

GABRIELLA CRESPI



NILUFAR
GABRIELLA
CRESPI





A SPIRITUAL ELEGANCE: THE ENDURING LEGACY OF GABRIELLA CRESPI

What is it about the work of Gabriella Crespi that makes its appeal so enduring?

A Milanese designer whose legacy continues to resonate through exhibitions, publications and collections around the world, Crespi represents through her work an intricate interplay between elegance and innovation. Her profound influence on the design world was not perhaps immediately recognized – it developed slowly, transcending the boundaries of her era in a way that was only later fully understood, speaking to a contemporary audience that values both aesthetic beauty and functionality. In a landscape dominated by fleeting trends and male auteurs, Crespi's creations emerge as timeless reminders that authentic creativity is not necessarily a function of its own time, or any particular time.

It is indisputable that Crespi was something of an iconoclast. Operating from Milan, the very epicenter of what was considered to be the home of design excellence throughout much of the 20th century, she refused to participate in any of the fast-paced trends raging through the offices of far more widely recognized contemporaries such as Ettore Sottsass Jr, Alessandro Mendini, Enzo Mari and others. She was not interested in the design movements that rose and fell around her like ocean swells – hers was an almost autarchic vision of design, driven by close relationships with both the artisans who ultimately were one of the secrets of her excellence, and her clientele.

Her life narrative weaves through the fabric of privilege and passion, unveiling a journey marked by reinvention and artistic expression. And it is possible, or even likely, that certain biographic elements became central to this almost uniquely autonomous creative trajectory. Born into a distinguished Milanese family, Crespi's entrance into the world was one graced by societal eminence. Her union with a member of the Crespi dynasty, renowned owners of the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper, provided her with a passport into high society. Yet beneath the veneer of privilege lay an innate drive and creativity that would guide her life's trajectory. I recall her daughter Elisabetta's reminiscences about her mother's indomitable spirit, an entity that radiated charisma and magnetism, leaving an indelible mark on all who encountered her. Despite the allure of high society, Crespi's insatiable need for creative expression remained the driving force in her career.

As a result, at the heart of Crespi's designs is a harmonious convergence of influences that shaped her distinctive aesthetic. Grounded in an observation of the world around her and the beauty of nature, she masterfully melded design principles with sculptural abstraction. Her works, characterized by intricate forms and thoughtful functionality, were a manifestation of her deep affinity for both the natural world and the cosmic expanse. The "Plurimi" series, notable for its fluid shapes and playful approach to home furnishing, epitomized Crespi's knack for infusing furniture with an almost sculptural quality.

Particularly intriguing for a designer born into a world of opulence, luxury and the expectation of precious and rarefied materials is Crespì's fascination with bamboo during the 1970s, which culminated in the "Rising Sun" collection—an ode to Eastern mystique. This collection's material frugality did not stand in the way of its exquisite expressive qualities, demonstrating on the contrary her design prowess and showcasing her willingness to experiment with materials and unfamiliar influences. This openness to exploration underlined her legacy as an innovator, willing to traverse uncharted territories in the pursuit of creative brilliance.

Crespì's narrative transcends the confines of design, encompassing a spiritual odyssey that commenced at the age of 65 amidst the serene landscapes of the Indian Himalayas. This chapter, characterized by silence, meditation and communion with nature, added a profound layer to her creative perspective. It attests to the notion that artistic expression isn't solely about external manifestation; it's a reflection of inner transformation that fuels and shapes these outward expressions.

Time did not diminish the brightness of Crespì's creative flame. Her return to Italy, already at an advanced age, marked a resurgence, where she embarked on new creative endeavors while remaining steadfast in her spiritual practices. This harmonious blend of creative energy and inward exploration epitomized her final years, revealing her resolute commitment to both self-expression and self-discovery.

In an era where design often finds itself in a perpetual chase of the next trend, Gabriella Crespì's legacy serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring impact of the power of obstinately autonomous thought and practice. Her designs stand not merely as objects of aesthetic delight, but as emblems of a life lived with an unwavering dedication to artistic integrity. Crespì's journey is a reminder of the transformative power of creative vision expressed without compromise – a life defined by an honesty reflected in every aspect of her work and still clearly visible today.

Joseph Grima





GABRIELLA CRESPI
25TH OCTOBER 2023 - 25TH JANUARY 2024

NILUFAR
VIA DELLA SPIGA 32, MILAN



SEDIA '73, 1973
RISING SUN DINING TABLE, 1975
SCULTURA LOW TABLE, 1976
CARCIOFO TABLE LAMP, 1973
BY GABRIELLA CRESPI

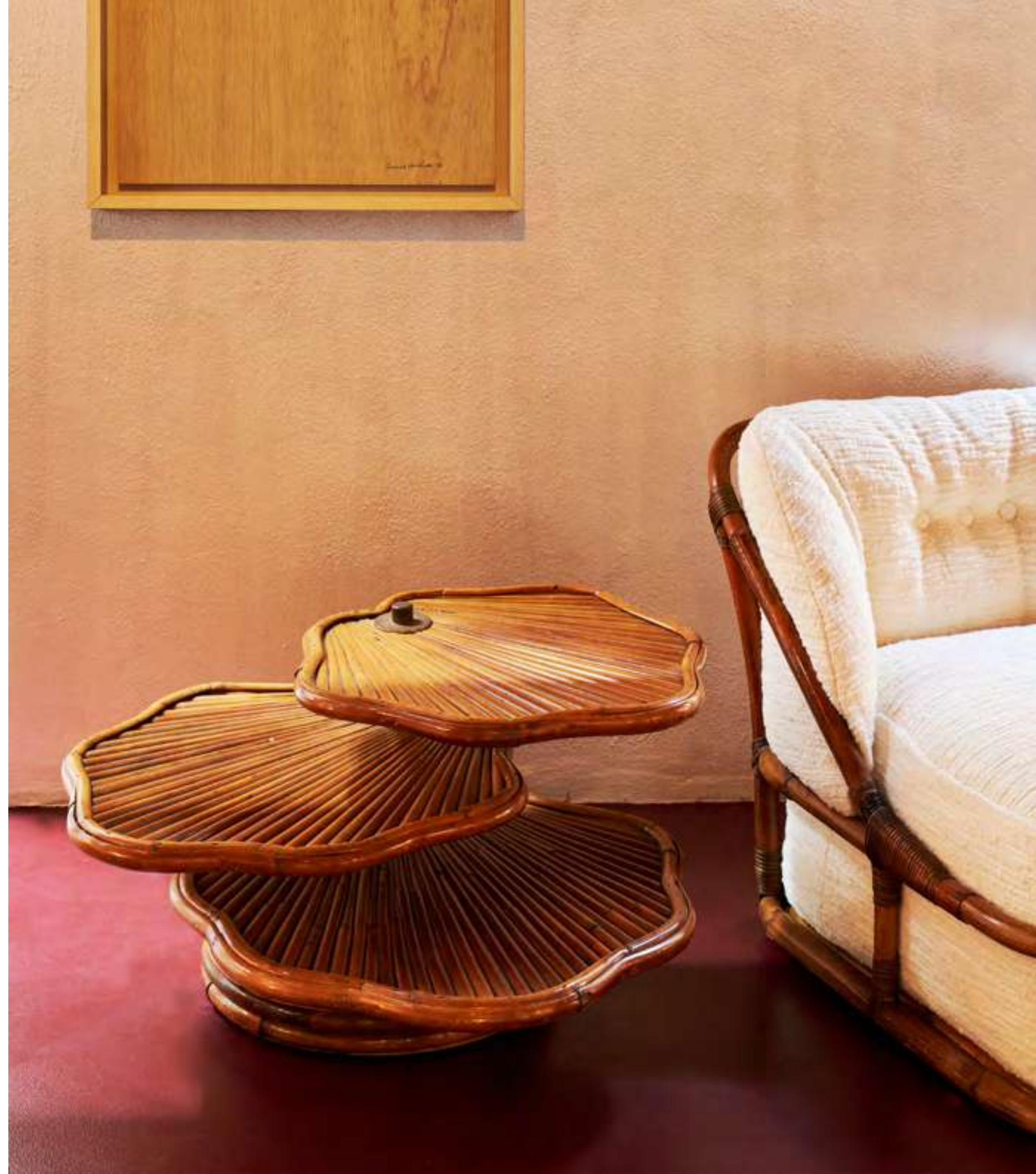
FAMIGLIA CEILING LAMP
BY MAXIMILIAN MARCHESANI, 2023

CARPET BY THIERRY BETANCOURT, 2016

AT NILUFAR, VIA DELLA SPIGA, MILAN



LOTUS LEAVES LOW TABLE, 1975
ARMCHAIR MOD. 698, 1970
BY GABRIELLA CRESPI
AT NILUFAR, VIA DELLA SPIGA, MILAN



LAZY SUSAN TABLE, 1975
PAIR OF ARMCHAIRS MOD. 698, 1970
CALEIDOSCOPIO FLOOR LAMPS, 1970
BY GABRIELLA CRESPI

VAI O STAI CEILING LAMP
BY MAXIMILIAN MARCHESANI, 2023

HECHIZOO CARPET
BY JORGE LIZARAZO, 2016

AT NILUFAR, VIA DELLA SPIGA, MILAN



EXHIBITED WORKS

BAR OVALE, 1976
MENHIR SERIES
BAR CABINET
BRASS, WOOD
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
NUMBERED PIECE
W 60 X D 40 X H 76 CM
W 23.6 X D 15.7 X H 29.9 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN

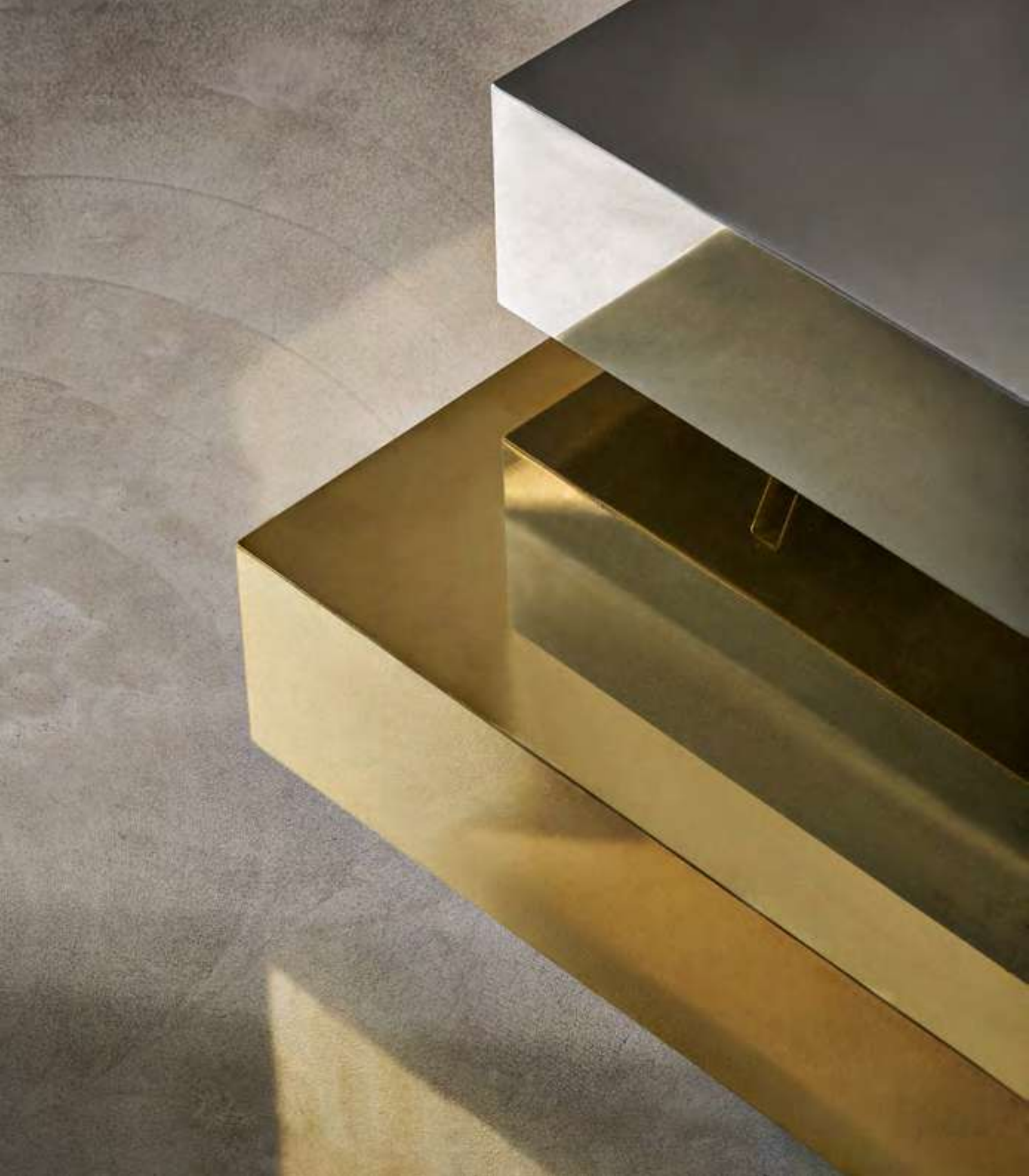




SCULTURA, 1970
PLURIMI SERIES
LOW TABLE WITH SLIDING TOP
WOODEN FRAME COVERED WITH BRASS AND STEEL
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 70 X D 50 X H 41 CM (CLOSED) - W 70 X D 70 X H 41 CM (OPEN)
W 27.5 X D 19.6 X H 16.1 IN (CLOSED) - W 27.5 X D 27.5 X H 16.1 IN (OPEN)

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





SCULTURA, 1970 (DETAIL)



SCULTURA, 1976
PLURIMI SERIES
LOW TABLE WITH SLIDING TOP
WOODEN FRAME, POLISHED BRASS PLATE COVERING
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 79.5 X D 60.5 X H 42 CM (CLOSED) - W 100 X D 75 X H 42 CM (OPEN)
W 31.2 X D 23.8 X H 16.5 IN (CLOSED) | W 39.3 X D 29.5 X H 16.5 IN (OPEN)

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN



SEDIA '73, 1973
GROUP OF FOUR FOLDING CHAIRS
BRASS STRUCTURE, SEAT AND BACK IN LEATHER
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 47.5 X D 55 X H 83.5 CM
W 18.7 X D 21.6 X H 32.8 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





SHEHERAZADE, 1978
LOW TABLE
BRASS, IRON
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
NUMBERED PIECE
W 60 X D 40 X H 58 CM
W 23.6 X D 15.7 X H 22.8 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN



SCULTURA, 1970
PLURIMI SERIES
LOW TABLE
WOODEN FRAME, POLISHED BRASS PLATE CLADDING
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 134 X D 89 X H 40 CM (CLOSED) - W 134 X D 129 X H 40 CM (OPEN)
W 52.7 X D 35 X H 15.7 IN (CLOSED) | W 52.7 X D 50.7 X H 15.7 IN (OPEN)

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





SCULTURA, 1970 (DETAIL)

CUBO MAGICO, 1970
PLURIMI SERIES
LOW TABLE
WOODEN FRAME, POLISHED BRASS AND STEEL PLATE CLADDING
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE AND LOGO
W 62 X D 62 X H 44.5 CM (CLOSED) - W 146 X D 146 X H 44.5 CM (OPEN)
W 24.4 X D 24.4 X H 17.5 IN (CLOSED) | W 57.4 X D 57.4 X H 17.5 IN (OPEN)

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





ELLISSE, 1976
PLURIMI SERIES
LOW TABLE WITH SLIDING SURFACES
WOODEN FRAME, POLISHED BRASS PLATE COVERING
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 132 X D 92 X H 35 CM (CLOSED) - W 270 X D 92 X H 35 CM (OPEN)
W 51.9 X D 36.2 X H 13.7 IN (CLOSED) | W 106.2 X D 36.2 X H 13.7 IN (OPEN)

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





CARCIOFO, 1973
TABLE LAMP
BRASS AND PLEXIGLASS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 55 X D 55 X H 66 CM
W 21.6 X D 21.6 X H 25.9 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





CARCIOFO, 1973 (DETAIL)

FUNGO, 1970
TABLE LAMP
BRASS STRUCTURE, BRASS AND PERSPEX LAMPSHADE
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
Ø 60 X H 78 CM
Ø 23.6 X H 30.7 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN

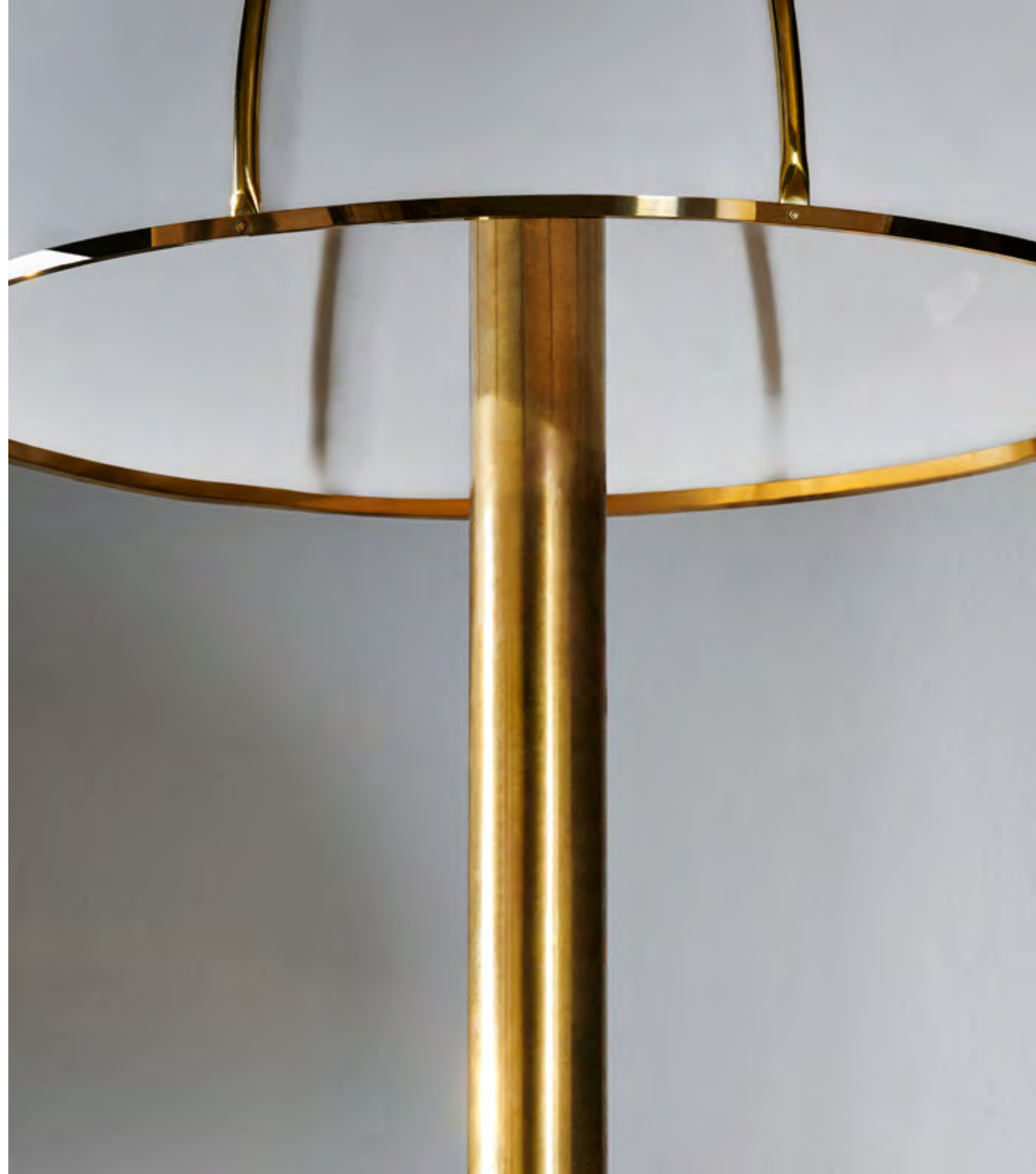




FUNGO, 1970
FLOOR LAMP
BRASS STRUCTURE AND PLEXIGLASS LAMPSHADE
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
Ø 70 X H 178 CM
Ø 27.5 X H 70 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN

FUNGO, 1970 (DETAIL)



SCUDO, 1976
WALL LAMP
BRASS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 59.5 X D 20 X H 35 CM
W 23.4 X D 7.8 X H 13.7 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





SCUDO, 1976



SCUDO, 1976
WALL LAMP
BRASS AND PLEXIGLASS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 59.5 X D 18 X H 36 CM
W 23.4 X D 7 X H 14.1 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN

PAIR OF WALL LAMPS, 1970s
BRASS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 48 X D 7 X H 37 CM
W 18.8 X D 2.7 X H 14.5 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





PAIR OF WALL LAMPS, 1970s (DETAIL)

CALEIDOSCOPIO, 1970
FLOOR LAMPS
NICKEL-PLATED BRASS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 25 X D 25 X H 128 CM - W 25 X D 25 X H 108 CM
W 9.8 X D 9.8 X H 50.3 IN - W 9.8 X D 9.8 X H 42.5 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





CALEIDOSCOPIO, 1970 (DETAIL)

NAUTILUS, 1979
BAR CABINET
STAINLESS STEEL AND LACQUERED WOOD
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
NUMBERED PIECE
W 74 X D 82 X H 100 CM
W 29.1 X D 32.2 X H 39.3 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





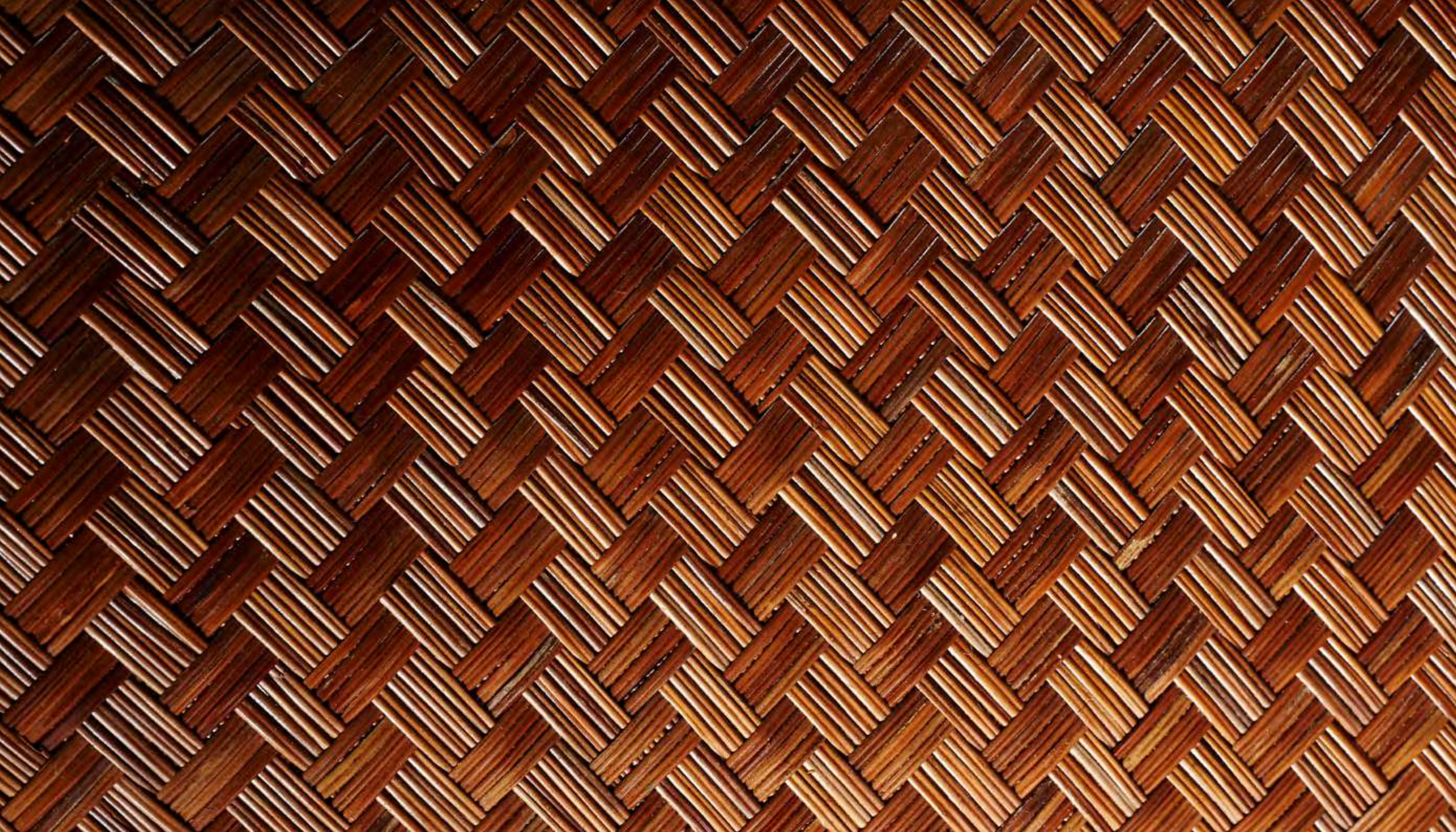
NAUTILUS, 1979

PAIR OF LOW TABLES, 1966
NICKEL-PLATED IRON, CRYSTAL
W 60 X D 60 X H 51 CM
W 23.6 X D 23.6 X H 20 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN







TOI ET MOI, 1975
DORMEUSE
MALACCA AND WOVEN RATTAN, FABRIC CUSHIONS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE ON LOGO
W 124 X D 180 X H 83.5 CM
W 48.8 X D 70.8 X H 32.8 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





TOI ET MOI, 1975 (DETAIL)



PAIR OF ARMCHAIRS *MOD. 698*, 1970
RATTAN STRUCTURE, FABRIC UPHOLSTERY
W 70 X D 83 X H 62 CM
W 27.5 X D 32.6 X H 24.4 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





RECLINING ARMCHAIR AND OTTOMAN, 1972

5 *POSIZIONI* COLLECTION

RATTAN, FABRIC UPHOLSTERY

ENGRAVED SIGNATURE ON LOGO

W 70 X D 105 X H 76 CM (ARMCHAIR) - W 70 X D 72 X H 30 CM (OTTOMAN)

W 27.5 X D 41.3 X H 29.9 IN (ARMCHAIR) - W 27.5 X D 28.3 X H 11.8 (OTTOMAN)

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





RECLINING ARMCHAIR, 1972 (DETAIL)



LOTUS LEAVES, 1975
LOW TABLE
MALACCA AND BRASS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 54 X D 62 X H 44 CM (CLOSED) - W 90 X D 81 X H 44 CM (OPEN)
W 21.2 X D 24.4 X H 17.3 IN (CLOSED) | W 35.4 X D 31.8 X H 17.3 IN (OPEN)
RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN

LOTUS LEAVES, 1975





FOLDING TABLE, 1972
MALACCA CANE, WOVEN RATTAN
W 132 X D 88 X H 80 CM
W 51.9 X D 34.6 X H 31.4 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN

FOLDING TABLE, 1972





LAZY SUSAN TABLE, 1975
MALACCA, WOVEN RATTAN
Ø 122.5 X H 48 CM
Ø 48.2 X H 18.8 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN



RISING SUN, 1975
RISING SUN SERIES
DINING TABLE
MALACCA, BRASS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE ON LOGO
Ø 151 X H 80 CM
Ø 59.4 X H 31.4 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





FUNGO, 1973
RISING SUN SERIES
PAIR OF TABLE LAMPS
BRASS STRUCTURE, MALACCA AND BRASS LAMPSHADE
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
Ø 45.5 X H 70 CM (A) - Ø 46 X H 70 CM (B)
Ø 17.9 X H 27.5 IN (A) - Ø 18.1 X H 27.5 IN (B)

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





FUNGO, 1973 (DETAIL)

TABLE LAMP, 1973
BRASS AND MALACCA, SILK LAMPSHADES
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 42 X D 23 X H 80 CM
W 16.5 X D 9 X H 31.4 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





TABLE LAMP, 1973 (DETAIL)

PAIR OF TABLE LAMPS, 1974
BRASS AND MALACCA STRUCTURE, SILK LAMPSHADES
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 30 X D 30 X H 62 CM
W 11.8 X D 11.8 X H 24.4 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





PAIR OF TABLE LAMPS, 1974 (DETAIL)

FUNGO, 1973
RISING SUN SERIES
TABLE LAMP
BRASS STRUCTURE, BRASS AND MALACCA LAMPSHADE
Ø 70 X H 94 CM
Ø 27.5 X H 37 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





FUNGO, 1973 (DETAIL)

ICE BUCKET ,1970
METAL FRAME COVERED IN BRASS AND STRAW
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 23 X D 23 X H 24 CM
W 9 X D 9 X H 9.4 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





ICE BUCKET, 1970
CORK STRUCTURE, NATURAL TREE BARK AND BRASS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
Ø 27 X H 27 CM
Ø 16.6 X H 16.6 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN

OBELISCO, 1970
TABLE LAMP
NICKEL-PLATED BRASS BASE AND PLEXIGLASS OBELISK
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 16 X D 16 X H 66 CM
W 6.2 X D 6.2 X H 25,9 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





DUE LUNE, 1970s
PORTRAIT FRAME
NICKEL-PLATED BRASS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 50 X D 2 X H 57 CM
W 19.6 X D 0,7 X H 22.4 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN

PAIR OF VASES, 1970s
MURANO GLASS AND METAL BORDERS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 21 X D 17 X H 38 CM - W 19 X D 9 X H 31 CM
W 8.2 X D 6.6 X H 14.9 IN - W 7.4 X D 3.5 X H 12.2 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN





VASE, 1970
GLASS, BRASS
ENGRAVED SIGNATURE
W 29 X D 29 X H 85 CM
W 11.4 X D 11.4 X H 33.4 IN

RECORDED BY THE GABRIELLA CRESPI ARCHIVE, MILAN

Born in 1922, Gabriella Crespi studied architecture at the Politecnico in Milan, where her work was permeated by her perspective on Le Corbusier's and Frank Lloyd Wright's design experience. Since the 1950s, she dedicated herself to the creation and worldwide circulation of furniture and other objects that balanced design and sculptural abstraction. Thanks to her always original conception and ideas, to the articulated forms that meet the needs of contemporary design, and to the amazing ability to transform objects by adding openings, closings, and changes in function, Gabriella Crespi conquered the international scene in a short time. Her creative journey still incisively inspires the expressive creativity of today's generation of artists.

Crespi began her career as a designer in the 1950s with her first production of objects, the "Small Lune Collection", steel moon-shaped sculptures, in which the stylistic influences of time converge and are transformed. In the beginning of the 1960s, she established an enthusiastic creative relationship with Maison Dior, especially in the context of home and table accessories and, from the 1970s, with furniture. In 1968, the prototype of her first "Plurimo", representative of Italian design from that era, was exhibited in Dallas. In 1970, Gabriella's daughter, Elisabetta, began her collaboration in the famous "Plurimi" series, the name of which is a tribute to Emilio Vedova. These "metamorphic" furniture pieces ("Magic Cube", "2000", "Dama", and "Scultura") are a play on volumes and evolutionary possibilities of the same form that change in space and which are in perpetual dialogue with both the environment and light. That same year, "Kaleidoscopes" and "Lune", the leitmotif of Gabriella Crespi's poetic philosophy, were born: sculptures and lamps that introduced a creative intervention in design.

Between 1970 and 1974, she created her most significant lost-wax works, including the sculpture "My Soul" (1974), the "Animali" collections (bronze sculptures with a fairy-like feel that reveal Gabriella's relentless attention to the natural world), "Jewels," and "Gocce Oro", free-flowing sculptures conceived through the ancient and precious process of lost-wax casting. Between 1972 and 1975, she designed the "Quick Change Sofa", the "Z" line ("Z Bar" & "Z Desk") and the "Rising Sun" bamboo collection, material much loved by Crespi that, as she says, "unites strength and flexibility." The famous "Fungo" lamps (1973) are part of this collection. In 1976, the new "Plurimi" ("Ellisse" and "Cubo Tondo"), the "Sheherazade" collection, and the "Stone Sculptures" took shape. Between 1978 and 1980, the bookcase-block "Menhir" (1978), the "Yang Yin" collection (1979), and the two sculpted tables "Ara" (1979) and "Lunante" (1980) were created. In 1980, Gabriella Crespi designed three new "Plurimi" ("Blow Up," "Eclipse," "Sit & Sip") and in 1982 she presented "Punto '83", her last "Plurimo" and a unique piece (one prototype was realized in the same year) at Milan's Museo della Scienza e della Tecnica as part of the exhibition "I Plurimi di Gabriella Crespi" introduced by Vanni Scheiwiller. In 1985, she released the last interviews on her work as a designer before setting out on a new life completely devoted to the spiritual quest, a path she followed for the remainder of her life.

In 1987, she traveled to India where she met Sri Muniraji, who became her spiritual advisor. Gabriella lived in India almost without break for two decades. In 2005, Crespi returned to Italy and began work on her book "Ricerca di Infinito, Himalaya" which was published in 2007. In 2008, she created for Stella McCartney a limited reissue of some of her jewelry collection from the 1970s. The proceeds were donated to the Shree Baba Haidakhan Charitable and Research Hospital at Chilianaula in the Himalayas, an institution specializing in eye care that was founded by Sri Muniraji, Gabriella's spiritual advisor. In 2011 Palazzo Reale dedicated the great anthology "The Sign and the Spirit" to Gabriella Crespi. The anthology was promoted by the Municipality of Milano-Cultura, sponsored by the National Chamber of Italian Fashion and made possible thanks to the exclusive sponsorship of the Mediolanum Farmaceutici S.p.A. Group. It is a tribute to a prominent figure of Italian creativity who has left a permanent mark in the shape of the design culture of our time. In April 2012, Gabriella Crespi S.r.l was established with the aim of promoting the latest creations by the artist and designer. In the same year the Archivio Gabriella Crespi was set up within the company and managed by the artist's daughter Elisabetta Crespi. In 2013, a new limited edition of the "Tavolo Scultura" was presented in a new version made of Belgian Black marble. In occasion of the Salone del Mobile 2015, Gabriella Crespi presented "New Bronze Age" a series of new limited editions of her 'classic' works, realized for the first time in bronze. In 2016, Gabriella Crespi realized her last work "Wave Desk".

She died in her home in Milan on February 14th 2017.

SPECIAL THANKS TO
ARCHIVIO GABRIELLA CRESPI FOR THE COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT.

NILUFAR

Viale Lancetti 34
20158 Milano
Italy
+39 02 36590800

Via della Spiga 32
20121 Milano
Italy
+39 02 780193

www.nilufar.com

THANKS TO:
JOSEPH GRIMA
FRANCESCO SANTOCHIRICO

ART DIRECTION & GRAPHIC DESIGN:
MARIO MILIZIA

PHOTO:
FILIPPO PINCOLINI

PRINTED IN ITALY

© NILUFAR 2023

ISBN: 978-88-99748-17-3