

# WSJ. Magazine

THE WALL STREET

FALL FASHION

## GO F BAROQ

Donatella Versace's Day,  
Alber Elbaz's Deep Thou  
Diana Vreeland's Family  
Christian Louboutin's Ga



DESIGN

GABRIELLA CRESPI

Clockwise from left: The Z desk, (also below), circa 1974, in Aerin Lauder's dressing room; an extendable coffee table made of wood, covered in brass, from the '70s; a pyramid table lamp, circa 1970.

## CUE THE '70S

Long maligned, and now deeply covetable, design pieces from the 1970s offer a welcome mix of louche styling and refined luxury—and are a slick counterpoint to almost any room

BY JEN RENZI

WITH ITS SHAG CARPETING, macramé curtains and conversation pits, '70s interior design has suffered a bad rap, much the same way as have many of that decade's offerings, ephemera and ideas. However, the era was, in fact, an especially fertile and inventive one for furniture design, with experimental exercises in high-concept craftsmanship sweeping the globe.

The best pieces of decorative arts and furniture from that time are a curious mix of aggressive and neutral, showy and shy. Even the most radical, exuberant flights of fancy have a hint of formal restraint—clean lines, elemental geometries, spare expanses of glass and metal. Today, with the distance of time and the style for mixing pieces from different periods, much of the furniture from the '70s feels like just the thing to give a room a little kick.

At the time, political upheaval, such as the May 1968 youth protests in France and the leftist agitations throughout Italy, had liberating consequences for designers. The strain of social emancipation, though, did not result in democratic, affordable-for-the-people product, as was the case

## PLACES & THINGS

DESIGN

with mid-century modernism. Rather, a concurrent rebellion against industrial production meant that designers were able to envision one-offs that verged on fine art. In France, Maria Pergay rendered sculptural forms in painstakingly handworked stainless steel, drawing out metal's liquid quality. Pierre Paulin created elegantly voluptuous seating for the Palais de L'Elysée. In Milan, Gabriella Crespi experimented with architectural, unadorned shapes such as her Z desk, a zigzag of brass-sheathed wood. Italian collaboratives, like Archizoom and Superstudio, made witty one-liners that verged on pranks (the palm-tree-shaped floor lamp) alongside more refined riffs on modernism. Americans like Paul Evans and Wendell Castle, meanwhile, focused on giving the craft a decidedly organic and upscale spin.

In turn, collectors began to be receptive to the idea of mixing aggressive contemporary design with more classical pieces. Henri Samuel, decorator to society fixtures like the Rothschilds and the Vanderbilts, audaciously paired Philippe Hiquily's brass and plexiglass armchairs and daring creations by short-lived collective Atelier A alongside 18th-century antiques and Persian carpets. In his Rue de



**PIERRE PAULIN**  
From top: The Face  
a Face sofa from  
the late '60s; the  
designer's Elysée  
Palace sitting  
room for Georges  
Pompidou; a 1973  
Groovy chair.



**FRANÇOIS-XAVIER  
AND CLAUDE  
LALANNE**  
From left: Yves  
Saint Laurent's living  
room includes a  
Lalanne bar and  
sheep; a bronze and  
copper mirror from  
1974; a marble dove  
chair, also from '74.



**MARIA PERGAY**  
 Clockwise from top:  
 A 1968 stainless-steel  
 table; an amethyst  
 Flying Carpet daybed;  
 a stainless-steel  
 commode from 1972.



**GUY DE ROUGEMONT**  
 Left: Cloud table  
 in plexiglass and  
 brushed aluminum,  
 circa 1971, in  
 Delphine and Reed  
 Krakoff's living  
 room (also, below).

Babylone duplex, Yves Saint Laurent commingled Art Deco masterpieces with surrealist commissions from husband-wife design duo François-Xavier and Claude Lalanne. Zoomorphic seating brought whimsy to his library, while an installation of botanical-inspired mirrors blossomed across his music room.

The period's streamlined style also made it easy for decorators to assign pieces to satisfy functional needs. "Henri Samuel used '70s furnishings to fill in gaps, things like large coffee tables and lighting—accoutrements for our modern lives," says 20th-century furniture dealer Liz O'Brien, who notes that prices have been slowly rising over the last decade. Today, a Pergay one-armed Banquet daybed can fetch \$120,000 at auction and a Crespi coffee table, \$35,000. This notion of the practical avant-garde hints at the decade's most intriguing legacy: a blend of fantasy and pragmatism that celebrated both the handcrafted and the industrial without quite kowtowing to either extreme. The most buzzed-about designs embody myriad contradictions and conceptual fixations while still being wonderful to live with. How very radical. ♦