



Study abroad.

SYLLABUS

THE GENIUS OF ITALIAN DESIGN

Carol Caughey

400-level

Contact Hrs: 45

SIENA, ITALY

Course Content:

Italian furniture design is revered throughout the world by architects, designers, and artists. Unlike the IKEA and similar furniture with which we are familiar in the US, the inventive and often whimsical furniture created by Italian designers challenges us to question the roles of furniture in our lives. Examples from the Renaissance, the inventive Memphis style in Milan in the 1980s and contemporary furniture will be studied as artifacts of the culture of their times. Students will have the opportunity to see and sketch vernacular furniture in Italian homes as well as icons of design in the famous furniture showrooms of Milan and Rome. Instruction will be provided in “sketching for the artistically timid.”

Objectives:

Identify the characteristics of historic and contemporary Italian furniture. Analyze the components and design process involved in selected pieces. Record sketches and photos of examples of Italian furniture from several periods. Compare the materials, design, and role of each piece in the history of the period.

Suggested excursions, and relevance:

NOTE: These excursions may be combined with those already scheduled.

Of the 122 furniture showrooms around the world listed in a prominent German furniture textbook, 35 are in Italy, and most of those in Milan.

Milan: One excursion will include guided tours of the most famous showrooms such as Memphis, Bernini, and Cassina.

Rome: Showrooms in Rome will provide opportunities for students to see and sketch not only “high style” furniture but the furniture bought by middle class Italians for their homes.

Florence and Venice: Scheduled trips to these cities will provide opportunities to see and sketch Renaissance furniture as well as contemporary pieces in museum collections and in private homes.

Siena: Walking tours of private homes and showrooms – as well as observation of furniture used in cafes and offices -- will provide on-site experience with sketching and identifying pieces of furniture.

Instructional methodology:

Lectures with slides (Power Point or traditional) to illustrate characteristic Italian furniture design, beginning with some icons from the Renaissance period and emphasizing 20th and 21st century design.

- 1.) Team discussions and debates wherein students must support an assigned point of view or defend their identification of a piece as belonging to a certain style
- 2.) Artifact analyses of vernacular and famous pieces of furniture
- 3.) Scavenger hunt through showrooms and museum exhibits in order to sketch and identify specific pieces of furniture
- 4.) Portfolio of students' own photos, their sketches, and images from the web with justifications for why each is characteristic of a style or designer. Reference citations are included in order to support the students' justifications. Students will take the portfolios back to the US as personalized records of their study of Italian furniture design.
- 5.) Field trips to showrooms, museums, and homes in order to examine and free-hand sketch furniture

Method of evaluation/grading:

- Mid-term
- Scavenger hunt
- Final Project, which is a Portfolio due during the final week.

Course readings/texts:

Whiton, S. & Abercrombie, S. (2002) *Interior design and decoration (5 ed.)* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Fiell, C. & Fiell, P. (1997). *1000 Chairs*. Koln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag GmbH.

Course Schedule:

The class will meet to see slides (either Power Point or traditional) and to discuss the subjects for at least 2 hours each week. The remaining average of 2.5 hours per week will consist of walking/sketching tours in Siena and trips to other cities. This totals 45 contact hours per term.

Week 1: Italian Renaissance and Mannerist Furniture and Interiors

Week 2: Italian Baroque, 18th and 19th centuries

Week 3: Stile Floreale: Carlo Bugatti, Quarti, Basile

Week 4: Italian Rationalism and the roots of modern design

Week 5: Early 20th century

Week 6: Mollino and Albini

Week 7: Cassina brothers, Gio Ponti, Lella and Massimo Vignelli

Week 8: The Anti-Design Movement: UFO, Gruppo 9999, Ziggurat

Week 9: Ettore Sottsass and Memphis

Week 10: Portfolios due. Review for final exam.