



VICO MAGISTRETTI

The architect responsible for the enduring Italian 'squishy sofa' trend

Words AMY BRADFORD

VICO MAGISTRETTI (1920–2006) was one of the masterminds of Modernist Italian design. In 1945, he graduated with a degree in architecture from Milan's Royal Polytechnic and went to work at his father Pier Giulio's practice. Magistretti was one of many talents responsible for Italy's post-war design renaissance, a phenomenon he called 'miraculous': the concept involved architects teaming up with manufacturers such as Cassina and Artemide to create a new, streamlined aesthetic.

Although Magistretti designed a number of private houses and public buildings around the world, he is best remembered for his furniture and lighting. His 'Maralunga' sofa, which he created in 1974 for Cassina, is a landmark of 1970s style: a special edition in fabric or leather featuring new stitching details has just been released to mark the brand's 40th anniversary. The sofa's USP is the back, which can be folded down to create a backrest or extended upwards for more relaxed lounging. This flexible feature is said to have been perfected when Cesare Cassina, co-founder of the firm, punched and broke the back of an uncomfortable prototype. The design spawned a thousand imitators and is one of the chief reasons we associate 1970s sofas with squishy leather cushions. But, according to Magistretti, the model will have to wait a few more years before it achieves iconic status. 'There are so very few eternal pieces,' he told *Domus* magazine in 1993. 'Furniture becomes "eternal" if it manages to survive at least 50 years. At that point it is for ever.'

Magistretti's architectural background came to the fore in his lighting designs, where he played with geometric angles. His 1977 'Atollo' lamp for Oluce has a hemispherical shade that connects to a conical base by an almost invisible element so that the top section appears to float: the light source is concealed from view, giving the piece a mysterious, totemic quality. In contrast, his 1967 'Eclisse' lamp for Artemide is dainty and playful, with a rotating inner shade that adjusts the flow of light.

Magistretti created many interiors for private homes, which he believed should be functional, with no superfluous decorative input from him. ('Anybody living in a house I designed has their own culture, background and taste,' he reasoned.) His minimalist style has influenced modern designers such as Jasper Morrison and Konstantin Grcic, whom he taught at the Royal College of Art as a visiting professor in the 1970s. **LD**

You can find the 'Maralunga' sofa collection at Cassina (cassina.com) and the 'Atollo' and 'Eclisse' lamps at Twentytwentyone (twentytwentyone.com).



MUST-HAVE DESIGNS BY VICO MAGISTRETTI

'Eclisse' lamp for Artemide (above), £117; 'Atollo' lamp for Oluce (below), from £401, both Twentytwentyone (twentytwentyone.com). 'Maralunga' sofa, from £4,620; 'Nuvola Rossa' bookcase, from £2,190, both Cassina (cassina.com)

