

“ THE STUDIO MAGAZINE”

The HP Le Studio Gallery Newsletter

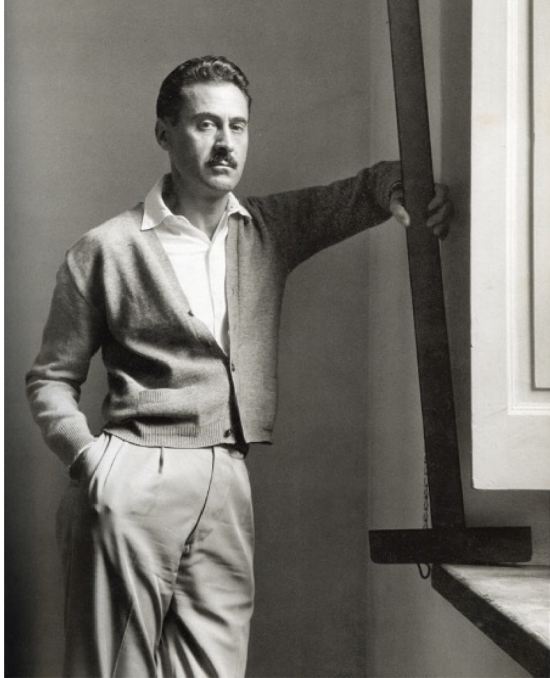
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Franco Albini (1905-1977) and the Fiorenza chair (1938-1978)

Franco Albini and his method

The recent important publications and the great exhibition at the 2006 Milan Triennale commemorating the centenary of [Franco Albini](#)'s birth have permitted to renew scholars and collectors' knowledge about his work and his purposes as an architect and a designer. If he appears as the last supporter of the Modern Movement's methods, aesthetics and ethics, he can also be identified as well as [Gardella](#) and the [BBPR](#) Studio, as one of the first Italian rationalist architects criticizing the frozen modernist orthodoxy and opening the way to post-modernism.



Franco Albini by Irving Penn, private archive

Questioning modernism in order to keep alive its spirit and to create a modern tradition was, for Albini, the only way to build modernity. As a man of silence, Albini used to work directly on the prototypes. Very few theoretical statements, but years of experimenting on the model. Every day at the workshop, with the craftsmen, testing the construction of the piece improving each single detail, and back to the studio for drawing, and again into the workshop, until perfection: that was Albini's method for design. His care about craftsmanship was not a "pose", but a necessity for his mission. He wanted to create new types for modern living, types than can be used as examples. The Fiorenza armchair is one of them.



Fiorenza, Arflex, 1952. Photo Hervé Lewandowski, copyright

The Fiorenza chair as a manifesto

As well as for the LB7 library (1957), the TL2 table (1950) and the Luisa Chair (1950), the genesis of the Fiorenza armchair began in the 30's with the first prototypes, and after a first version in 1952, the project was definitely achieved in 1956 with the second version made by Arflex.



Fiorenza, Arflex, 1956. Photo Hervé Lewandowski copyright

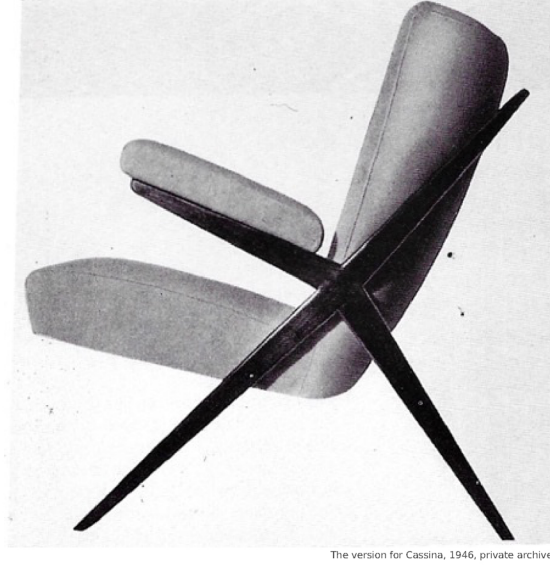
With the posthumous version of 1978, no less than seven different versions can be identified. As a work in progress, this creative process, running over almost forty years, has integrated the major technological innovations of the 50's. It is also a highly instructive testimony of the albinian method for designing furniture as well as for creating architecture. The analysis of this evolution is at last the best way to illustrate Albini's critical relationship with the Modern Movement.

From the beginning, there is no doubt about Albini's aim. The challenge for him was to reinvent tradition by applying modern principles to an eighteen-century icon: the wingchair or bergère; an almost completely closed chair, more compact and massive than any other in the history of furniture.



First idea for the Fiorenza chair, Poggi, 1939, private archive

Undoubtedly, his method made of the "Fiorenza" a model of lightness and transparency, turning away this chair from its "bourgeois" reputation. Isolating every primary constructive element of the chair, reducing it to the essential, then recombining all elements in a suspended composition which alternate gaps and isolated masses was his way to succeed at renewing a topic without falling into dryness or manierism.



The version for Cassina, 1946, private archive

Even the anthropomorphism of the arm's design in the two last versions (Arflex), which participate to the expressivity of the chair, as well as the extraordinary and highly metaphorical void at the back of it, constitute more than an effect of style. They were a statement from a humanist architect who had, all his life one obsession: to suppress gravity from our world in an obstinate quest for freedom: this was, in these times, the spirit of design.

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