



TEACHING ITALIAN STYLE TO INTERNATIONAL INTERIOR DESIGNERS

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ABSTRACT

Can you teach Interior Designers how their creative process can benefit from being contaminated by the quality and excellence of the Italian Style attitude? The course “Where Interior Design meets Fashion. Italian Style” is meant to teach learners (students and professionals from all over the world) the distinguishing features of the charming and classy mood that defines one of the most famous stylishness examples in the world. At first glance, Fashion and Interior Design might not seem to have much in common. However, the boundaries blur when the two industries cooperate – and this is happening more and more. People that appreciate a cultured style, that goes beyond the typical fashion items, can also find fully structured lines and collections of home products from the main Fashion Brands. This is not a new experience, since Fashion and Interior Design have been mutually influencing each other for centuries. The basic idea is, then, that innovative teaching techniques, in this field, can help designers to learn and implement the main characters of a stylistic feel, and apply them into their professional layouts. The main approach is, then, teaching learners through a learning by doing/thinking/loving technique, in a proactive design exercise of role playing, in which they will be Interior Designers for a famous Italian Fashion Brand of their choice.

KEYWORDS: Interior Design, Italian Style, Fashion Brands, Innovative teaching techniques, Learning by doing, Role playing.

Interior Design: this is where we are

In the modern times, Interior Design has always been positively contaminated by Fashion trends, and, recently, the tendency is increasing and reshaping an old linking, whose harbinger can be traced back to the anthropological relation between personal tastes and the need for adorning our body and space (Jenkyn Jones, 2005). This contamination between the Fashion world and the Interior Design field is a long course connection, that dates to the times in which Fashion Designers started experimenting new ways of expanding their product range (Myzelev, 2016), with examples of cross-production experiments that can be traced back even at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (or before) in the textile and pottery sector. This mutual influencing trends have significantly changed in the last 70 years (Monneyron, 2008), for the modern concept and evolution of Fashion Brands have extensively altered the role of Fashion Designers in their industry (Bruzzi, 2013).

The creative process behind the ideation and production of Fashion lines and collections is a crucial procedure, that should be analyzed also from the marketing and company organization point of view (Howard, 2007). This process is also influenced by national and international Public relations, preliminary findings and collection heritage connections (Razzaghi, 2005), but also from the evolution of Fashion companies (Tungate, 2005), and their interaction with the Interior Design brands. In the light of these assertions, the importance of the contamination between these two fields and the future trends are, then, clearly presumable.

Contaminations between Fashion and Interior Design Industries

Fashion and Interior Design Industries are two separate worlds that merges together, at times, to create new Interiors Concepts (Myzelev, 2016). Apparently, these two industries have only some elements to share, mainly related to the use of the same basic knowledge and philosophy in the creative process (Jenkyn Jones, 2005). Essentially, Fashion and Interior Designers are both involved in the effort of creating original, interesting, bold and striking concepts and products (Pepitone, 2013). Nonetheless, the marked sharpness of the borderlines of these two industries dissolves more and more when the Fashion world meets the Interior Design industry, through a collaborative experience, that can span from single spot collaborations to wider projects, such as in the Hospitality Business (Dallabona, 2015). Those who appreciate classy style examples can widen their experience far beyond a head to tail Brand distinctiveness (which includes any kind of accessories and beauty products), through items that range from the 'classic' home soft and hard furniture objects to entire branded experiences in stores and outside stores (Reinach, 2010). These events involve, at least, visual and olfactive imprints, though they are not limited to the two main senses through we can perceive and experience the space that surround us.

Fashion Stylists always cooperated with the Interior Design industry, offering a wide range of creative products (D'Amato, 2005). The history of Interior Design is full of examples, from the conception of patterns, textiles, and specific products, that has always been a fruitful field of contamination (Dorfles, 1979), to the creation of entire Home Lines and Collections, that is a more recent and spreading experience, in which Fashion Brands show their home concept side (Codeluppi, 2002). The mutual influence has become a steady relationship in

some recent project investments, that, on one side, are related to tailor-made solutions for Fashion Retail Concept Stores, with an increasing number of examples (Iannilli, 2015), and, on the other side, meet the needs of the luxury Hospitality Industry (Dallabona, 2015). Another interesting contamination between Interior Design and the Fashion world is represented by the increasing trend of Fashion Curations (Marchetti, 2017), and other Museology experiences, like Brand Museums and Exhibitions, or the Concepts for Art Galleries and Retail Emporiums.

In conjunction with presenting new lines and collections, Fashion Brands are increasingly interested in the Interior Design industry for their Retail strategies (Iannilli, 2015). Though online sales are constantly growing (fact that pushes the identification and distinctiveness archetype to a completely new level, based on Graphic and Web Design skills), the demand for new and immediately recognizable concepts for Physical Shops is increasing. After the latest evolutions in the conception of branded retail stores (see Apple examples), target customers in the luxury segment assume that their shopping experience will be an individual and customized event (Willems, 2011), with a drift that is spreading also towards mass Fashion Brands (like Abercrombie, or Desigual).

The trend about customized shopping experiences is also contaminating the Furniture industry, as part of the Interior Design field (Morris, 2017). It is widely acknowledged that new Interior Design trends are frequently inspired by Fashion tendencies, for the latest and the most fascinating and popular ideas (in terms of shapes, colors and materials) seen on catwalks can be easily borrowed by the Furniture industry, with the typical twofold (collection and pre-collection) dichotomical (Spring-Summer/Autumn-Winter) seasonal influence (De Fusco, 2008).

Teaching Italian Style to International Designers

With a Fashion world that is always a step ahead from the Interior Design Industry, teaching international professionals and students how to be positively influenced by the quintessential essence of Italian Style entails an innovative learning program, just like any other higher education program in the digital globalized era (Subba, 2017), catching the core values of the typical creative process of this field: the preparation, development, illumination, and verification of a new collection (Kaufmann, 2014). A proactive creative process for the Interior Design has to be centered, then, on an organized structure of knowledge in the project planning and development (Conconi, 2016), with a strong reference to innovative, interactive and direct teaching methods (Jain, 2017), which are now essential for the improvement of every knowledge field (Yue, 2017; Vaithy, 2017). Passing to a proactive approach can, for sure, improve the involvement level of learners in an effective process, aimed at efficiently sharing the knowledge they will need for their actual and future professional practice (Conconi, 2016).

The course “Where Interior Design meets Fashion. Italian Style” has been presented to learners and professionals under different educational programs and in different Campuses (in Italy and abroad), always using the same teaching methods. The 5-day intensive course starts with a brief presentation, focused on the Top Brand analysis and a chronological case history of Fashion Brands, considering the main Fashion Designers and Art Directors (biographies, ideas, com-

mercial success) that dealt with the team of Fashion in the Interior Design. The ex-cathedra activities (which, usually, last no more than 4 hours) target, then, the main trade policies of Fashion Brands, based on the theme selected for the course, focusing on the following topics: Marketing and Art Direction, Production, Trade, Lines, Collections, Hard and Soft Furniture Design. The last step considers the main strategies between possible competitors in the major industries where Fashion meets Interior Design: Home Design, Hotel Design, Retail Stores and Show Rooms Design.

The core workflow of the course is, then, presented to learners, that will be called to develop a creative process through a 'learning by doing and thinking' approach. Divided in small groups (3-4 students or professionals), the class will start driving its inventive workflow to the final result: developing an original concept for a Fashion Brand (for show rooms, retail stores, or hotel rooms/ spas/ common areas). The work on Fashion Brands is planned and discussed step by step, in a tailored program, with the teaching team.

After choosing the reference Fashion Brand, learners will proceed in a brainstorming activity, to point out which are the main themes and aims for their concept. Once the main direction is settled, learners will start developing a mood board chart, to represent the main references and goals of their original concept through an impactful visual representation. After deciding the main appearance of the graphic concept and the major references, learners will have to develop a physical model of their original concept, and a presentation video, in a sort of a role-playing game, where they act as a creative team, called by the customer (the selected Fashion Brand) to present an original concept, with some project alternatives.

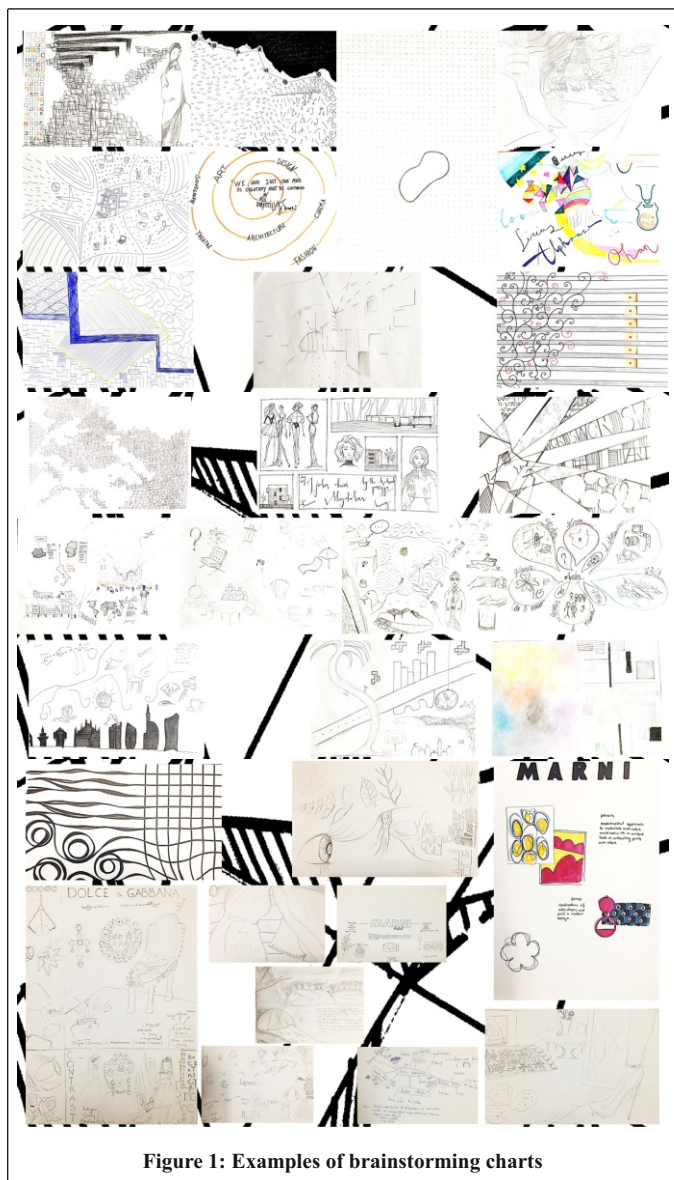


Figure 1: Examples of brainstorming charts



Figure 2: Examples of mood board charts

The learner is also expected to write a short paper-like essay (6 pages), agreed with the teaching team, about a Fashion Designer, pointing out the main features of his/her style, with a short description and the selection of visually impactful pictures. The paper also has to point out the main potentials of the Fashion Designer for the Interior Design industry. The evaluation is, of course, considering both the descriptive contents, and the layout quality of the research work.

A new teaching method

This 'learning by doing' approach induces learner to gain a higher awareness on the need of effectively communicating through images, light and colors, but also materials and ideas. Learners are also called to improve their verbal, manual, body language and visual communication skills, as they are involved in the development and presentation of their original concept design, using both a physical model and a virtual representation of it (video). Since learners will have to epitomize their concept design through graphic works (both in tangible and virtual illustrations), the different creative procedures they are experimenting (brainstorming, mood board charts and video production) offer them an unparalleled opportunity for understanding the basics of the graphic quality in the communication process, fact that is also considered and discussed in the final evaluation of the team work.

The importance of integrating a proactive approach in the creative workflow becomes even more relevant, if we consider that most students, learning from a traditional behavioral technique (Stojanovski, 2015; Shukla, 2015), show a reverse approach to the design stages, meaning they start from the concept and, then, try to adapt it to its context. In the light of the modern theories of education, the new challenges in the Interior Design field require a shift to a constructivist learning method, based on the theory that education should follow students in dynamically building their own connotations and mental awareness, by linking the information they acquire to their previous knowledge system they have. This is all made by considering that proactive education techniques are boosted by social interaction experiments, made in the light of the constructivist approach (Stojanovski, 2015). Through a constructivist shift, the focus of education will be reallocated from a passive information sharing method to an active development of understanding and opportunities for students, that will learn how to structure their knowledge by themselves. The passive approach in the information transmission should be, then, replaced with a more constructivist view of teaching and learning. This modifications in the attention of what learners usually acquire from an approach, based on listening and reading activities, to a method, that is aimed at actively stimulating their participation, is recently considered as essential in the new leading educational theories. The emphasis is, then, reallocated from the educator to the learner (Shukla, 2015).



Figure 3: Examples of physical models

The new communication tools and a project oriented approach (Rosales, 2016) help students in learning in a more efficient way, as the new technologically mediated forms of communication in the educational context (Djermanov et al., 2015) enhance the direct interaction with learners and promote an insightful perspective on the new environmental challenges of the Interior Design field (Maulana, 2015). This will help learners also to identify the real skills to develop in their education pattern and to be better prepared to the challenges they will meet in their future professional field. In this framework, they will learn how to use the assessment tools that can be applied in the different instances, knowing which are the limits of the paradigm they are working in.

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