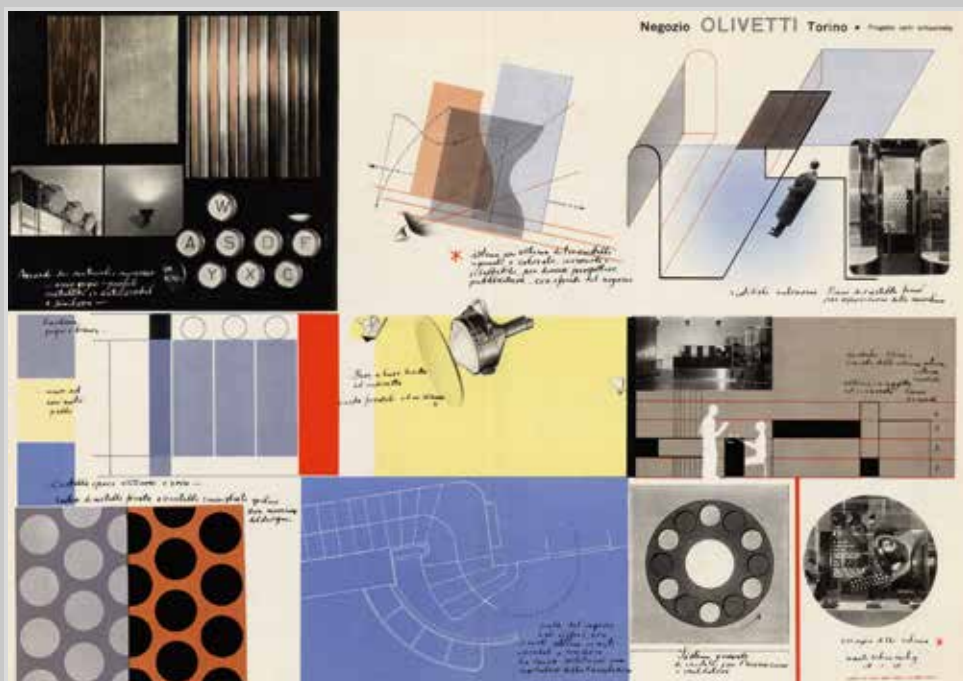


# Olivetti Identities. Spaces and Languages 1933–1983

edited by Davide Fornari and Davide Turrini



Triest

front cover

*Negozio Olivetti Torino* (Olivetti showroom in Turin),  
design Xanti Schawinsky, gravure printing,  
33.3 × 47 cm, from *Domus*, 92, 1935.

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**Triest**

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## Abbreviations

AAMCM	Archivo de Arquitectos Mexicanos, Facultad de Arquitectura, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Ciudad de México
AASOI DCUS DSSS	Associazione Archivio Storico Olivetti, Ivrea / Direzione Comunicazioni Ufficio Stampa Direzione Sviluppo Servizi Sociali
ACSR	Archivo Carlo Scarpa, Collezioni MAXXI Architettura, MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome
AFAFHM	Archivo Franco Albini-Franca Helg, Milan
AGAM	Archivo Gae Aulenti, Milan
AHCOACB	Arxiu Històric del Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya, Barcelona
ALCM	Archivo Legorreta, Ciudad de México
ANCS	Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, Sant Cugat del Vallés
ASBM	Archivo Silvana Bellino, Milan
ATMM	Archivo Tomás Maldonado, Milan
AWBM	Archivo Walter Ballmer, Milan
AZM	Archivo Bazzani Zveteremich, Milan
BAB	Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin
BGGP	Biblioteca Giovanni Gronchi, Pontedera
CSACP	Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione, Parma
FJVBDM ASD	Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese, Milan / Archivio storico del Design
FRL ACLR	Fondazione Centro Studi sull'Arte Licia e Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, Lucca / Archivio Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti
MfGZ	Museum für Gestaltung Zürich
MoMAANY	The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York
SIAW	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington

## The Creation of a Commercial Archetype. The Olivetti Showrooms of Correa and Milá

Amparo Fernández  
Otero  
Josefina González  
Cubero

The many architectural, industrial, graphic and artistic projects for Olivetti built the visual identity of this pioneering company over the years. Studies and research concerning the retail spaces have focused mainly on the work of important Italian architects, artists and designers, while the creations of designers Federico Correa and Alfonso Milá, presented here, are perhaps less well known among the company's many showrooms. However, these works deserve to be studied in depth as they are the fundamental innovative contribution of the Iberian subsidiary to the creation of the unified identity of the "Olivetti world."

Spain was the first country to participate in the Italian company's international expansion. The chance meeting in 1928 between engineers Camillo Olivetti and Catalan Julio Caparà, the relative proximity of the two countries, the affinity of customs and the possibilities offered by a market that was still far from saturated, as well as various commercial links, favoured an agreement that led, a year later, to the creation of the Hispano Olivetti company.<sup>1</sup>

The progressive expansion that began with the creation of this company was interrupted by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. After the war ended in 1939, Olivetti took the necessary steps for reconstruction. Dr Lucas Peiretti, director of the company in Spain, in 1940 commissioned architect Josep

Soteras and Engineer Italo Lauro to build a factory, at 86 Avenida José Antonio Primo de Rivera in Barcelona (today's Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes), "which would be every bit as good as Olivetti's corporate architecture in Italy, having requested the necessary advice from the company's headquarters."<sup>2</sup>

Another of the post-war actions was the separation of industrial production from commercial activities. This division became effective in February 1940 with the establishment of the new company Comercial Mecanográfica SA (COMESA). From this moment on, and until the two companies merged in the 1970s, COMESA was responsible for all commercial activities relating to sales, including expanding and adapting the network of sales outlets to market requirements and ambitious national expansion objectives.<sup>3</sup>

The sales network consisted of dealerships, which gradually multiplied across the peninsula. These generally sold not only typewriters and calculators but also other products such as Askar equipment, Wertheim sewing machines or household appliances.<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, they were genuine sales outlets, such as the numerous Exclusivas Sainz dealers in Galicia, where architecture and product played independent roles that were not consistent with the image of the company they represented. (fig. 37)

In the 1950s, COMESA's model began to change with the development of direct sales, through branches and subsidiaries dependent on the former. From 1955 onwards, the Spanish press reported on the successful expansion of this sales network with subsequent inaugurations of new facilities throughout Spain.

Visitors unanimously praised the modern facilities and warmly acknowledged the artistic taste and decorative quality of the company line. [...] A good distribution of the spaces and the sober presentation of the products guaranteed a unified vision of the machines on display from the outside. Inside, customers were met with practicality and comfort, and all technical requirements were satisfied by the customer service.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of its creation, COMESA was sorely lacking in organisational structure, with no personnel management, nor administrative, marketing or sales management. The situation changed in 1965 with the arrival of Engineer Riccardo Berla, who had been in charge of personnel management at the Ivrea headquarters before being transferred to the United States as deputy head of marketing for the Olivetti Corporation of America. On his return to Spain, he was appointed general director of Hispano Olivetti, with the initial task of modernising management in line with the strategies of the Olivetti governance in Italy, centralising the worldwide production of portable typewriters in the Barcelona plant.<sup>6</sup> This challenge involved not only adapting the company's administration but also creating an extensive network of retail outlets and restructuring existing ones. This made it possible for the sales network to offer new products, as well as responding to the growth in consumption in the Spanish market after the period of self-sufficiency and the approval of the *Plan Nacional de Estabilización Económica* in 1959, during Franco's dictatorship.

In Olivetti's historical evolution, the new commercial spaces "incorporated the individual ideas and styles of each designer," giving rise to "a unique and harmonious image of corporate architecture," as the Bilbao headquarters documents show.<sup>7</sup> However, archive research reveals that the Spanish sales structure, despite the subsequent modernisation of shops, was very heterogeneous in the mid-1960s, with display spaces widely distant from the unitary Olivetti image.<sup>8</sup> This is where Riccardo Berla came in as the new general manager. An expert in American marketing culture and the ideas and languages of the Ivrea-based company's communication strategy, he decided to transform the Spanish shops by opting for a consistent image based on a standardised model.

On the recommendation of Vico Magistretti, Berla commissioned architects Federico Correa and Alfonso Milá – the best interior designers in Spain according to Gillo Dorfles<sup>9</sup> – to create the new corporate identity strategy.

Correa and Milá began in 1951 at the studio of their master, José Antonio Coderch, who transmitted to them his enthusiasm and fascination for architecture, experimentation and rejection of formal stereotypes, the rationalist logic of popular architecture, the essence of things, the use of materials, and practice of the profession. Only a year later, they had their first contact with Italian culture and architecture when they attended a course organised by CIAM in Venice, where they met Albini, Gardella and Rogers, whose friendship and influence would continue over the years.<sup>10</sup> On their return they began their career as associates, with architectural, design and interior design work, both individually and in collaboration with Coderch producing, among others, the interiors of the Hotel de Mar in Palma de Mallorca and the Monitor residential building in Barcelona.

In the course of a highly productive career, they developed experience in both interior design and architecture, with projects that retained a constant rational and modern style, removed from any historicist interpretation, where functionality and the logic of construction in a

1 25 Años Hispano Olivetti 1954: 17–20.

2 "Que en nada desmereciera a las existentes instalaciones industriales de la Olivetti en Italia, recabando de la casa central los asesoramiento necesarios," in Soteras 1954: 7.

3 25 Años Hispano Olivetti 1954: 29–33.

4 ANCS, Fondo Hispano Olivetti.

5 "Los visitantes coincidieron en sus elogios a las modernas dependencias, felicitando efusivamente a los Directores de la Empresa por el buen gusto artístico y la dignidad decorativa que las preside. [...] La acertada distribución de las dependencias y la sobriedad en la presentación de los productos permiten al público contemplar desde el exterior la totalidad de las máquinas exhibidas mientras la comodidad y el confort se unen en su interior para recibir debidamente a la distinguida clientela y atender a todas las demandas de orden técnico que su servicio de asistencia a clientes requiera," in *La Voz de España* 1960.

6 Aguirre 2008.

7 "Integran las ideas y estilos particulares de cada diseñador [...] una imagen única y armónica de arquitectura industrial," AHCOACB, Fondo Correa i Milá, C2522/200.

8 AASOI, Fondo Fototeca Olivetti, Foto del Fondo Lodovichi, Foto Allestimenti Negozi, Showroom, Mostre, Ex Lodovichi, 31, 1959–1967.

9 Dorfles 1967: 150.

10 Galí 1997: 14.

responsible economy of resources<sup>11</sup> also characterised the shops for Hispano Olivetti.

In 1969, *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, a periodical of the COAC, Architects' Association of Catalonia, published an article by Federico Correa entitled "Nuevos establecimientos Olivetti en España" (New Olivetti Buildings in Spain).<sup>12</sup> An extensive description with numerous images by photographer Francesc Català-Roca, regularly featured in the magazine's pages with works by Correa and Milà, illustrates a series of shops whose plastic and formal uniformity testifies to the quality of the interior design in the Catalan designers' professional experience.<sup>13</sup>

The architects approached the commission for the shops in the Spanish headquarters as a field of testing and experimentation, through a research process characterised by a pragmatism that allowed them, in a short time, to adapt their scheme to the different existing conditions of the premises, as well as the functional and commercial requirements. Initially, they adopted the scheme established by the company, planning a series of details repeated in subsequent shops. However, throughout their research, there is a shift towards the standardisation of "precise systems and dimensions" adapted to the different project requirements.<sup>14</sup>

This was not the first time that standardisation had been adopted in the design of shops. *Bernasconi e associati architetti e ingegneri. B&A*, a publication illustrating the firm's activities, highlights how standardised elements were used in over three hundred designs in Italy and abroad, including Madrid and Barcelona, between 1937 and 1957.<sup>15</sup>

Stefano Zagnoni maintains that with these "standardised elements" – described in detail by Roberto Aloï in the Olivetti showrooms in Brussels and Florence, designed by Gian Antonio Bernasconi<sup>16</sup> – "It is not a question of preparing a standard project, but rather of developing certain 'syntagms' that can be adapted to the contingent situation as required, giving form to an expression that is both immediately recognisable and not merely repetitive."<sup>17</sup> However, the thirty or so projects designed by Correa and Milà highlight not only the recognisable standardisation in a series of "normalised elements" of their own, but also a "grammar" of compositional and formal criteria that articulates these "syntagms" – in the words of Davide Fornari, "a coordinated system

of 'alphabetical' spatial elements."<sup>18</sup> In doing so, the Spanish architects succeeded in retaining the identity link of the shops with the Olivetti image, so that they would be recognisable to customers, while at the same time creating a unique and unmistakable style.

Right from the first projects – the renovation of the Terrassa shop and the new Badalona headquarters – we can see the elements systematised by the Spanish designers, but also their articulation in a combination that provides unity and variety.

The facade acts as an evocative blank canvas between two worlds; it is the membrane that separates the street – understood as the privileged stage of modern life – from the Olivetti world. The front is clearly defined by an enveloping geometry that emphasises an essential form, a framework that distinguishes it from the surrounding architecture. Inside, the white pictorial-sculptural surface tends to fill this frame marked by the incisions of the shop windows and the empty space of the entrance which cross it, moving it back towards the interior. The actions on the surface and at depth, as well as integrating the structural elements into the aesthetic solution, introduce tension and plastic movement into a composition balanced by the ever-present company sign. Located on the main front, the graphics of the Italian brand name becomes an eloquent, effective and powerful communication tool that unifies the image of all the shops.

The shop windows, perfectly cut out of the white facade, gravitate on the floor and act as a full-height permeable boundary, guaranteeing the passer-by a view from the street into the interior, interrupted only by the fixtures and products on display.

In the overview of the shops, the first shop windows designed are replaced by those which return to the strategy of configuring

the commercial front, limiting the frame and directing the eye towards the display of objects. The shop window becomes a diaphragm directing attention to the products: the passer-by perceives the typewriters in the foreground, without being distracted by the view of the interior. A new compositional possibility, where the geometric shapes cut into the surface emphasise the display of the product or expand where compositional gestures, such as access, are required. Unlike full-height shop windows, which allow the full depth of the space to be appreciated from the outside, these new solutions make the presence of the facade more explicit, in a play of geometric shapes distributed centrifugally and combined on the front in a dialectic of contrasting directions. In the León shop, for example, the clear, lightweight horizontal window is marked by the deep vertical cut of the entrance, in a composition balanced by the position of the sign, which becomes an effective, powerful communication tool. The entrance, whose threshold is indicated by the lower band of the facade, is framed by aluminium profiles that emphasise the recess. In the glazed entrance, the door is never parallel to the street front – dedicated to the product display – but rather lateral, to facilitate the approach to the set back window. In some shops, the entrance is not in the centre of the facade, but to the side, with one or two doors facing each other. In Valladolid and Pamplona, the meeting point of the two adjacent facades is cleared to accommodate the entrance, in a variant allowing two separate, perpendicular doors. In Gae Aulenti's words, in some of Correa's and Milà's shops, the entrance is the visitor's "first conscious contact" as they climb a step and "penetrate the facade," with the ceiling lowering to welcome them.<sup>19</sup>

The framework of the facade, the shop windows, the entrance and the sign are the elements that create a solution that combines the perfection of the surfaces and the play of full and empty spaces, accentuated by natural light, in a dialogue with the integrated rectangular forms. In addition, the interplay between the volumes highlighted by the metal profiles and the curves of the sign and the machines on display creates an immediate and seductive advertising image. (fig. 38)

Inside the container, the formal configuration is not immediate but emerges from

the addition and subtraction of pure volumes, which sculpt the void and activate the space, always with a specific function. In contrast with the linearity of the shop window, the interior defines precise areas of activity without delimiting the space, as happens in the public area defined by the lowered ceiling and the emerging counter. The volumes, clearly profiled, act as three-dimensional references, showing a definition linking interior and exterior, and which in the multi-level shops – as in Salamanca or Avilés – follows the zigzag outline of the stairs. The result is a balanced and inviting interior, an exhibition space without visual interference between the architecture and the objects on display.

The display system consists of a series of individual supports and perimeter shelves at different heights, which emerge from the floor and are only interrupted by integrated devices following the same criterion. The opposite modelling generates the hollowed-out spaces, the niches that contain the objects.

In some shops, such as in Terrassa, Badalona or Malaga, the display support for the shop window consists of a series of compact prisms emerging from the floor and covered with travertine – a material originally chosen as a substitute for white marble for the floor and pedestals – to enhance and emphasise by contrast the geometry of the typewriters they support. The predecessors of the displays are their counterparts in the New York shop designed by BBPR.<sup>20</sup> The solid volume contrasts with the Olivetti imagery of delicate metal supports, which create the illusion of weightlessness, and machines suspended in space. In subsequent projects, these elements will in some cases be replaced by a continuous surface serving as the basis for the serial presentation of the product, a linear sequence abandoned by Olivetti from the late 1930s<sup>21</sup> and now retrieved by the designers in the composition of the interiors.

11 *Ibid.*: 12.

12 Correa 1969.

13 *Cuadernos de Arquitectura* 1969.

14 "Ciertos sistemas y ciertas medidas," in Correa 1969: 13–16.

15 AASOI, *Fondo Renzo Zorzi*, Personalità Olivetti-Ex Zorzi, Gian Antonio Bernasconi, 2.

16 Aloï 1950: 243.

17 Zagnoni 2017: 158.

18 Fornari 2012: 219.

19 Aulenti 1969: 26.

20 Correa 1969: 14.

21 Scodeller 2007: 110.



37

Exclusivas Sainz and Olivetti dealer shop  
in Vilagarcía de Arousa, Spain, 1950s.  
Photographer unknown.



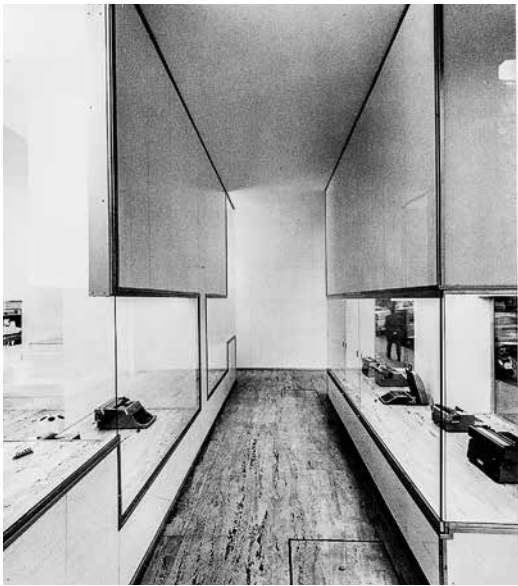
38

Olivetti showroom in La Coruña, Spain,  
design Federico Correa and Alfonso Milà,  
1968.  
Photorealistic processing  
by Amparo Fernández Otero, 2019.





39 Olivetti showroom in La Coruña, design Federico Correa and Alfonso Milà, 1968. Photorealistic processing by Amparo Fernández Otero, 2019.



40 Olivetti showroom in La Coruña, interior view, design Federico Correa and Alfonso Milà, 1968. Photo by Francesc Català-Roca.



41 Olivetti showroom in Pamplona, window display, design Federico Correa and Alfonso Milà, 1968. Photo by Francesc Català-Roca.



42

Olivetti showroom in Vilafranca del Penedès, design Federico Correa and Alfonso Milà, 1968.  
Photo by Francesc Català-Roca.

A visit to two shops in the city of Málaga marks a turning point. Correa and Milà note that the showrooms are not conceived as spaces for selling, but for displaying typewriters and calculators. In the words of Federico Correa, “they are above all exhibition spaces, with something of the office and something of the shop.”<sup>22</sup> This reflection leads to a new functional programme which translates into new rules of composition. In the shop in La Coruña, it is particularly evident how the display and sales area create a visual opening to the administrative and demonstration areas. The floor level varies, with steps and separations ensuring maximum flexibility and permeability, in line with Olivetti’s philosophy of transforming the working environment, in search of visual continuity and natural lighting. (figs. 39, 40)

In the multi-level shops, the staircase element is integrated into the display layout, with parapets and steps used as supports for objects. The staircase becomes a focal point, whose verticality is accentuated by the parallelepiped light points, long translucent prisms suspended from the ceiling, strategically positioned over the objects displayed in the shop window and on the shelves. (figs. 41, 42) Concealed from the outside or barely visible, they offer a theatrical night scene, in which the machines are elevated to the level of “jewels.” The ceiling lighting system, rectangular and arranged on a metal grid, is used to emphasise the uniqueness of the huge Mercator electronic accounting machines. The lighting of the exhibition spaces is supplemented by the WT table lamp, designed by Miguel Milà for Polinax, as a functional light on counters or seating areas.

These Olivetti showrooms are, in short, jewellery shops with typewriters: “precious spatial caskets,” as Manfredo Tafuri pointed out.<sup>23</sup> The arrangement of products on individual supports, the repetition in the niches and continuous shelves of the shop window and interiors, the separation from the space surrounding them and the lighting pointing on each item confer a quality that ennoble the product of industrial manufacture.

The choice of immaculate white for the shops is a constant that provides unity. The decision is not arbitrary, it is a rejection of preconceived architectural solutions, even

though it poses a challenge in a country still very much marked by tradition and which, according to Federico Correa in the draft article for the magazine *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, creates a refined impact, even at the risk of looking like “a dairy or a pharmacy.”<sup>24</sup> In the end, the project’s ambition to achieve whiteness throughout the shop is considerably limited by the materials, and realism prevails in the choice of flooring:

We decided that the space as a whole should be white and that all the materials should also be white, as far as possible; in the case of the floor, for example, as there was no completely white material, a white rubber covering marbled with grey was chosen.<sup>25</sup>

The white of the facade acquires the nature of a real “colour,” by contrast with the neighbouring buildings, while inside it becomes a “non-colour” that embraces the entire space and, accentuated by natural and artificial light, helps to create the neutral and essential environment that brings out the iconic and polychromatic character of the typewriters with greater intensity. Consequently, no decoration or explicit allusion to the company is applied to the white interior surfaces: all the brand’s communicative power is entrusted to the only sign on the facade. An opposite solution to the repeated presence of pictorial or sculptural elements in Olivetti showrooms since the late 1940s.<sup>26</sup>

Correa and Milà’s designs for the Hispano Olivetti stores demonstrate how the authors did not limit themselves to combining a series of standardised and normalised “syn-

- 22 “Son, sobre todo, locales de exposición, con algo de oficinas y un poco de tiendas,” Correa 1969: 20.  
23 Tafuri 1982: 51.  
24 “Una lechería o una farmacia,” AHCOACB, *Fondo Correa i Milà*, C1907/5.  
25 “Decidimos que el local, por entero, fuese blanco, y que todos los materiales fuesen blancos también, o al menos lo más aproximados posible; en el caso del suelo, por ejemplo, al no existir un material absolutamente blanco, escogimos una goma blanca jaspeada en gris,” Correa 1969: 18–19.  
26 Scodeller 2007: 118.

tagms,” but developed a “grammar” based on the articulation of compositional constants articulated by contrast. This concept is present in their designs on every scale, and reaches its maximum expression in the use of the omnipresent colour white to enhance the undisputed protagonists, the “Olivetti jewels.” In Gae Aulenti’s reflection, the process used shows the combination of “repeatable elements grafted into a poetics that could be defined as that of a ‘device of perceptual and functional control.’”<sup>27</sup> This masterfully executed design method exploits the difficulties and variability of existing architectural constraints, generating the unified and unmistakable image of the brand with remarkable refinement in the various solutions proposed. The harmony between plastic forms, the atmosphere of the space and the products constitutes the archetype of the Hispano Olivetti showrooms of Correa and Milà, from which unprecedented solutions in the Spanish commercial landscape were derived.<sup>28</sup>

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After completing his studies at the Escuela de Artes Aplicadas y Oficios Artísticos in Seville in 1971, Santiago Miranda moved to Milan and in 1976 founded the King & Miranda Design Studio together with Perry A. King. He was a consultant to the Olivetti Corporate Image Department from 1973 to 1979. He has been a member of the scientific committee of the IED, Istituto Europeo di Design in Madrid and of the Master's course in Design at the Pablo de Olavide University, Seville. In Spain he received the Premio Nacional de Diseño (1989) and the Premio Andalucía de Diseño (1995).

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Architect and PhD in History of Architecture and the City, she conducts studies on the modern era, with particular reference to the study of archival sources for the history of monumental complexes and the city from the 15th to the 20th century, topics that she has explored in numerous scientific essays and monographs, including: *Giulio Parigi Architetto di Corte: la progettazione dell'ampliamento di palazzo e piazza Pitti*, in *Architetti e costruttori del barocco in Toscana* (De Luca, Rome 2010), and *Palazzo dei Visacci: XV-XX secolo* (Polistampa, Florence 2012).

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Born in Leeds, UK, he trained at Gloucestershire College of Art. In 1970 he moved to Milan, where he opened his own design and product development studio in 1979. In 1981 he was one of the founding members of the Memphis Group, and in 2010 he created SOWDEN, his own brand. Throughout his career he has worked as a designer and product developer for numerous companies worldwide. In the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s he worked as a consultant for Olivetti, initially alongside Ettore Sottsass, working on the design of computers, printers, fax machines and telephones.

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An art historian, since 2001 she has worked at the Olivetti Historical Archives Association, curating and organising numerous cultural projects and initiatives, including the exhibition for the centenary of the Olivetti Company, *Olivetti 1908–2008. Il progetto industriale*. She contributed to the catalogue *Ettore Sottsass 1922–1978* (Silvana, Cinisello Balsamo 2017) and the exhibition *Ettore Sottsass. Oltre il design*, curated by CSAC, University of Parma (18 November 2017 – 23 September 2018), to mark the centenary of the designer's birth. In collaboration with CAMERA – Centro italiano per la fotografia, Turin, she curated the exhibi-

tion *1969. Olivetti formes et recherche, una mostra internazionale* (6 December 2018 – 24 February 2019).

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Associate professor in Industrial Design at the University of Ferrara. He has conceived and coordinated research projects on design in Tuscany from the 1950s to the present, on the influence of Renaissance culture on 20th-century arts and the design of Giuseppe Terragni. He has worked on the sorting and publishing of project and product archives; in this context, he was head of the project for the dissemination of the archives of the Manifattura degli Artieri dell'Alabastro in Volterra, which was financed by the Direzione Generale Archivi di MIBACT (Directorate General of Archives, Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and of Tourism). He has curated exhibitions at Casa Buonarroti in Florence, the Galleria Civica in Modena and the Ragghianti Foundation in Lucca, and is co-director of the editorial series *Presente Storico. Narrazioni e documenti di architettura e design* (Edifir, Florence).

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Loccioni, Angeli di Rosora 2010); the catalogue of the 5th edition of the Triennale Design Museum, *TDM5: Grafica Italiana*, with Giorgio Camuffo and Mario Piazza (Corraini, Mantua 2012); *Argomenti per un dizionario del design* by Ugo La Pietra (Quodlibet, Macerata 2019) and *Campo Grafico* (Tipoteca Italiana, Cornuda 2019).

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The editors of this volume are sincerely grateful to the scholars who volunteered their time for the double-blind review of the contributions published in this book.

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*Spaces and Languages 1933–1983*

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back cover  
Crystal diagram describing the complex  
domain of Olivetti's activities, for the exhibition  
*Design Process. Olivetti 1908–1978*,  
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Olivetti's world-famous typewriters epitomise the company's industrial legacy and visible identity, which was both innovative and complex, material and immaterial. These identities are at the heart of an interdisciplinary research project carried out by ECAL/University of Art and Design Lausanne and the University of Ferrara, in collaboration with the Olivetti Historical Archives Association in Ivrea.

*Olivetti Identities. Spaces and Languages 1933–1983* presents the results of this research, with contributions from 37 authors, analysing the Olivetti phenomenon as a whole and paying particular attention to corporate evolution and the approach of designers such as Xanti Schawinsky, Carlo Scarpa, Ettore Sottsass, Hans von Klier, Egidio Bonfante, and Walter Ballmer, among others.

The book examines the development of Olivetti's corporate identity, from the opening of the Olivetti Advertising Office in 1933 to that of the permanent Olivetti pavilion at the Hannover Fair in 1983, seen as the final step in a particularly efficient corporate identity strategy.

Divided into four sections, the work covers showroom and exhibition design at trade fairs and expos, as well as the languages that shaped the corporate vocabulary: visual communication and interaction design, cultural and promotional activities.

Designers Santiago Miranda and George Sowden, along with former Olivetti sales and training employees, add their own personal accounts in the final section, while two visual essays of published and unpublished documents from the Olivetti Historical Archives complete the book.

