



## Serie Up 50th Anniversary

---

**B&B**  
ITALIA

### **THE ONLY WAY IS UP. ANATOMY OF AN ICON**

#### **Milan, 1966.**

C&B was established in 1966 by Cesare Cassina (the C) and Piero Ambrogio Busnelli (the B). The company became a key player in Italian design in just a few months. It burst onto the industrial, creative and innovative scene of modern design with some symbolic creations, such as the Coronado armchair by Afra and Tobia Scarpa and the Amanta armchair by Mario Bellini. C&B, whose logo was designed by Bob Noorda, is based in Novedrate, in the heart of Brianza, the historic cradle of Italian furnishing. The company goes about its work in an ultra-modern factory designed by Afra and Tobia Scarpa, equipped with state-of-the-art technology. The site is also home to a highly specialised Research Centre, with Francesco Binfaré at the helm.

#### **Milan, 1968.**

Italy was not spared by the students and workers' uprising, which peaked in France in May 1968. The university of architecture was occupied in Rome, and in every town, from Pisa and Turin to Bologna, Milan and Florence, strikes and huge protests ground the country to a halt. Protesters condemned the indissociable industrial tool of the economic boom, as well as religious constraint. Described as "creeping", this protest reached all industries and lasted until the 1970s. Among other things, this produced many groups and collectives operating in the field of plastic creation, which were established to counter the industrial design system. These included Archizoom, Superstudio and, later on, Gruppo Strum. With Francesco Binfaré and Gaetano Pesce, C&B will take part in this anti-formal response, theorized as anti-design.

The partnership between Francesco Binfaré and Gaetano Pesce had been formed a few months before, during a trip to Germany to visit the Bauhaus Archive. Theirs was a consolidated partnership devoted to "fierce complicity". With a unique profile in the design world, Francesco Binfaré, Milanese through and through, born in 1939, was tasked with creating items at C&B in the company's early days. Also born in 1939, in La Spezia, Gaetano Pesce entered the school of architecture in Venice at the age of twenty, taught by Carlo Scarpa and Richard Sapper. He made his name as a turbulent member of Gruppo N, the first Italian group devoted to research into kinetic art, created and produced collectively.

Within the C&B Research Centre, where the time was also ripe for collective creation, with ego out of the equation, design was in its element. Its pop age in full swing, European design went down every path and experimented with all materials. The décor was invaded by inflatable furniture in lifesaver style: the Aérospace Collection by Quasar Khanh, made in France since 1967, made it to Hollywood and took to the big screen as a joke. That very year, in 1967 in Milan, Quasar plunged his Floating House into the large and deep Solari swimming pool, stage of the Space Utopy installation designed for the presentation of Missoni's spring-summer '68 collection, created by his wife, fashion designer Emmanuelle Khanh. Models in swimming costumes and males scuba divers starred in the show. The inflatable 'Blow' armchair fine-tuned by Milanese studio De Pas-D'Urbino-Lomazzo & Scolari, accompanied the famous Sacco ottoman at Zanotta: originally conceived to be transparent in a material used for Moon Boots, its name was inspired afterwards by the main headlines of French daily newspaper France-Soir during the Paris Furniture Fair in January 1968: *'Zanotta a mis Paris à sac'...* [Zanotta sacks Paris]

### **Milan, 1969.**

It was within this context and thanks to Gaetano Pesce that C&B brought the house down in September 1969 at the Milan Furniture Fair. Strewn over the vast area of a purpose-built stand, hundreds of massive flat galettes took on the shape of a spectacular seat in front of the eyes of the public, as if self-inflated by magic. It was more than a presentation. It was a performance. Like no other before. *"With its big bosom and large behind,"* the happening armchair invented by Gaetano Pesce, officially named Up5, was nicknamed Mama internally, by virtue of its morphological design and its emotional effect too. Pesce himself gave it another nickname a few years later: La Donna [The Woman] referring, according to him, to the bust of Anita Ekberg, who jumped into the Trevi Fountain in the film *La Dolce Vita*.

Whether you call it Mama or Donna, for Francesco Binfaré\*, this armchair was, *"a reaction to the official design of the time, a scathing jibe intended to cast aside everything that was being done in the right, precise and objective way at that time"*. There was nothing philosophical about its creation. It was simply the application, inflated and as part of a collection, of a process that had already been used at C&B by Binfaré and Pesce in late 1968 when they had the idea of sending the company's customers and dealers a soft under vacuum

polyurethane sculpture as a Christmas card which took shape when the envelope was opened. And so Fiore in Bocca was created, a message about opening up, communicating and liberating....For Gaetano Pesce, the creation of the Serie Up collection was a less exciting feat: he was in the shower, observing how an ordinary sponge is pressed, compressed and takes back its original shape, just how babas are tested in Naples to check if they are cooked, when the idea to use these new foams for seats using nothing but this material as their structure came to him.

### **Milan, 1969-1973**

The collection of the six Up seats – armchairs and sofa - is made of expanded polyurethane that is vacuum-compressed up to 1/10 of its actual volume using a technique developed by Camillo Colombo, specialist of plastic materials at C&B. Once the packaging is opened, each seat, already covered with its stretch fabric, takes shape as soon as it is put into contact with the air thanks to the presence of Freon gas in the polyurethane blend. The operation is irreversible, and spectacular. Up does not deflate again. The Up5 armchair is the biggest in the collection in terms of size and volume. It instantly became a symbol of modernity, upsetting the functional orthodoxy of the time. With its shape and strength, Up5 also sits on the official border between industrial design and post-industrial design. It was a phenomenon the world over. *“Pierre Cardin wanted to meet us. Foreign firms asked for licences. Up was in fact a magnificent vehicle of internationalisation for C&B, and also a tremendous advertising tool for the firm’s technology,”* Francesco Binfaré later pointed out.

It was exactly that: advertising. C&B chose science fiction to launch the Serie Up collection. The talented Enrico Trabacchi was in charge of visuals for a campaign that would go down in history. Trabacchi tragically passed away in 1976, having worked for C&B from very early on. Using typography, photography and graphics, he willingly catapulted Up into a provocative and sexy futuristic-lunar dimension, somewhere between Barbarella and the Amazons from outer space. Produced by Swiss fashion and advertising photographer Klaus Zaugg, who was very popular in Milan, the Up campaign sequences are still viewed as exemplary in terms of communication today. The advertisement literally evokes not the seating but “the objects” by Gaetano Pesce.

Moreover, the advertising message is juxtaposed with visionary ultra-feminism: the woman dragging around her umbilical cord and condition as a milestone around her neck, finally sets herself free. Because the Up5 armchair is attached by an elastic cord to an ottoman, Up6. It is a powerful image. For Gaetano Pesce, it is a personal and metaphorical vision of the woman. *"I was telling a personal story about how I see the woman: despite herself, the woman has always been her own prisoner. And so I wanted to give this armchair a feminine form with a ball at the foot, which also represents the traditional image of the prisoner... For me, this armchair was a way to express content other than advanced technology, new materials and product convenience. In fact, the issue of male violence towards women had only just started being talked about at the time. Back then, I thought that this serious sign of incivility, which was happening all over the world, would have lessened with time. Unfortunately, however, that was not the case."*

Beyond the senses and sensations, Up5\_6 was also sensational: the inventor of paranoiac furniture, Salvador Dalí, posed on this very chair, all coiled up, almost lost in this larger-than-life bosom. In *Diamonds Are Forever*, the 7th film of the James Bond series, Up5 appeared in a scene in the concreted décor of villain Blofeld's lair. Hard boiled girls Bambi and Thumper give Sean Connery a hard time, waltzing over the Mama-Gang. The year was 1971. The following year, with Francesco Binfaré and Gaetano Pesce, C&B took part in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape*, the pioneering and historic exhibition at MoMA in New York. Pesce presented the *Habitat* project there, alongside the legendary *Kar-a-Sutra* steered by Mario Bellini.

In 1973, C&B became B&B Italia and the Serie Up collection was removed from the catalogue due to a ban on Freon gas. Ironically, the Up5, all the rage and a symbol of freedom, had become cumbersome. A new domestic prison, an example of which was symbolically burned, condemned for treason by its own creators.

### **Milan, 2000.**

More than twenty-five years after being put away with the souvenirs of design as a super-cult collector's item, the Up5 armchair was reissued by B&B Italia, accompanied by the Up6 ottoman as always, and in 2014 was produced in junior size, all under the name of Serie Up 2000, which included the seven original items of the gang of '69. But by force of circumstances, the genetically modified Up5 - the only

model produced by B&B Italia without a metal frame inside - no longer inflates. It is now made in cold shaped polyurethane foam and is held up by its density of mass and foam alone.

A polyurethane foam obtained from a blend is injected into a mould and heated to over 100° celsius ( 212° Fahrenheit). Up5s are produced at a rate of four a day and are shaped and perfectly homogeneous two hours after "baking". After a 48-hour cooling period, cleaning and trimming, the Up5 armchair is ready to be covered. A "tailor" and his or her assistant, donning white cotton gloves, begin covering each form with a non-removable technical stretch fabric, plain-coloured or striped, produced exclusively for B&B Italia.

In 1969, Gaetano Pesce had covered the Serie Up in striped or plain-coloured fabrics, giving them a very distinctive visual identity, especially in red, the matrix colour par excellence. These versions feature in the permanent design collections of the Triennale in Milan, MoMA in New York, the Vitra Design Museum and last but not least, the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Montreal.

In addition to the eight covering colours offered, one of which is silver, the second-generation Up5\_6 has been manufactured in a number of versions produced as limited editions. B&B Italia auctioned a special edition of twelve Up5\_6s in 2004 for the 1954-1974 Pop Art sale held at Christie's in London.

### **Milan, 2019.**

To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Gaetano Pesce's Up5\_6, B&B Italia has opened its wardrobe up to new solid colours: orange red, navy blue, petrol green, emerald green, cardamom.

There is also the 50th Anniversary Special Edition, striped beige/petrol green, which refers to the original color palette of 1969.

\*Il Viaggio di Francesco Binfaré attraverso il design dagli anni 60 a oggi. [Francesco Binfaré's journey through design from the 1960s to the present day.] By Christine Colin. Published by Electa

### Gaetano Pesce, itinerary of a “flying fish”

The quicksilver of design, Gaetano Pesce, whose surname translates literally as “fish”, now lives in New York, after many years spent in Paris. He is first and foremost an artist whose work has always been political in the Latin sense of the word. The work of this architect, designer and professor, who proclaims himself to be a “pre-visionary creator”, is still today *“based essentially on the idea of warning society of a more or less alarming situation.”* He was also one of the first to bring design into museums, with the awareness that this vehicle for society is a reflection of its era. Champion of anti-design, for which doubt, questioning and uncertainty are the search engines, proponent of imperfection as an added value but also as an aesthetic, artistic and social value, Gaetano Pesce likes to say he has *“no problem throwing himself into projects that even he does not understand at the start”*. Irony, provocation and much more...

### UP5\_6 IN FIGURES

Date of creation: September 1969

Date of reissue: 2000

Weight: 52 kg

Height: 103 cm

Width: 120 cm

Depth: 130 cm

Ball diameter: 57 cm

It takes 2 hours and 45 minutes to cover an Up5 and 1 hour and 30 minutes for the Up6 ottoman, both have a hand-stitched finish.

