, films, objects, books and magazines (Fondazione Achille Castiglioni, n.d.). Similarly, in 2009, Archivio Giovanni Sacchi was inaugurated as a result of a collaboration be-

tween Comune di Sesto San Giovanni and Fondazione ISEC (Institute for XX Century Studies) and the contribution of Fondazione Cariplo in order to collect models, products, drawings, photographs, documents, machinery and equipment coming from Sacchi's workshop (Archivio Sacchi, n.d.).

Nonetheless, the opening of these places is not sufficient to diffuse their contents, as not everything is easily accessible because of the format or the material of the support. In that light, a pilot project came to life to explore ways to communicate the mental processes that generated some of the most important products of Italian design and to promote design culture and knowledge, enhancing the attitude of their *faber*. The project, funded by Regione Lombardia, aims at identifying, digitising and cataloguing all documents, drawings, models and prototypes related to selected and renowned products.

8.2 Highlighting the Design Process Through Digitisation

As already pointed out, the process of design making is an enriching heritage to be shared with design researchers, scholars, students, and a wider public to fully understand the universe of the creative thought concealed in the even well-renowned objects of the Italian design production.

Currently, more than 300 wooden models by Giovanni Sacchi – property of Regione Lombardia – are preserved at Triennale di Milano. This collection, though, is stored in the museum but not exhibited to the public. Nonetheless, the great value of this heritage brought them to give Politecnico di Milano the assignment to digitise some of the works to make them accessible while preserving the original pieces. This commission fostered the idea to deepen the project, intending to reconstruct the entire process underneath the development of an industrial product, letting thoughts and making of well-known protagonists of the Italian panorama emerge. Therefore, after selecting some significant objects as samples of the programmatic initiative, the digitisation had to be extended to the related documents, preliminary sketches, drawings, photos, transparencies

and intermediate prototypes collected involving the design offices and the manufacturers of the industrial products. Specifically, for the choice of the objects, the Triennale di Milano staff assisted us and eventually, six out of 312 models by Giovanni Sacchi were selected according to their relevance in the history of Italian design, as well as to the ease of retrieving the concerning materials and documentation.

These are: 1. Gibigiana Lamp (1980, A. Castiglioni for Flos); 2. Tama Lamp (1970-1977, I. Hosoe for Valenti); 3. 4870 chair (1984, A.C. Ferrieri for Kartell); 4. 4822/44 Stool (1977-1979, A.C. Ferrieri for Kartell); 5. Trattopen marker (1975-1976, Design Group Italia for Fila); 6. Rialto phone (1975-1976, Design Group Italia for Siemens).

We aimed to identify a sample methodology of digitisation to be applied to heterogeneous items from different sources and correlated to different design procedures and outcomes. Nowadays, digitisation is a common practice that anyone can easily carry out with good quality and allows access to a broad audience, taking advantage of the great progress of information and communication technologies (ICTs) that modify how people create, deliver, accumulate, and use data. Digital libraries nowadays are enhancing the traditional ones, giving access to the information they preserve ubiquitously through the web and possibly mobile devices. A great example of the effort to make cultural heritage accessible online is Google's Arts & Culture project, which enables people to access several museums worldwide – exploiting its Street View Technology – and discover expert-created content. The real issues that institutions face is about how to catalogue data and make it accessible to expert users and a wider public, as well as on different platforms and systems. Some European projects deal with this topic, such as Minerva, Michael, Michael Plus, Athena (Angelaki *et al.*, 2010) and Europeana (European Commission, 2009). In Italy, a set of rules and directions, defined by ICCD (Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione), establishes norms to digitise images properly (Auer *et al.*, 1998) and records to catalogue the digitised data. More specifically, Regione Lombardia instituted SIRBeC (Sistema Informativo Regionale dei Beni Culturali), a regional cataloguing system (Degiarde, 2007). With those references in mind, our work developed according to three main steps.

1. *Retrieval*. We retrieved and organised the documentation from the designers' archives and the companies producing the items. Our main focus was collecting all the useful materials to reveal the mental process that led to the final design. Therefore, we excluded the commercial ones.
2. *Digitisation*. We digitised all the material in different ways according to the nature of the products. We mainly used digital photography for wide-size drawings (posters, technical, etc.), scanning for small-size sketches and documents, slides and transparencies up to the A3 format, 3D laser scanning for Sacchi's wooden models, and a 360° photography of one significant prototype. The entire process followed the Italian standards defined by ICCD (Auer *et al.*, 1998), overtaking the top level A required for large prints and conservation as a high-quality digital copy of the original. Additionally, for correct colour calibration, every document has been digitised with Kodak grey scale and colour targets (Figure 1).

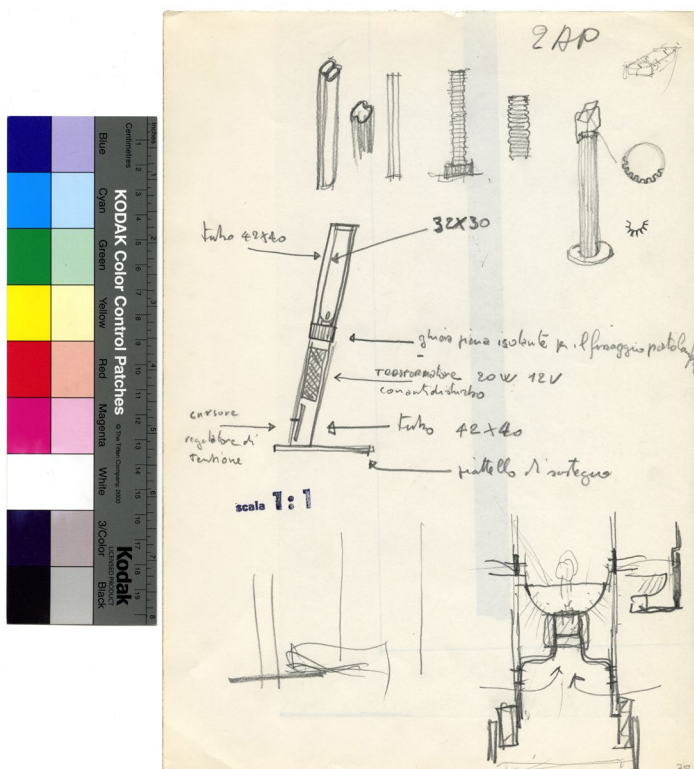


Figure 1. Digitised sketches with colour targets. Image courtesy of Fondazione Achille Castiglioni - SIRBeC. <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/opere-arte/schede/w5010-00147/>.

3. *Cataloguing.* We catalogued and stored the digitised material in the Regione Lombardia database, according to its cataloguing system for cultural heritage: SIRBeC. In particular, all the drawings, intermediate models, and final prototypes have been catalogued as works of art according to the record OA (Opera d'Arte), highlighting the artistic value of such production. In contrast, we catalogued photos, slides and transparencies with the record F (Photographs). Additionally, the system provides a record Design (DES R.L.), linking all the digitised materials that describe the overall project behind an industrial design product, the related documents, the subsequent restyled editions and the information about the author.

8.3 Gibigiana Lamp. The Narrative of a Design Project Through Archive Materials

With the specific purpose of exploring and reporting the evidence of Castiglioni and Sacchi's working modalities, the argumentation of the digitisation process is here limited to the case of the Gibigiana Lamp. It is a table lamp with an adjustable light swivelling in a particular spot with a movable mirror. The evident reference is the game of light sent back by a reflecting surface, called *gibigiana* in the Milanese dialect. In the Sacchi collection we analysed, this object is among those with the most materials (drawings, slides and intermediate models – stored at Fondazione Achille Castiglioni) (Table 1).

As foreseen, the A0/A1 technical drawings did not require a high resolution. As there were not so many to justify the purchase of a large scanner, digital photography has been considered the best method for their digitisation. The entire acquisition process took place at Photo Lab – Design Department of Politecnico di Milano – which provided a professional custom set to acquire them with a digital camera, Canon Eos 5D MarkII, with a minimum resolution of 240 dpi. A similar treatment was given to intermediate models, while final ones from Fondazione Achille Castiglioni were photographed from different angles to obtain a 360° degrees Quick Time VR image. Instead, the precious wooden prototypes by Sacchi are the only ones digitised

Table 1.
Gibigiana Lamp digitised documents.

N°	Description	Size
22	Technical Drawings	A1-A0
25	Technical Drawings	A3-A4
64	Sketches	A3-A4
6	Slides	24x36 mm
7	Slides	6x6 cm
4	Colour Transparencies	10x12 cm
4	Colour Transparencies	13x18 cm
18	Models	Various
1	Wooden Model - Sacchi	Real size
2	Prototypes	Real size

at the Virtual Prototyping and Reverse Modeling Lab at the Design Department, with the process of 3D scanning. We used a Minolta Vivid 910 laser scanner, and the clouds of points acquired have been processed to obtain a correct polygonal mesh, successively texturised properly.

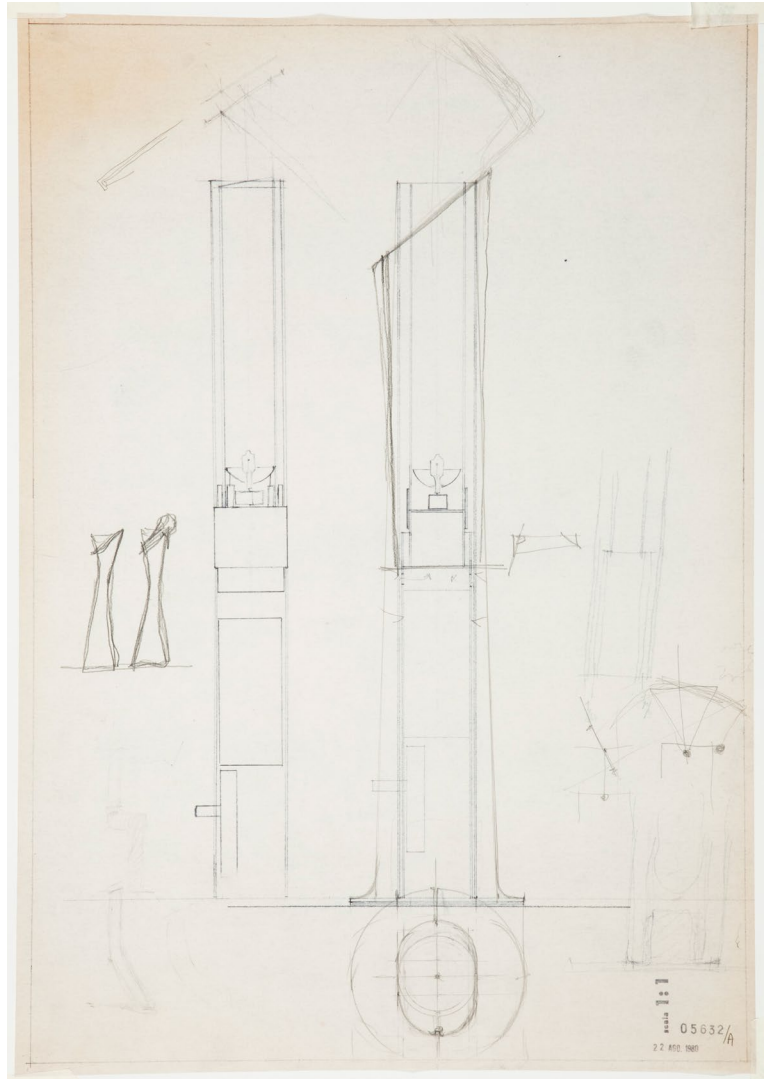
Small-size drawings, sketches, slides and transparencies, instead, have been digitised with a flatbed scanner in not-compressed TIFF format with a resolution ranging from 300 dpi to 600 dpi for the first ones and 4800 dpi and 2400 dpi for the latter. Particular attention to the complexity of the drawing and the scanner calibration has ensured an accurate correspondence between the originals and the digital copies. The small-sized originals of Gibigiana have been mainly digitised at Fondazione Achille Castiglioni to minimise the risks of damage.

By reviewing and ordering all of these materials, the reconstruction of the process, from the early ideas to the final product, becomes patent. Like a growing creature, shape by shape, it narrates its story from the actual author's point of view. Intuitions, inspirations, rethinking and distractions: everything has been impressed, especially on paper. Thus, exploiting the SIRBeC, the 180 record realized for the Gibigiana lamp enables people to detect its development in the subsequent phases, a positive opportunity for scholars, researchers and design students who can profit from a mind-on and hands-on approach towards the design. Indeed, in some cases, Castiglioni's

bricoleur attitude (Levi-Strauss, 1962), bringing him to the ready-made or redesigned production (Antonelli, 2000), showed how he drew on existing objects to create new harmonious shapes; other examples demonstrate how some modifications derive from technical requirements to lower the cost; while sometimes suggestions and recalls to other objects that the designer would have developed later in his career can be highlighted (Figure 2), almost as a side note, on his drawings.

Finally, we can state that digitisation is a way to make the faber's spirit live again and to disseminate their knowledge in terms of crea-

Figure 2.
Sketches while designing
Gibigiana. Image
courtesy of Fondazione
Achille Castiglioni -
SIRBeC. <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/opere-arte/schede/w5010-00077/>.



tivity, technical ability, process and communication: a heritage worth being discovered. Moreover, it is the only way to make some resources accessible while preserving the originals – sometimes characterised by big formats or fragile materials. Nonetheless, these kinds of documents are still not easy to access and interpret for common people, leaving the potential of this work mostly unexpressed. The project could be similarly extended to other products and archives in the Milan area to create a great repository for digital resources, on the condition that they could be disclosed and explained even to non-expert users, possibly in a captivating way.

The project shows how famous designers, like modern faber, can be brought back to life by the diffusion of their more private work materials; the aim is not just digitising and cataloguing but is the reconstruction of the process of development of the design product, bringing to light the cultural contents of the drawings, models and photos. They conserve great knowledge regarding creativity, technical ability, process and communication worth rediscovering and disseminating: a useful opportunity for researchers and scholars conducting studies and future designers who can profit from a mind-on and hands-on approach towards the culture of design projects.

As writers express their minds through their words, the protagonists of Italian industrial design – Castiglioni and Sacchi, among others – put their souls into drawings and models that usually remain stored out of sight. Even if the described approach is just one in the panorama of the valorisation actions concerning design archives, it demonstrates how digitising those precious materials can be suitable and powerful for the declared intents, especially if presented and spread narratively. Pointing at the core of the *faber's* projects could add immense value to the mere exhibition of the design outcome, and, as the approach can be quite easy for public and private institutions to perpetrate, the design process could truly become a represented cultural heritage.

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