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The Spazio Vivo and Spazio Vivo Icona kitchens on display at the MoMA.



## A MODULAR PROGRESSION

For nearly a century, designers have worked to streamline and change the ways we use the kitchen. A recent exhibit examines these developments and puts Italian innovation center stage. **BY JESSE RUSSELL**

»»» **RECENTLY, I FOUND MYSELF MAKING ONE OF MY MANY** pilgrimages to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, this time to see *Counter Space: Design and the Modern Kitchen*. As is often the case with exhibits drawn from objects in the MoMA's permanent collection, I am simply staggered at how much this mecca of art and design has in its collection that you don't often get to see. This includes a multitude of objects that relate to kitchen design—*Counter Space* is made up of nearly 300 pieces, including photographs, paintings and films, all relating to innovations and socio-domestic developments as seen through the 20th century kitchen. Walking through the show, I focused on the fact that there is no other single room that has seen as much innovation in design and functionality solutions as the modern kitchen. It is a workspace where the dance between function and aesthetics is played out at even the smallest level—the shape of a spoon, sugar cube or even the brown paper bag.

The Italians are well represented in *Counter Space*. There is Alfonso Bialetti's iconic 1930 Moka Express stovetop coffee maker, a design that endures today and has been riffed on by several other

manufacturers. In addition, there are certain objects in the exhibit that we might find banal today because they have become so familiar, such as Earl S. Tupper's designs that would become Tupperware, or plastic bowls by Gino Colombini from 1957. Yet they call your attention to the importance of plastic in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. During those decades, a new frontier for plastics allowed designers to mold durable pieces in exciting ways. Seeing these objects in a museum reminds us that what now seems ordinary was once extraordinary.





The Italian star of the show, Virgilio Forchiassin's 1968 Spazio Vivo, is anything but ordinary. Produced by Snaidero and standing 36 inches high by 48 inches wide, this white- and yellow-clad rectangle on casters unfolds into »»»

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## DESIGN KITCHENS

a complete and efficient kitchen and cooking station with refrigeration—a small plug-and-play version of a larger kitchen called Spazio Vivo Icona.

This unit explored high-concept design for flexibility in the living space, similar to Joe Colombo's famous 1963 Minikitchen created for Italian manufacturer Boffi. The Spazio Vivo was the first time Snaidero collaborated with an outside designer. This relationship would become important to Snaidero's legacy, leading to their long-standing collaboration with famed design house Pininfarina (the firm behind many of the sexy bodies of Ferrari's cars).

Spazio Vivo shares the exhibition with the larger installation of Margarete Schütte-Lihortzky's Frankfurt Kitchen from 1927. The Frankfurt Kitchen was designed as an efficient, functional and economical kitchen for housing projects in and around Frankfurt. Spazio Vivo is seen here as a development of a unified kitchen design, condensed into a small, mobile rectangle.

Yet early kitchens such as the Frankfurt Kitchen, the Spazio Vivo or the Minikitchen are really launching pads for thinking about the kitchen as a complete design, and would lead manufacturers, as well as others, to great commercial success.

We think of the kitchen today as the integration of cabinetry, ovens, cooktops and refrigeration into a modular, space-efficient aesthetic.



*Above: Pedini's first kitchen, the 1957 Francesca. Its unified and modular approach was a precursor for what was to come. Below: the central island of Pedini's Artika kitchen.*

Looking at recent designs, I came across Pedini's Artika kitchen. It struck me as a continuation of the modular concept. Still in production and designed by Domenico Paolucci, it is a striking example of the utility of the kitchen island. This is the perfect use of the modular concept, because it is ostensibly dropped into the space. Artika's wrapping, curvilinear shape creates a new space to work in, with two sinks, two sets of cooktops and impressively crafted cabinetry following the island's lines. Accessible from 360 degrees with a myriad of functional detail, it optimizes modular design advancements from the last half-century. Perhaps few countries have influenced kitchen design as gracefully as Italy has over the last fifty years, and *Counter Space* and the Spazio Vivo represent merely an entry point into the way we think about the most important room in the home. □

