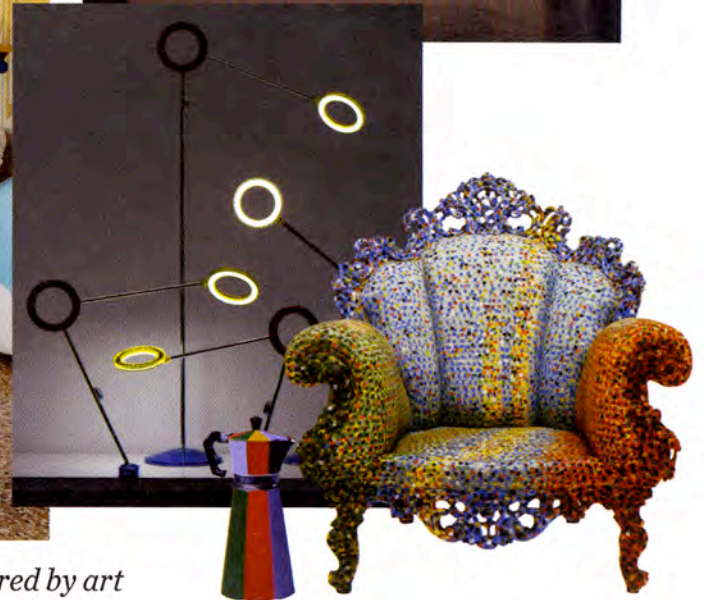
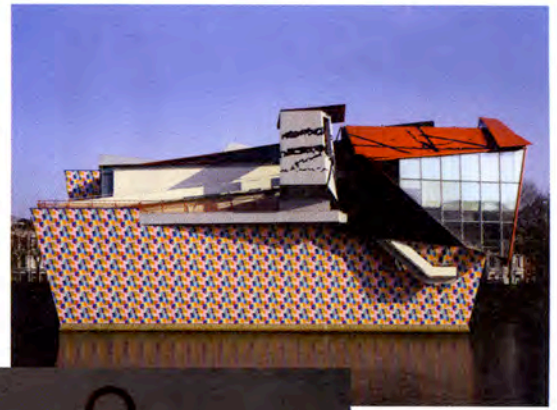




## DESIGN HERO ALESSANDRO MENDINI

*The Italian Postmodernist whose witty designs are inspired by art*



**Decades before the phrase 'design-art' became ubiquitous**, Alessandro Mendini (1931–) was doing his own version of the idea. In the late 1970s and early 80s, when Milan was emerging as the new design centre of the world, he put forward a Postmodernist vision that borrowed from disparate sources, such as the art world, kitsch products, mass-produced pieces and historical styles.

The Milanese native, who studied architecture at the Politecnico di Milano during the 1950s, co-

founded the design group Studio Alchimia with fellow designers, including Ettore Sottsass, in 1976. A forerunner of the Memphis Group, it created experimental pieces characterised by bright colours and discordant forms. It was during this era that Mendini created his most iconic design, the 'Proust' chair (1978). Described by the designer as 'an intellectual exercise', it is a synthesis of several ideas: an 18th-century chair that Mendini imagined the author Marcel Proust might have used; a Pointillist-style pattern reflecting the Impressionist artists that Proust wrote about (the detail is inspired by a painting by Paul Signac); and a fake-antique chair. Subsequently produced by Cappellini and Mendini's own studio, vintage examples now fetch fine art-level prices at auction. It has also been reproduced in marble, ceramic, bronze and plastic.

Art is a recurring motif in Mendini's work – he's also created furniture inspired by Giotto and van Gogh – and several of his

pieces have a Surrealist feel. Take, for instance, his 1994 'Anna G' corkscrew for Alessi. Inspired by Anna Gili, an artist friend, it's modelled on the shape of a smiling woman whose head you have to turn to work the object, and whose arms rise upwards above her dress as the corkscrew turns. It was followed by a male version – 'Alessandro M' is undoubtedly a self portrait – and by a series of playful accessories, including a cake stand that folds up to reveal Anna's face. The collection reflects not just Mendini's wit, but also his thoughtfulness: 'An object is something that tells a tale,' he told *Architonic* in 2011. 'You can almost read it.' It's hardly surprising to learn that he also edited design magazines *Casabella*, *Modo* and *Domus* in the 1970s and 80s.

Mendini's exuberance comes through most strongly in his many architectural projects, which include the 1994 Groninger Museum in the Netherlands, with its geometric patterned exterior, and the Byblos Art Hotel in Verona, where he installed a fun and colourful Postmodernist scheme inside the walls of the 16th-century villa.

Today, Mendini runs design studio Atelier Mendini with his brother Francesco. His most enduring legacy, though, will be the Domus Academy in Milan, Italy's first postgraduate design school, which he co-founded in 1982 ([ateliermendini.it](http://ateliermendini.it)).

**Clockwise from top left** Byblos Art Hotel, Verona. Groninger Museum, the Netherlands. 'Amuleto' lamp for Ramun. 'Proust' chair (1978). 'Oggetto Banale' cafetiere (1980). 'Anna G' and 'Alessandro M' corkscrews for Alessi

