

ON INTIMACY

AUTHENTIC SLICES OF EVERYDAY LIFE
RECAPTURE THE SOUL OF DESIGN

STORY _Eric Mutrie

and stacks of old novels perfect for reading by the fireplace, surrounded by enameled copper tiles. But perhaps the most affecting personal touch is a sliding oak door fashioned after the one found in the home where Lenti and her sister Anna grew up, which their father had designed back in the 1960s.

This conversation about the stories embedded in the objects we live with was continued at “Design Is Language; Speak for Yourself,” an exhibition by American design firm Rapt Studio (working in partnership with Studio Grassi and D’Angelo & Associates). Culminating in a living room-like space characterized by vintage furniture lovingly sourced through online Italian marketplace IntOndo, the exhibition celebrated the slightly mismatched pairings that result in a home that develops gradually, rather than being furnished all at once with shiny pieces from the latest collections. Rapt Studio had crafted a whole fictional backstory for the couple it was designing the space for — he was a symphony flutist, originally from Milan; she was an elementary school teacher from the American Midwest — and there was a magic to be found in gradually piecing this together through the various trinkets and mementos on view.

Adding to the sentiment, another area of the exhibition presented ordinary objects raised on plinths in the style of museum artifacts. Instead of dry curatorial text, each one was accompanied by a personal narrative written by someone who had developed a significant attachment to it. A stack of nearby cards offered prompts for further reflection: for example, “Is there a particular object that makes you feel at home when you see it?” The exhibition’s living room and museum zones stood in stark contrast to its opening section: a room with a series of black archways framing several rows of screens that were all responding to the same A.I. cues, instantly designing new iterations of a kettle or bedroom. What do we lose without a personal touch?

During the mid-century movement, designers like the Eameses preached the value of democratic design. By presenting atmospheric, deeply individual spaces that felt grounded in reality, Milan’s best exhibitors carried that spirit forward. The world is filled with fabulous furniture, but the designs that take on the most meaning are the ones you actually get to live with. **az**



Muuto's presentation in a Brera apartment felt more like a friend's home than a brand display.

It's easy enough to compose a domestic vignette out of a table and some chairs — but it's a much more difficult feat to create a space that feels genuinely lived-in. During this year's trip to Milan, I found some of the festival's most memorable experiences in warm, refreshingly personal environments that placed the showcase of novelties secondary to rich world-building.

Returning to the same venue where it exhibited last year, Muuto welcomed visitors into an 18th-century Brera apartment that — despite the majestic terrazzo flooring underfoot — felt more inviting than imposing. That was partly the result of the idiosyncratic green and lilac palette, but it was also partly the result of the rental unit's close quarters. The kitchen, buzzing with visitors snacking on antipasti, became a tight fit as it filled up, especially with the company's new Earnest dining table by John Tree sitting fully expanded to its eight-seater form at the centre of the space. But as people began taking their places at the table, the

apartment transformed into a kind of dinner party, bringing strangers together into relaxed conversation. The overall set-up (which Muuto planned around the prompt “What makes up the feeling of home?”) was a welcome reminder that design is something you engage with — not just something to admire.

Muuto was not alone in its portrayal of honest domestic life. Last year, Paola Lenti began gradually reimagining a former industrial estate as its new flagship. In April, the brand debuted a new sub-showroom built within the shell of one of the property's raw, warehouse-like buildings and modelled after an actual house. Named Alfa (after alfa grass and the fibre that it produces), the residence features lime and hemp cladding that insulates it from the surrounding activity to create a quiet refuge. Long the master of texture, Lenti has curated each of the rooms with rich layers of time-worn decor. A mix of new and antique furniture joined framed sketches by Italian artist Lucia Pescador