



Gabriella Crespi among her 'Obelisks' in the late '60s. Photo © Archive Gabriella Crespi

Fabrizia Caracciolo on the reasons why **Gabriella Crespi**
has been the “woman-symbol” of Italian design
(in the area of interior decorating) in the second half of the 20th century.

Gabriella Crespi quickly burst onto the international scene thanks to her always original approach and ideas, and her amazing ability to transform objects by adding openings, closures and changes of function. Because she actually took her distance, with the confidence of those who fear no rivalry, from the thread of serial and industrial research over time. Her output is mostly a matter of one-offs constructed with precious materials, skillfully wrought by the very nimble hands of the finest Italian artisans. It borders, without mingling, on the “Nouvelle Vague” of French decorative arts that precisely in the '50s and '60s invented new forms, paving the way for that extraordinary blend of the traditional and the contemporary that in obedience to the indispensable condition of quality, was to bring acclaim to talented artists and decorators like the Lalannes, Guy de Rougemont and Henri Samuel. The materials and forms converge and vary in articles that are different, yet share a dominant line of invention typical of those with an understanding of great architecture. The glow of brass, the use of glass or wood combined with metal, smooth, sparkling surfaces; everything suggests a contemporary

character, while demanding airy, elegant spaces—chic and worldly, in short.

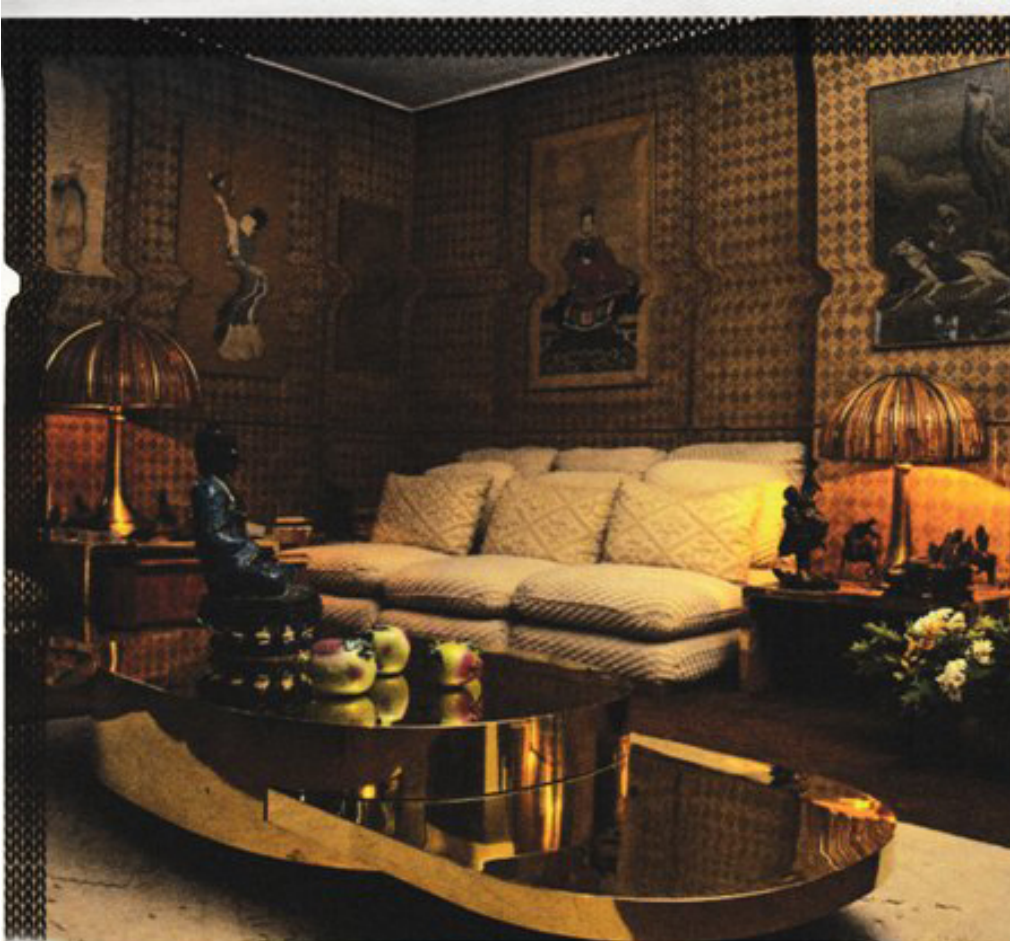
Unconventional in her work as in her private life, Gabriella now lives in Milan with her daughter and precious helper Elisabetta.

The first impression when one enters their lovely home is that of being in a loft of the vibrant New York of the '70s, where it appears that much can be allowed, though in compliance with aesthetic laws that are far from predictable.

The natural color of the rattan panels, the relics from a trip to faraway China, entirely covering the walls, nearly in contact with the lush greenery of the garden, faced by the large windows: the place has nothing in common with the typical bourgeois apartments of the Lombardy province.

A sensitive, erudite visitor, above all free of any stereotypes, cannot help but be swept away by the unusual, warm atmosphere of the place, transported by an elusive sensation of great balance and calm, a fascinating perceptive and aesthetic experience.

Light and harmony form the leitmotif of the decoration; light that is released by things, or settles on them. The materials (besides the various metals,



bamboo, blown glass, plexiglas) become essential attributes of furniture and objects produced by Gabriella, scattered here and there throughout the house; their polished surfaces bestow gorgeous effects of reflection and transparency, their sinuous forms suggest the orbits of heavenly bodies, encouraging you to have a seat, to converse, to take your time and observe. In the end, a mysterious magic hovers, unleashed by the various effigies from her beloved Orient; in particular, from a beautiful photograph of Shri Muniraji, Gabriella's spiritual mentor, adorned by a garland of saffron-color flowers, overlooking the large living area.

As her daughter Elisabetta says, the "silence" of the meditative, contemplative Gabriella of today is countered by the "exuberance and glamour" of the designer who for years was the muse and icon of the international jet set, known for her brilliant collaborations with the most prestigious maisons, like the precious objects inspired by the mineral, vegetable and animal world she created for Dior. At the same time, she gained well-deserved critical acclaim—just consider the success of her "Plurimi" series presented at the Museum of Science of Milan in 1982, which Vanni Scheiwiller praised as "post-modern." Guido Guerrasio compared her work to that of the great masters of Art Déco of the '30s like Ruhlmann, Mallet-Stevens and Chéreau.

Like "Yin and Yang" (hence the name of one of her most important pieces of furniture), the apparent opposites of "noise" and "silence" in her case become just two complementary aspects, both directed towards a single end.

When asked, "who has influenced your creative talent most?" Gabriella responds without hesitating: "the universe is my only influence."

Her pursuit of balance and the "infinite" (thus her book *Ricerca di Infinito: Himalaya*) has driven an inner path that initially at an unconscious level has given rise to an intriguing aesthetic made of planes, curves and "luminous cosmic matter." The apparently inexplicable abandonment of this path to success, at the height of her career, makes her much less conventional than the many other designers of our time. The choice of an existence devoted to spirituality has not implied a "break" with the past, but has been the natural evolution of her creative endeavor. Since her return from India in 2006, Gabriella—with the help of her daughter Elisabetta—has in fact again taken up her artistic work, making both new pieces and reissues of her historic collections.

In the case of Gabriella Crespi, "creation" is the consequence of ideal, not only aesthetic, investigations: thus the meaning of her life is fully summed up in her works and her open-minded way of living "free-style."



From left to right:
Gabriella Crespi's apartment, Milan. Photo by Ben Erisson.
Courtesy Vogue Living, Feb/Mar 1980.
Rising Sun Table, 1975; Aurora, 1973 © Archive Gabriella Crespi
Yang Yin Desk, 1979 and Lune sculpture-lamp, 1969 by Gabriella Crespi