



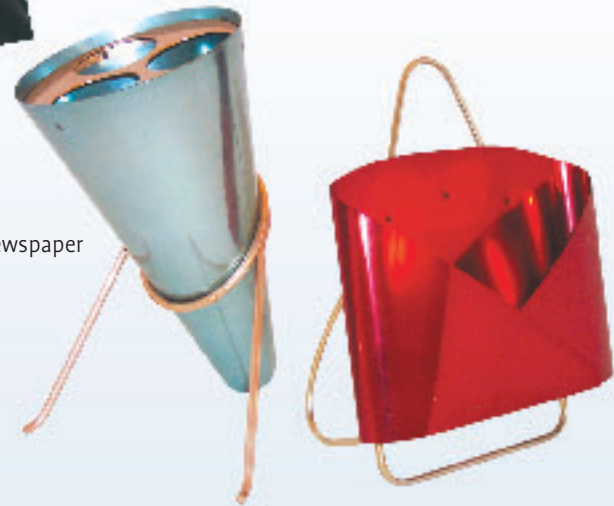
# Ettore Sottsass

Ettore Sottsass is a distinguished designer of his generation best known for his founding role in the early 1980s Memphis collective. His ideas have had as much of an impact as his designs, which over a 60-year period have moved from ceramics to mainframe computers and from poetry to pragmatism. Ettore Sottsass's 90th birthday in September 2007 was celebrated by a retrospective exhibition of his life and work at the Design Museum in London, titled 'Ettore Sottsass - Work in Progress'.

Ettore Sottsass - Work in Progress  
 29 March to 10 June 2007  
 Design Museum, Shad Thames  
 London SE1 2YD  
 10.00-17.45 daily  
 T: 0870 833 9955  
 www.designmuseum.org



Umbrella and newspaper stands - 1955



## His early career

Ettore Sottsass was born in 1917 in Innsbruck, Austria, to an Italian architect father and Austrian mother. The family moved to Turin so that he could study architecture there and in his student days he encountered the most progressive Italian designers and architects of the day. After serving in the Italian army in the war he returned home to work for his father on housing projects, before moving to Milan in 1946 to curate a craft exhibition. He then set up his own architectural and industrial design practice making limited editions of ceramics, jewellery and one-off pieces of furniture. Many of the themes that would characterise his later work were already evident as he had started to create a personal design language that set him apart from his contemporaries.



Valentine portable typewriter - 1969

## The Olivetti era

Sottsass travelled to New York in 1956 to work in George Nelson's studio and on his return to Italy was invited to design furniture for Poltronova, near Florence. He was also appointed as design consultant to Olivetti's new electronics division where he was responsible for the styling of the Elea 9003 (Italy's first mainframe computer) and a range of office machinery, equipment and furniture. His work on the bright red Valentine portable typewriter in 1969 was as significant as the introduction of the iPod, in that it became an iconic product with a visual identity that helped Olivetti extend beyond the office to the consumer market. During this period he maintained his own studio to explore more radical designs such as pop-influenced 'totem' ceramics and the first 'superbox' closets coated in striped plastic laminate. In 1978 he collaborated with Alessandro Mendini and Andrea Branzi on an exhibition of 'new design' furniture at the Milan Furniture Fair for Studio Alchimia, a group of avant garde furniture designers.



Suspended ceiling light - 1957

Enamel plates - 1959

Hydrants and gas pumps - 1956/67

Vase - 1953

Barbarella desk - 1965

Side table - 1947

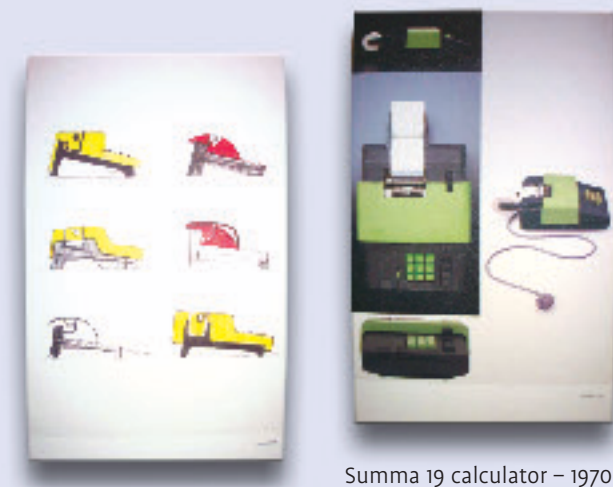


Efira - 1986

Lidia and Aspasia - 1986

## Memphis

Alchimia was eclipsed by Sottsass's collaboration in 1981, in the design collective called Memphis - a short-lived, but enormously influential creative group. Memphis was a group of young Italian and international designers and what it lacked in aesthetic consistency was made up with impact - over 2,000 people flooded to the opening of the first exhibition in Milan. Memphis embodied themes that Sottsass had been experimenting with since the mid-1960s including bright colours, kitsch motifs and the use of cheap materials. This fusion of high art and popular culture was a deliberate attack on conventional ideas of good taste. Even for those who were unmoved by its aesthetic vocabulary there was a conviction and excitement about Memphis that could not be ignored. Later that same year the design consultancy Sottsass Associati was also founded.



Tekne 3 typewriter - 1964

Summa 19 calculator - 1970



Z9R typist chair - 1973

Factotem (Studio Alchimia) - 1979

Vetrinetta di Fanniglia - 1979

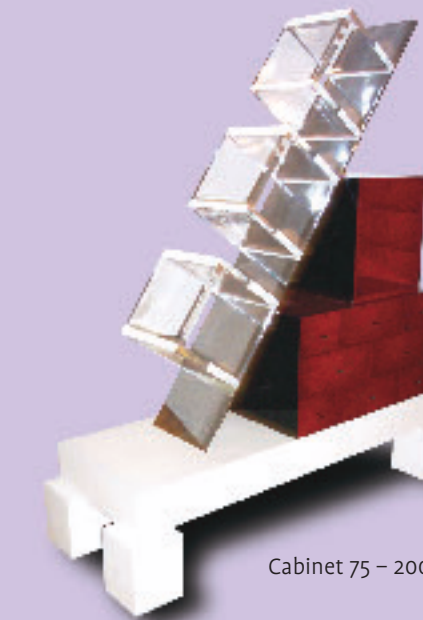


Tartar sideboard - 1985



Casablanca - 1981

Carlton - 1981



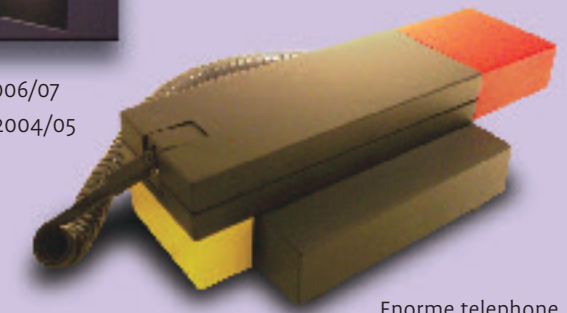
Cabinet 75 - 2006



Trono chair - 2006 (Ettore Sottsass and Christopher Redfern)



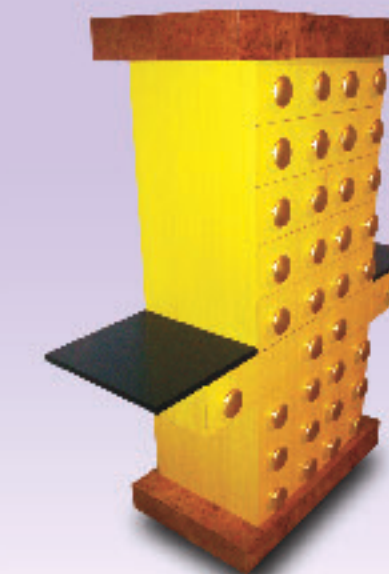
Bon Appetit cookware - 2006/07 and Cinque Stelle cutlery - 2004/05 (Ettore Sottsass and Christopher Redfern)



Enorme telephone (Sottsass Associati) - 1986/1988

## After Memphis

In 1985 Sottsass announced that he had left Memphis to concentrate on Sottsass Associati and complete architectural and industrial design projects, including shops for the flagship store Esprit, cutlery for Alessi, consumer electronics and furniture of all kinds. More recent projects have been the Malpensa 2000 airport near Milan and work for Apple, NTT, Philips and Siemens. Sottsass skilfully ensured that the firm was never defined by the Memphis connection and at its height Sottsass Associati had forty people working in the studio in Milan. Presently the practice concentrates primarily on furniture and industrial design projects, co-ordinated and designed by partner Christopher Redfern, a British designer. Sottsass himself has continued with his personal projects in glass and ceramics and his extreme designs for items of furniture.



Mobile Giallo cabinet - 1988



Cabinet 54 - 2003