

## DESIGN IN TIMES OF CRISIS

**Choices become more difficult yet clearer,  
while innovation remains a fundamental  
and award-winning certainty**

The evaluation criteria that drive the work of both the Permanent Design Observatory and the final Commission – in order to arrive at the selection of products/services to include in the *ADI Design Index* – should not be compromised, but inevitably they are subject to a certain decline in the general context in which such decisions are taken. In times of crisis, research into the innovation content featured in each product/service becomes more detailed and scrupulous, since it is only through the ability to offer original and high quality answers that virtuous mechanisms can be activated which will lead to the creation of products/services that satisfy the (sometimes unexpressed) needs of consumers and users.

Is protection of intellectual property the only bastion from which Made In Italy can be defended? Or is it a simple reformulation of supply, with the consequent creation of scenarios that stimulate demand for previously non-existing goods that is the road that leads to the revitalization of growth? Or again, without wishing to put the blame on individual consumerist acts, would it not be more desirable to decrease in order to grow in another way? Can we look forward to (or should we hope for) an “artisan’s future”, in which vertical skills (typical of manual labour and knowhow) will take the place of the horizontal ability (multi-tasking but effectively superficial) of the manager suitable for all tasks who can be used in every season? Against a backdrop dominated by the most serious economic crisis since 1929, is there any sense in asking these and other questions, knowing from the beginning that no-one has any sure answers?

The critical contributions contained in the *ADI Design Index 2012* look at these problems, they venture to provide some conjectures, and they suggest some different interpretations. The quest for quality presupposes the asking of general questions, set in a concrete temporal context and governed by incidental circumstances of which it is essential to be aware.

The current edition of the *ADI Design Index* contains **111+17** products and services (chosen from among the 778 proposed), divided into 10+1 sections: Design for living (39), Design for the environment (8), Design for work (14), Design for the individual (8), Design of materials and components (11), Service design (3), Corporate research (4), Visual design (7), Exhibition design (12), Theoretical, historical and critical research and publishing projects (5). The selection of projects proposed for the Targa Giovani section (17) closes the collection of works thus included in the *ADI Design Index 2012*.

In comparison with the 2011 edition – which had introduced new regulations for access to the selection and publication process – the final numbers are for the most part confirmed, with a few small variations in some sections and an increase in others (Design for work and Targa Giovani). Highly desirable in each case, since on the one hand they focus attention on working tools and machinery (a regular feature of the Italian industrial landscape) and on the other hand they give rise to a positive

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feeling of hope for fresh energy and quality in design in the near future. Nevertheless, it is necessary to add a few points of a more general nature: the overall view of the products selected presents a picture of a vastly different reality compared to that into which the first Index was introduced (2000, a selection of products from the 1998-1999 biennial). Complete sectors of products are absent (which are however still present in the Observatory's enquiry criteria). One might suppose a loss of interest or vivacity (or even the disappearance) of entire product sectors from Italian industry. This is obvious, from even a quick perusal of the pages in the book. In the same way, during recent years, certain aspects have become more obvious (sustainability, design for all, food, services), together with their effect on productivity, in which design should have a leading role. If possible, Italian industry has become "lighter". The hope is that the artisan's skills return to become a synergistic and fundamental part of industrial production.

If the Permanent Design Observatory genuinely wishes to find the best of Made in Italy, it is essential to explore the overlapping areas between different production processes, and analyze them afresh, in order to underline the contribution that design can (and already does) contribute to these fields. Innovation and quality will always make a key difference in global competition. The important thing is to highlight them, wherever they may be.

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