



ETTORE SOTTASS

Designed by Jessica Hu

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Typefaces used include:

Niagra by Tobias Frere-Jones,

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Ettore Sottsass in 1973.

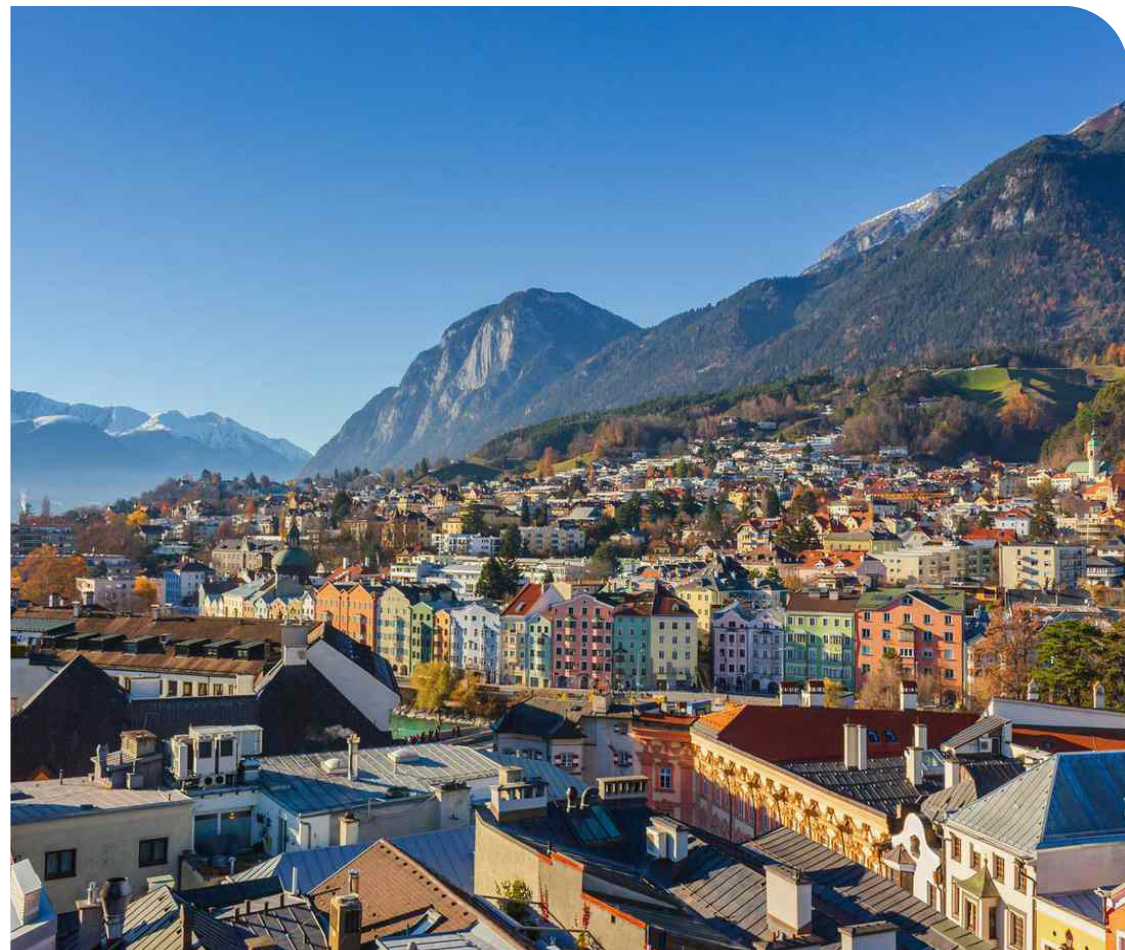
SOTTSSASS JR'S LIFE

Early Life

Ettore Sottsass jr was born in Innsbruck (Austria) in 1917, and he grew up in the Austrian mountains. He defines these years as very happy for him, and he opposes this period with his youth, much less happy, spent in Turin.

He studied and spent all his early life in Turin. Then, he graduated in architecture from Polytechnic University in 1939. His father was an architect himself. So, he grew up in a household that exposed him to architecture from an early age.

After his graduation, he enlisted in the army. He fought in Montenegro during World War II and spent six years in a labor camp in Yugoslavia. He later said that he considered the years he spent in the army a waste of time. Fortunately, he was able to return home safe and sound.



Innsbruck, Austria. Picture taken by Natalia Shcherbyna.



Sottsass with his wife, Fernandoa Pivano, or "Nanda."

The Beginning

After the war, Sottsass worked in his father's studio for a while. Here, the principles of the Bauhaus and rationalism influenced his young mind. Then, in 1946, he finally founded his architecture and design practice in Milan. In this way, he started working on his projects with different means that went beyond architecture. He even married in 1949 Fernanda Pivano, whom he called "Nanda."

These first years of his professional career are marked by projects, exhibitions, articles, and speeches at several conferences.

In these years begins the story of Ettore Sottsass. He was an architect and designer, intellectual and painter, and a traveler, photographer, anthropologist, and writer.

It is challenging to delineate him because of the multiple facets of his artistic and cultural activity. His restless and non-conformist spirit will lead him to an intense and culturally elevated existence.

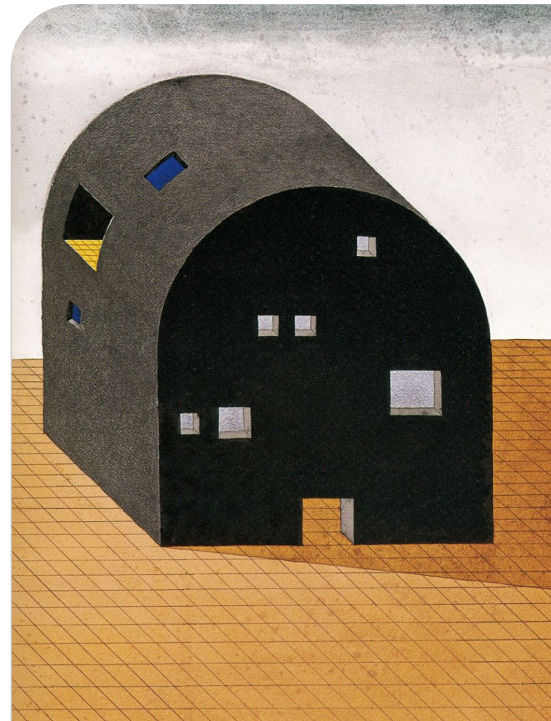
Museo triste (Memorial per popoli massacrati) a Domus drawing by Ettore Sottsass in the exhibition "Architettura attenuata. 24 disegni di Ettore Sottsass" ("Subdued Architecture. 24 Drawings by Ettore Sottsass") held at the Antonia Jannone Gallery, Milan 2003.



"Califfo" Sofa by Ettore Sottsass for Poltrona, Italy, 1960s (front view).



Domus



Architettura monumentale, a Domus drawing by Ettore Sottsass in the exhibition "Architettura attenuata. 24 disegni di Ettore Sottsass" ("Subdued Architecture. 24 Drawings by Ettore Sottsass") held at the Antonia Jannone Gallery, Milan 2003.

In 1946 he began his first collaboration with the renowned architectural Italian magazine "Domus". The iconic designer intensely marked the magazine. He contributed with articles, photos, and ideas, that were the pure expression of his many interests and nuances. The years of his life spent traveling and working with Domus were very prolific for his research and the magazine itself. Ettore Sottsass was a wise and skillful traveler. Indeed, he was fascinated by places, unknown artists (at that time), and the pure or even chaotic ideas spreading outside Europe. He was a visionary; he was able to recognize the genius in artists and concepts, and he brought it all along with him.

Poltronova

In the 1950s, Sottsass moved briefly to New York City to work with the industrial designer and Modernist George Nelson. But as soon as he came back to Italy in 1957, he became the creative director of the Poltrona brand. The twenty-year-long collaboration with Sergio Cammilli, the founder of Poltrona, allowed him to experiment in the design field.

The firm from Agliana (Tuscany) permitted him to unleash his relentless brilliance. Sottsass' production in these years was defined by strong use of color and marks and symbols often deriving from Eastern cultures that he studied intensely and firsthand.

Related to this, we could quote:

- The Superboxes (1968), coated with laminate in bold colors.
- The "Yantra di Terracotta" series (1969), which shape comes from the geometric diagrams used in Hinduism and particularly in tantrism as an aid to ritual meditation.

Ettore Sottsass, Dado Stool T29, Poltronova completely original example, 1960.



In these years, strongly animated by an extraordinary creative streak, Sottsass envisaged design as a manner of reforging architecture, as well as a way of weaving a new connection between human beings and objects:

“I have always thought that design begins where rational processes end and magic begins.” – Ettore Sottsass.

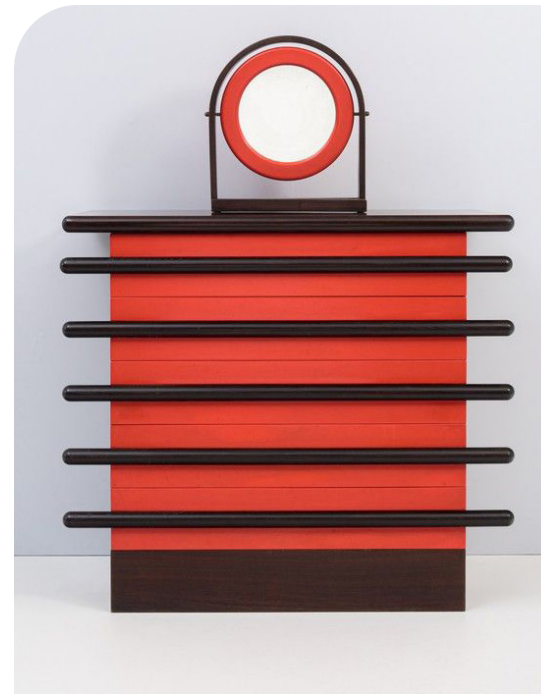


Ettore Sottsass Jr. Pair of Rocchetta Side Tables for Poltronova, Italy, 1964. Measurements 35.5 x H 30cm.



Poltronova was a privileged place to encounter the young Italian radical vanguard. Here, Sottsass met Archizoom Associati, Superstudio, UFO, Gianni Pettena, and more. He fits perfectly into this context and feels free to experiment, creating, for example, the captivating Mobili Grigi series (1970), among which stands out the Ultrafragola mirror-lamp (1970). Unfortunately, his work was too far ahead of his time to be accepted by the society of that time.

Ettore Sottsass Mirror Ultrafragola for Poltronova.



Ettore Sottsass jr., Mobile cassettiera modello "Bastonio"



La Cometa Floorlamp by Ettore Sottsass for Poltronova, 1970s.

Olivetti Praxis 48 Typewriter
Ettore Sottsass.



Olivetti 'Summa 19' Calculator.

where designers and some technicians of the Olivetti operated.

The two groups had different roles: the first had to answer the company's production and marketing needs. In contrast, the second was more independent and had a broader vision of the corporate image. The close cooperation guaranteed outstanding results, and Sottsass developed his style more clearly, pushing the boundaries between industrial design and pop culture and bringing bold colors, form, and styling to office equipment. An example can be the Valentine revolutionary typewriter (1968), instantly recognizable by its bright red color.

"Sottsass is a magician. Without Sottsass, our life would be colorless."
– Hans Hollein

Olivetti

Another great opportunity for Sottsass was to become Adriano Olivetti's consultant in 1958. They worked together for more than 20 years. Sottsass won three Compasso d'Oro Awards during this period, thanks to his brilliance and great skills.

Sottsass and his collaborators or associates designed in 20 years more than 50 products while working with Olivetti: computers, typewriters, writing systems, calculators, teleprinters, office furniture, equipment, etc. These years were very prolific for both the firm and Sottsass himself. The main strategy was based on the creation of two design groups. One group, composed of employees and Sottsass' collaborators, worked within the company. In contrast, the other group was based in Milan in Sottsass' studio,



Ettore Sottsass – Olivetti
Desk chair "Synthesis 45"
type, 1971-73.



Ettore Sottsass' Valentine
typewriter for Olivetti, 1969.



A collection of objects by The Memphis Group.

Memphis was the outcome of a long quest that Sottsass started 20 years earlier. Indeed, the products were not just experimental prototypes but real models, ready for the manufacturing world.

The movement was active from 1981 to 1988 and radically changed the Italian and world design scenario. His products were worldwide considered a symbol of innovation and modernity.

Asymmetrical shapes, abstract decoration, and bold colors: Memphis has been "a combination of unusual and disruptive approach to design and the playful attitude of children's games," influenced by Art Deco, Futurism, Pop Art, Bauhaus, and such.

For Memphis Milano, Sottsass designed some of his most iconic pieces, such as the Anake Vase, the Alioth Vase, the Carlton Room Divider, and the Casablanca Cabinet.

Memphis Milano

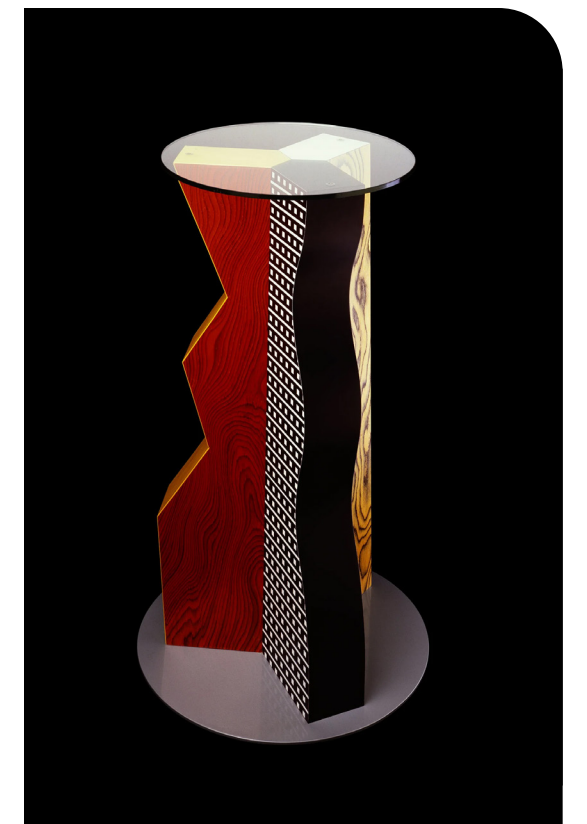
In the early 1980s, following his experience with Olivetti, Sottsass founded one of the most interesting movements in industrial design. The Memphis Milano movement was inspired and founded not only by Sottsass himself but also by a group of other young, creative, and brilliant architects and designers, among which Hans Hollein, Arata Isozaki, Andrea Branzi, Michele de Lucchi, and many more. They were all driven by the dissatisfaction caused by previous design movements and by the aim of providing objects with:

"A symbolic, emotive, and ritual worth. The underlying principle of absurd and monumental furniture is emotion, more than function."

Casablanca cabinet.



Memphis Milano Ivory Side Table By Ettore Sottsass (1985).





Ananke Vase by Ettore Sottsass - Memphis Milano.



Mizar Vase by Ettore Sottsass - Memphis Milano.

Bay Table Lamp USA, 110 Volts, by a Sottsass for Memphis Milano Collection

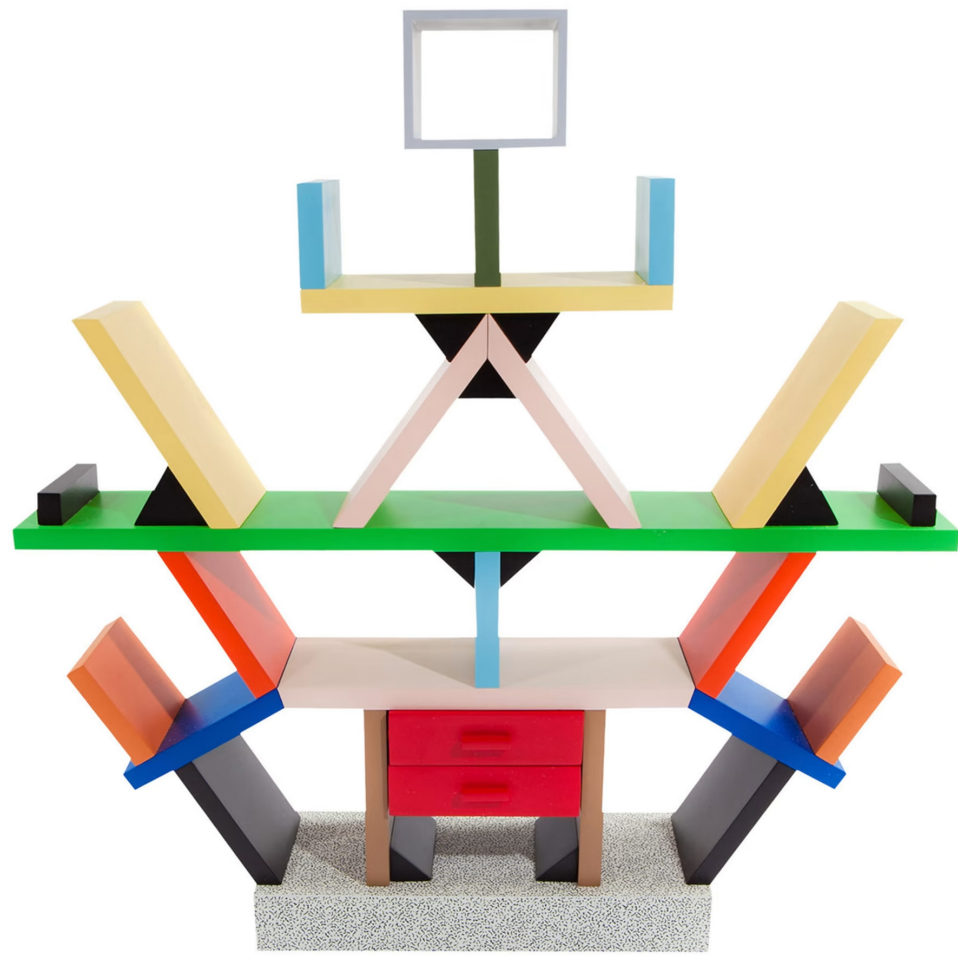


Detail of Alcor Vase by Ettore Sottsass - Memphis Milano

Alcor Vase by Ettore Sottsass - Memphis Milano.



Ettore Sottsass Max bookcase.



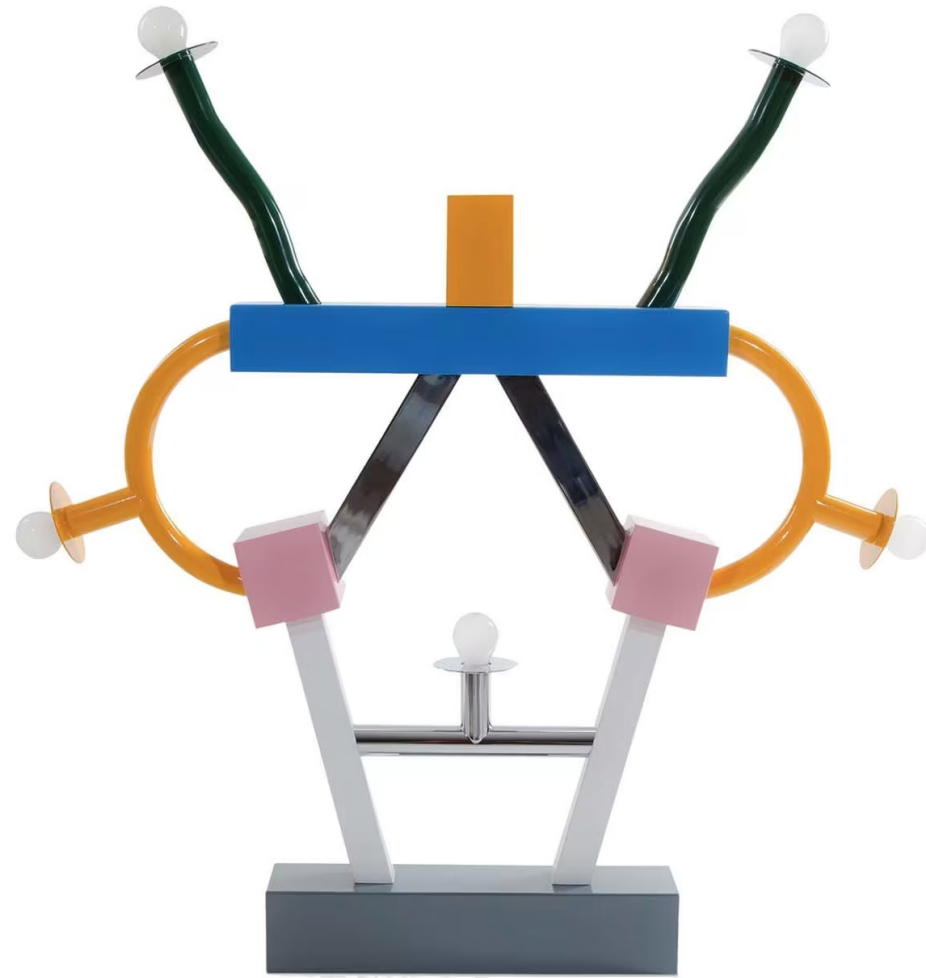
Carlton Room Divider
by Ettore Sottsass
– Memphis Milano



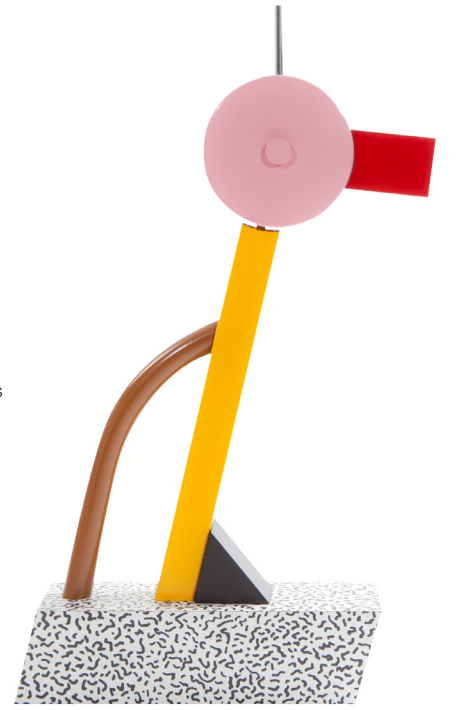
Detail of Carlton Room
Divider by Ettore Sottsass
– Memphis Milano



Ashoka Floor Lamp By Ettore
Sottsass – Memphis Milano.



Tahiti by Ettore Sottsass





Leather 'Selim' Armchair
by Sottsass Associati for
Cassina, c.1990.

Pair of Glass Vases
by Sottsass Associati
for Egizia



Sottsass Associati
Trono chair.

Sottsass Associati

After the foundation of Memphis Milano, Ettore Sottsass established his private design consultancy firm named "Sottsass Associati". The studio consisted of several people, including Aldo Cibic, Marco Zanini, Matteo Thun, and many others. Together, they made architecture all over the world. The firm allowed them to expand their work in architecture on a large scale. Indeed, they collaborated with industries worldwide and focused on urban planning and strategy. To this day, all of the renowned members that co-founded Sottsass Associati are still acclaimed for their work, very influential in Italy and abroad. The studio became a reference point and a springboard for younger generations.

In addition to architectural practice, Sottsass Associati also ventured into a particular field: store and showrooms design. They created and

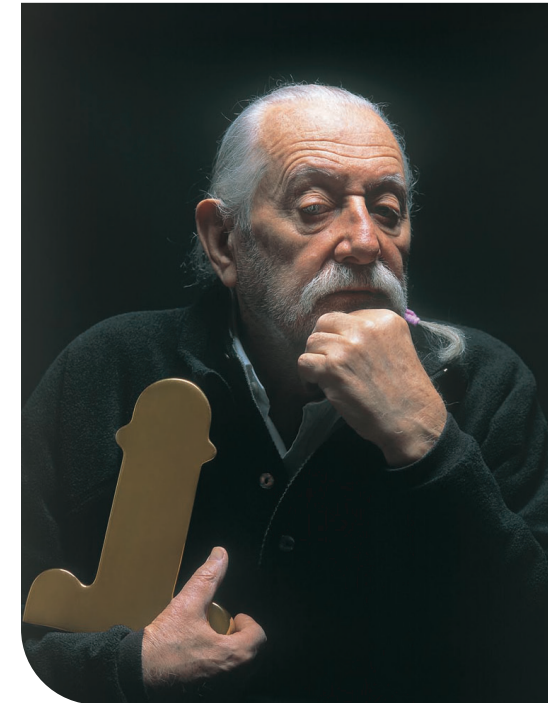
developed design concepts for iconic and renowned brands, such as Esprit and Fiorucci.

Based on the principles of "out-of-the-box thinking," Sottsass' work had so much success that it culminated in the opportunity to design the interiors of Milano Malpensa international airport in 1994.

Interior photo of Terminal
1 of Milano Malpensa
international airport.



Faituttotu; Sottsass's last design, manufactured by Serralunga, Italy.



Sottsass with his Shiva Vase, 2005.

As Sottsass himself said:

“The ritual of architecture is performed to give life, to make real a space that before the rite was not. Space is real when it’s solid of attributes and heavy of meanings, [...] when it drips – like a dense color – of surprises and transformations when it turns pale in shadows and becomes corrupted by light (1956).”

Late Years

While focusing on his main activity as a designer and architect, Ettore Sottsass also took part in several critical contributions. These participations led him, for example, to the conception of the magazine “Terrazzo,” dedicated to design and architecture and published until 1996.

During these years, Sottsass was profoundly disappointed by the Italian mass production, which he accused of fomenting consumerism. For this reason, from the '90 onwards, he decided to reduce his collaborations as a designer to a few interventions, especially for art galleries. In fact, he dedicated himself more willingly and with more regularity to architectural work.

All the works of this period are less known than his design production but still show the results of his constant search condition. He constantly tried to

establish a bond between nature and artifice, new constructions, and genius loci.

He died in Milan at the age of ninety, on December 30, 2007, after receiving from the 1990s onwards several awards and recognitions. These last decades were very notable for Sottsass and the international acknowledgment of his work. He was indeed nominated Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of the French Republic (1992), awarded the IF Award Design of Industrie Forum Design of Hannover (1994), and appointed as Honorary Doctor at the London Royal College of Art (1996) and many more.



Terrazzo Magazines by Ettore Sottsass.

SOTTASS TODAY

Nowadays, Sottsass's works are extremely appreciated worldwide. The permanent collections of many museums worldwide feature his main creations. For example, it is possible to find them at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Centre G. Pompidou in Paris, and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.

He left behind many ideas and inputs with his brilliant mind and personality. His originality and creativity opened up new paths for designers to come.

View of the exhibition "Ettore Sottsass. Radical Design" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Ettore Sottsass' Ceramics on display at Olivetti's Venice Showroom.



Ettore Sottsass Rebel and Poet at the Vitra Design Museum 2017.

“Design is one way to discuss life. It is a way to discuss society, politics, eroticism, food, and even design. Lastly, it is a way to build a possible figurative utopia or to build a metaphor for life.”

“Of course, for me, design is not limited to the need to lend more or less form to a stupid product destined for a more or less sophisticated industry.”

“Therefore, if you have to teach anything about design, it should be, above all, something about life, and you should stress this point, explaining that technology is a metaphor for life.”

– Ettore Sottsass, 1993.

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