

Cassina

'Echoes, 50 years of iMaestri'

A celebratory exhibition of an exceptional collection

An echo from the past to celebrate the future

For the 50th anniversary of the Cassina iMaestri Collection, the company presents '*Echoes, 50 years of iMaestri*', curated by art director Patricia Urquiola with Federica Sala, on show at Palazzo Broggi from the 17th to the 21st of April 2023.

Inside this historic palazzo in the Cordusio area of Milan, in a contemporary industrial setting, the **unique method that Cassina has established over the years to edit the great classics through the promotion of authenticity and design culture** is recounted. A celebration of the past with a new vision for the future that anticipates the book *Echoes*, curated by Ivan Miettton and published by Rizzoli, to be released this autumn.

The exhibition itinerary aims to adopt a current-day perspective that tells of the **painstaking research** that has been carried out over the last 50 years, leading Cassina to the **industrial development of the furniture designed by the great architects of the Modern Movement** through a complex philological process, providing a **contemporary reinterpretation of these timeless icons**. In particular, *Echoes* highlights the company's evolution through which it has built progress on the foundations of the past, launching a unique concept of **modern timelessness**.

This anniversary represents an opportunity for Cassina to continue the conversation and bring together the names of the great masters of the 20th Century with new figures whose work also has a strong connection with its history. Considering this, in April 2023, the **Cassina iMaestri Collection welcomes Vico Magistretti, Gio Ponti and Carlo Scarpa** and, anticipating the launch of their lighting collection in 2024, **Charles and Ray Eames**.

"50 years after its foundation, the Cassina iMaestri Collection expands to include new figures who have contributed to writing the history of design. This important evolution highlights the company's ongoing exploration of and respect for the past to create and develop its future."

Luca Fuso, Cassina CEO

Cassina red: an invitation to discover the heart of the company

The exhibition, divided into five sections inspired by the five chapters of the book, is characterised by the constant presence of red light. This colour, distinctive of the Cassina brand, tinges the large windows of the palazzo, offering passers-by a glimpse of the first pieces in the exhibition, such as the *Sindbad* armchair by Vico Magistretti and the *Banquette Méandre* by Charlotte Perriand, a model from 1937-1940 reconstructed by

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Cassina in 2012 and exhibited during “Le monde nouveau de Charlotte Perriand” exhibition at the Fondation Louis Vuitton.

In this area, we find a large, deconstructed sculpture of Gerrit T. Rietveld's *Red and Blue* armchair, a unique interpretation from the Cassina archive created by Gianfranco Pardi for “Interni d'Autore”, a 1985 advertising campaign that portrayed a series of reinterpretations of iconic pieces accompanied by the artists who created them.

Upon entering, the visitor is welcomed into an **immersive atmosphere** in which video projections present the faces and names of the fourteen masters, the protagonists of *Echoes*. The itinerary, spread over two levels, begins in the basement, in what was once a **bank vault**, a hidden, evocative place that **opens its doors to the public for the first time**, inviting visitors to experience **the pulsing heart of the company's incomparable method** and discover the treasures of the Cassina *iMaestri* Collection.

With their timeless designs, the *maestri* represent **an important legacy for Cassina** and the essence of each one is enhanced in the **cross-references between the three-dimensional selection of prototypes and products, all from the company's rich archive, and two-dimensional artistic photographs**, shot for the book and revealed for the first time in this exhibition.

“50 years of iMaestri is not a celebration, but a way of reflecting on the innovative nature of Cassina's method. We see how it remains up-to-date and relevant and how it initiates a dialogue to establish guidelines for the future. It emphasises the importance of research, experimentation, authorship and originality, and how this process leads to values that go beyond the contemporary. An example of sustainable thought.”

Patricia Urquiola, Cassina Art Director

Section 1: *The intuition of iMaestri*

The first part of the exhibition starts at the heart of the company, recounting Cassina's intuition, the idea behind the designs and the development process involved in their industrial production. Located in the basement of the building, **the vault holds the prototypes of some of Cassina's most renowned products**, including the 699 *Superleggera* by the new *maestro* Gio Ponti and the 4 *Chaise longue à réglage continu* by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, and Charlotte Perriand, two icons that represent the very essence of seating.

Cassina's experience in authentically researching and editing heritage pieces has led the company to explore **Charles and Ray Eames' lighting projects** working in close collaboration with the Eames Office, the design studio founded by Charles and Ray in 1941 and today led by their grandchildren, including Byron Atwood and Eames Demetrios. Extraordinary philological research, in continuous development, that inaugurates the **entry of the couple among the Cassina *iMaestri* Collection** and will continue with the launch of the **first Eames Lighting Collection in 2024**.

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Especially developed for this exhibition, a prototype of *Galaxy*, a spectacular aluminium pendant lamp designed by Charles and Ray Eames, first shown at Detroit's "An Exhibition for Modern Living" in 1949, is previewed.

This section continues by taking visitors on a journey to **discover the company's research and production facilities** through videos, archival documents and models from the initial design phases, on display alongside the final products. The Cassina factory is brought into focus by the photographer **Mattia Balsamini** whose shots capture the carpentry workshop's elegantly worked joints, while manufacturing materials such as red industrial machinery belts, from which Gio Ponti's chairs are hung, and heaps of sawdust where the prototypes of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's chairs emerge, are used as spectacular exhibition elements.

A further touch of atmosphere is provided by the reflective walls that accentuate the value of the objects stored inside the vault. In this context, the *Maralunga Mercurio Vivo* sofa by the new *maestro* Vico Magistretti, a limited-edition tribute from 2014 made in silver fabric to celebrate its 40th birthday, shines atop a pile of safety deposit boxes, like a real jewel worthy of the most impenetrable treasure chests.

Section 2: *Constant research*

The second area is dedicated to the **continuity between past and present** and emphasises the **importance of experimentation and innovation** that has allowed Cassina to establish a method for serially producing the designs by leading architects.

Photographs by the Amsterdam duo **Scheltens & Abbenes** hanging on the walls portray the deconstruction of emblematic icons such as the *Zig Zag* chair by Gerrit T. Rietveld, and the *Veliero* bookcase and *Radio in Cristallo*, two never released before products designed by Franco Albini for his own home. The components of these latter two products are on display on suspended shelves in the centre of the exhibition space, providing further insight into their designs. The itinerary is accompanied by archive documents and drawings on the walls, lent from the Fondazione Albini, and motion graphic projections devoted to the works of the authors.

Section 3: *Building culture*

Continuing along the itinerary, this space underlines the important contribution of the Cassina iMaestri Collection to **promoting universal artistic values**, in a further confirmation of the company's transversal approach. Thanks to its **cultural soul**, it has always dialogued with figures from different sectors with the aim of widening its horizons.

This section focuses on designs that demonstrate the collection's **iconic value**, with a selection of the most representative models by Gerrit T. Rietveld, including the *Red and Blue* small armchair and some other prototypes by the Dutch architect.

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The area also hosts a scenographic installation featuring the *Doge* table by Carlo Scarpa, a new entry among the *maestri*. The base of the table is positioned vertically in a room under construction where the piece dialogues with product photos taken by Delfino Sisto Legnani, DSL Studio.

Section 4: *Ieri, oggi e domani. Past to Future*

The fourth section takes us back to the ground floor and celebrates the designs of the *maestri* who have gone beyond trends with products that best represent Cassina's hallmark **timeless elegance**.

Platforms made with bricks, polycarbonate corrugations on wheels, floating floors and other raw construction materials present some of the **eternal icons** that have contributed to defining the company's design ethos and identity, also interpreted through the lens of **Sarah Van Rij**, the photographer based between Amsterdam and Paris. Among these designs, projects by Vico Magistretti, Ico Parisi and Marco Zanuso, with relative prototypes, product breakdowns and 3D sketches, while the *Paravento Balla* by Giacomo Balla engages in a virtual dialogue with a deconstructed video projection on the corner wall.

In this section, a long shelf houses catalogues and materials that tell the story of the collection and the company, represented by a rubber foam 1950s logo backlit with yellow light.

Section 5: *Anticipating change*

The final section of the exhibition illustrates Cassina's ability to **keep its roots firmly in the past** while always **looking towards the future**, an attitude that has allowed it to **understand and embrace social changes** and develop a collection with contemporary relevance.

This perspective explores natural materials with particular focus on the unique ability of Cassina's carpentry workshop. Demonstrating its mastery of wood workmanship, on display one can find production models such as the wooden-top worktable *LC15 Table de conférence, Atelier Le Corbusier, Paris 1958* by Le Corbusier, used by the architect in his Atelier, and the *LC14 Tabouret Cabanon, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin 1952*, spartan furniture conceived as boxes but with refined details like dovetail joints. Woven into this itinerary are prototypes that have never been exhibited before from the Cassina archives, including the *Table Tronc arbre*, a small table found in Le Corbusier's Paris apartment made from a solid tree trunk stripped of its bark that rests on a metal frame: a simple but extraordinary enhancement of the natural beauty of wood.

Granted exceptionally by the Fondation Le Corbusier for this exhibition, plaster casts of original wooden moulds are hung on the walls, depicting the symbols imprinted on the walls of some of the buildings of the utopian city of Chandigarh, designed by Le Corbusier. The same motifs were later used by Cassina for the *Chandigarh* collection of plates, produced in collaboration with Ginori 1735.

Cross-references between nature and experimentation reveals some of Charlotte Perriand's designs, including the *Paravent Ambassade* and the *Rio* coffee table which, suspended from the ceiling, gives form to a

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play of light and shadow. On display in this section are production models such as the *Tabouret Berger* and *Méribel*, refined stylizations of the typical milking stool, along with prototypes, never industrially produced, of the *Double chaise longue* (1952), the *Banquette Air France*, and the *Table Basse* (1941) with its massive stone top left unpolished, with only the support polished. Designs made with natural materials that recreate a rarefied, almost lunar landscape, including the *Cicognino* side table by Franco Albini, perched on an artificial boulder. This display area also celebrates nature in a preview of the shots by Paris-based Italian photographer Tommaso Sartori, who portrays the products immersed in the unspoilt landscapes of Etna and the Cretto di Burri.

A constantly evolving story

In collaboration with the design historian Filippo Alison, the Cassina iMaestri Collection was officially presented to the public in 1973 with the inclusion of models by Gerrit T. Rietveld and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. For some time, the company had begun analysing and selecting the **most significant pieces of furniture by leading figures in the Modern Movement**, with iconic status in contemporary design. This process began in 1964 with the acquisition of the worldwide exclusive rights for the serial production of the first four models designed by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand, and continued with Gerrit Thomas Rietveld (1971), Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1972), Erik Gunnar Asplund (1981), Franco Albini (2007), Marco Zanuso (2015), Ico Parisi (2020) and Giacomo Balla (2020), up to this year with the introduction of Charles and Ray Eames, Vico Magistretti, Gio Ponti and Carlo Scarpa.

This collection does not just symbolize a mere collection of iconic objects, but a **constant search for figures who have designed some of the most representative and innovative models in the furniture industry**. Work carried out with the utmost respect for authenticity, thanks to the **close collaboration with the designers' foundations and heirs**, making it possible to bring to light never industrially produced before projects, making this creative universe known to an ever-growing public.

Echoes: 50 years of iMaestri

Palazzo Broggi, via Tommaso Grossi 10, 20123 Milan.
M1 Cordusio

17th - 21st of April 2023

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| Monday | 11.00 am – 3.00 pm |
| Tuesday | 11.00 am – 5.00 pm |
| Wednesday – Friday | 11.00 am – 9.00 pm |