

# designboom®

## andrea branzi



andrea branzi © designboom

architect and designer, professor of industrial design at the politecnico di milano. born and graduated in florence, he lives and works in milano. since 1967 he has been working in the fields of industrial and research design, architecture, urban planning, education and cultural promotion. he was among the founders of archizoom associati, and promoter of the italian radical architecture movement. he has collaborated with the leading design producers in italy and abroad, such as alessi, artemide, cassina, poltronova, vitra, zanotta. he has taken part in many exhibitions at the triennale di milano and the biennale di venezia, and has held personal exhibitions in different international museums, including the museums of decorative arts of montreal and paris, at the scharpoord centrum of knokke and at the fondation pour l'architecture in brussels. he has written several books, among which are 'the hot house', 'learning from milan' and 'domestic animals' published by MIT press, usa; 'nouvelles de la metropole froide' in the cahiers of CCI (centre georges pompidou) in paris, and 'introduzione al design italiano' by baldini & castoldi, milano. in 1996 he curated two exhibitions aiming to set the basis for the

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new museum of italian design at the triennale di milano, and he has edited the catalogue 'il design italiano 1963-1990'. author of many essays and books, he has collaborated with the magazines 'interni', 'domus', 'casabella', and he was the editor of MODO (1983-1987). in 1983 he was among the founders of the domus academy, the first international post-graduate school of design. in 1987 he was awarded the compasso d'oro, with special mention for his work as a designer and theorician.

we met **andrea branzi** in his milanese studio on february 21, 2003.

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**what is the best moment of the day?**

either the morning when its time to start working  
or the afternoon when its time to start working.

**what kind of music do you listen to at the moment?**

I listen to... since I read chet baker's biography, I listen to miles davis,  
chet baker or keith jarrett who I find interesting because of the link  
with philip glass's music, which I often use when I give talks.  
I'm not a very sophisticated listener,  
I don't know that much about music itself,  
but I link music to theoretical problems which can be exemplified by music.

**do you listen to the radio?**

yes in my car, no in my office unless my daughter is on.  
she is a dj on a radio program. I don't listen to the radio while I'm working.

**what books do you have on your bedside table?**

history and above all biographies,  
I'm interested in reading people's accounts of their lives, whoever they are.

**do you read design magazines?**

no, never.

**where do you get news from? newspapers?**

newspapers, tv, magazines

**do you notice how women are dressing?**

**do you have any preferences?**

I look at women, although I don't have any set ideas  
about how they should dress.

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badly dressed women annoy me.

**what kind of clothes do you avoid wearing?**

it depends, I don't have any taboos,  
tuxedos, although nobody wears them nowadays

**do you have any pets?**

yes I have two jack russells, two medium sized nice dogs.

**when you were a child, what did you want to be?**

to follow my creative instincts,  
I was interested in art, art history, painting,  
I was an enfant prodige in architecture...

**where do you work on your designs and projects?**

physically I draw at my desk, but in reality it is the result of a reflection  
that I carry out even in the most unsuitable places,  
which are also extremely stimulating.

**who would you like to design something for?**

nobody, I don't have a particular client I'd like to design for.  
I am interested in having what I do please me, and a small circle of people.  
I don't have professional ambitions other than this.

**do you discuss your work with architects and designers?**

yes, very much

**describe your style, like a good friend of yours would describe it.**

andrea branzi is a person who deals with theoretical physics,  
and sees architecture not as the art of building  
but as a much more articulated form of thought.  
I work alternating between theoretical research and practical designing.

**from archizoom, radical architecture, alchimia... to your most recent works,  
can you tell us if there is an evolution in your thinking  
and your way of dealing with work?**

no, I've always been inside this profile which corresponds to my personal attitudes,  
that is I try to carry out designing as a form of reflection,  
an evolved form of thought, also as a knowable category.  
the core of my work is not architecture per se, a discipline per se,  
I'm interested in architecture and the discipline because of its tight bond with knowledge.

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for example, at the moment I am reconstructing the path  
from radical architecture to today. I defined modernity in the 21st century as

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*weak and diffuse.*

we have passed from a strong, concentrated modernity  
to a weak and diffused modernity, which is characteristic of our time.

this sort of attitude of knowing the era in which we live through design,  
not only through books, but through design, is what has characterized my work  
from the late 70s to now, it has been full of changes but also a unified whole.

**which of your work has given you the most satisfaction?**

a project that was of great importance for me, but also for my generation,  
for many artists that came afterwards was the 'no stop city' project.  
a fluid metropolis, where even the concept of modernity within order changes,  
towards an idea of uncontrollable complexity  
and a world destined to a huge diversification.  
today I see that this type of scenario is appreciated,  
shared by famous contemporary architects who recognize  
the radical movement and the 'no stop city' project to be a genetic event,  
which intercepted a development in the culture of the project,  
becoming an example within the project itself.

**is there any designer and/or architect from the past , you appreciate a lot?**

I'm not terribly interested in the history of modern architecture,  
because I feel so involved in it..  
in the deeper history, filippo brunelleschi.  
his invention of the classical turning within the medieval culture crisis  
gave birth to the role of the project and the esthetic research as a system  
for holding a civilization, which was falling apart, together.  
the role of dry, sudden, ingenious invention, by brunelleschi  
made all renaissance architecture possible.

**and those still active, are there any particular ones you appreciate?**

at the moment I have a particular relationship with toyo ito  
because I am interested in his work within this hypothesis  
of a weak and diffuse modernity that in contemporary japan  
is taking form in his work, and of shigeru ban...,  
... this development that I call post-kobe, that is post- kobe-earthquake,  
the disintegration of these heavy megalopolises,  
the generation lead by toyo ito has followed the path of a much lighter,  
more elastic, more transparent and crossable modernity.  
and toyo ito like many others recognizes his origins in our movement.  
even deconstructionists like frank gehry and daniel libeskind are set  
within this line that started in the late 60's and faced the crisis  
of contemporary architecture with positive, evolutionary  
and knowable intentions rather than as a crisis of a historical discipline.

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we live in permanent uncertainty, and uncertainty has always existed,  
for those who have known how to interpret it, as an extraordinary occasion.  
when I cited brunelleschi before, he was the very first architect who  
accepted living in a cultural system that no longer had a foundation.  
he reconstructed this classical code which had disappeared  
from the face of the earth for 12 centuries.  
thus he accepted that all of the planning apparatus was based on nothing...

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here we have a similar situation.  
europe has come out of the 20th century with a series of failures,  
there is no trace of the theorems that characterized it, modernity has gone  
in a completely different direction from the one that european rationalism  
had hoped for. artists are the saviors of the 20th century.  
this is an extraordinary occasion for an enormous renovation  
of the project on an experimental basis, based on research.

#### **any advice for the young ?**

I have no advice to give, in fact I hope that they can give me advice,  
the only thing is that they have the capacity for autonomy, especially from professors.  
autonomy is the most amusing thing, thus to have fun making architecture and design  
that now can also be a ferociously boring profession, since it is based  
on purely professional ambitions, I wouldn't wish this on any living being.

#### **what are you afraid of regarding the future ?**

I have no fear for the future. the world, society has continued on positively  
and in an extraordinary manner with respect to the mistaken predictions that were made.  
then again in history one finds what one has inside.  
I think that humans have a positive attitude. we'll see what happens.



#### **the questionnaire of marcel proust (1871 - 1922)**

.....

(in age of fourteen proust was given an english album "confessions : an album to record  
thoughts, feelings".

seven years later marcel proust published this questionnaire)

in the literary salons in nineteenth century paris, this parlour game was a popular  
amusement.

for designboom **andrea branzi** has answered these 'old fashioned' questions.

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.....  
.....  
**the main traits of my character.**

sense of humor.

**a quality I desire in a man.**

curiosity.

**a quality I desire in a woman.**

imagination.

**what I appreciate most among my friends.**

that they love me.

**my principal defect.**

laziness.

**my favourite occupation.**

fishing.

**my dream of felicity / happiness.**

the current one.

**what would be the biggest misfortune for me.**

to become an idiot

**who I would like to be.**

whoever

**where I would like to live.**

here, anyplace

**the colour I prefer.**

right now red and white.

**the flower I love.**

right now the new orchids.

**the bird I prefer.**

canary.

**my favourite authors.**

you either write books or you read them.

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**my heroes in fiction.**  
the great comedians

**my favourite composers.**  
philip glass.

**my favourite artists.**  
mark rothko.

**my heroes in real life.**  
intelligent ironic people

**my favourite names.**  
any

**what I dislike the most.**  
those who make bad use of their culture.

**the military enterprise I like the most.**  
alexander the great's conquest of far east  
he won and returned like an indian (he lost).

**the reformation I appreciate the most.**  
the pill for women.

**how I would like to die.**  
without knowing.

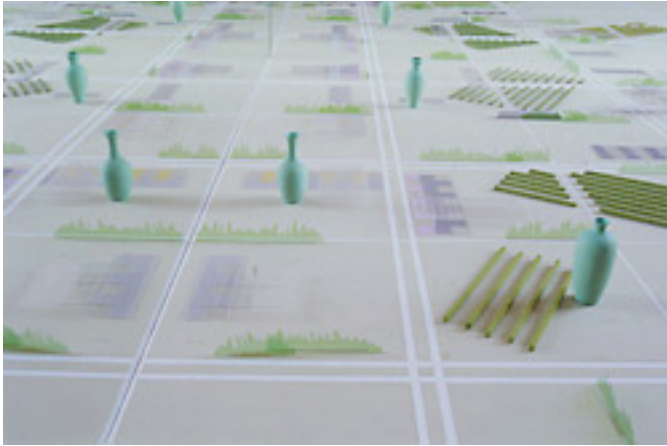
**my soul's present condition.**  
curiosity and attention

**the faults I can bear.**  
all faults

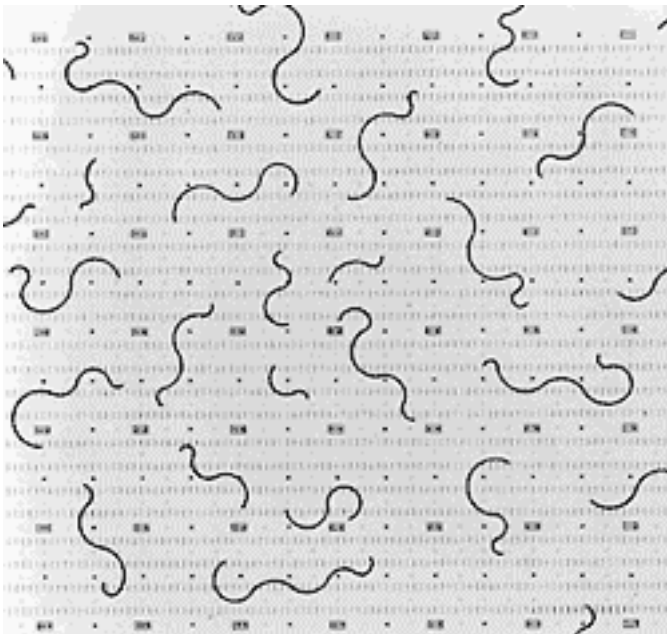
**my motto.**  
there will be a lot to laugh about in the 3rd millennium  
(future history will be hilarious).

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'weak urbanization' for eindhoven city  
project for philips, 2000



'no stop city'  
design archizoom associati, 1970

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'no stop city'  
design archizoom associati, 1970



'passaggi' lamp,  
manufactured by design gallery milano 1998

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'amnesie',  
manufactured by design gallery milano 1991



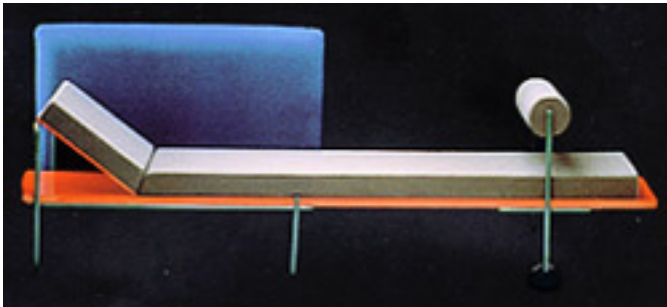
'amnesie' aluminium vases,  
manufactured by design gallery milano 1991

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'foglie' lamp,  
manufactured by memphis 1988



'century', chaise longue 1982

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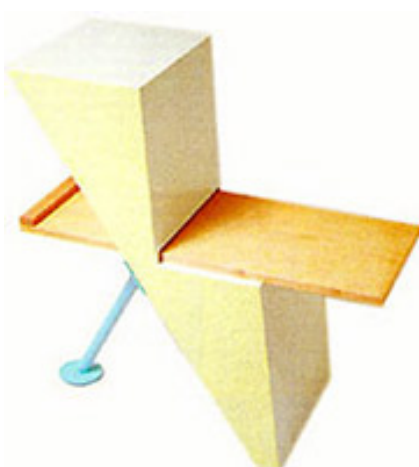
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'axale' sofa,  
manufactured by cassina 1988



'reverse' chair,  
manufactured by cassina 1993



'selz' chair,  
for achimia, 1980

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'animali domestici '  
manufactured by zanotta 1985

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