

THE REVIVAL

# GABRIELLA CRESPI

*As the affection for all things 1970s continues apace, this designer's work, reissued by Milan's hip Dimore Gallery, is more relevant than ever*



Light was fundamental to the work of Gabriella Crespi (1922–2017). It illuminates the sculptural planes of her brass, steel and lacquer tables, which feel still more lustrous alongside her space-age, mushroom-shaped Plexiglas lamps. In her hands, even humble materials – such as the bamboo she crafted into curvaceous furniture inspired by the silhouette of the rising sun – take on a glow.

A capsule collection of Crespi's work has just been reissued by Milan's Dimore Gallery, whose founders Emiliano Salci and Britt Moran have collaborated with the designer's daughter, Elisabetta, to revive tables and lighting created between 1970 and 1980. 'Crespi inspires us because she was modern and daring,' explains Salci. 'Everything about her was sophisticated and unconventional.'

The relaunch – which includes flower-shaped and geometric coffee tables reminiscent of Paco Rabanne's futuristic couture – is timely for several reasons. Crespi's style epitomises the lounge elegance of the 1970s, a decade that currently fascinates the design and fashion worlds. Her return to the spotlight also reflects the trend for reviving work by forgotten names (Brazilian José Zanine Caldas and American Paul McCobb are currently experiencing similar comebacks). Plus, Crespi's way of working is very much en



*vogue*: her pieces were all handmade by skilled craftspeople, using self-invented mechanisms that, for example, made table leaves and cabinet doors smoothly unfurl.

Crespi herself was an alluring figure who now seems remarkably ahead of her time. Born into an aristocratic family, she studied fine art and architecture – the latter a highly unconventional choice for a woman in mid-century Italy, especially one of her class. She then began making one-off objets for friends using precious woods and metals. Dior spotted them and snapped them up for its Paris boutique. A forerunner of today's artisan-designers, Crespi showed great prescience in matters of taste. Her apartment in Rome contrasted ancient frescoes with her angular brass furniture – startling at the

time, the combination would now be the last word in chic. Retiring at 65, she abandoned design and spent the next two decades living in a Himalayan retreat. 'I have always considered my independence in my work as well as in my life as one of my biggest achievements,' Crespi told the *Wall Street Journal Magazine* in 2015. Attitudes like that never go out of fashion (dimoregallery.com).

**From left** 'Fungo' table lamps; 'Cubo Tondo' coffee table; 'Eclipse' coffee table, all by Gabriella Crespi, prices on application, Dimore Gallery

**'CRESPI INSPIRES US BECAUSE SHE WAS MODERN AND DARING. EVERYTHING ABOUT HER WAS SOPHISTICATED AND UNCONVENTIONAL'**

WORDS: ANNE HAYDON; PICTURES: ARCHIVO GABRIELLA CRESPI BY CORRADO TOSCANI; SHINOBU FUKUDA

