

7. Imagining the Space of Inhabiting between Experimentation and System

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Few works by Alberto Seassaro are known in the field of interiors and furniture design. Nevertheless, his research was wide-ranging and articulated (unfortunately, true to his own practice, sparsely documented and preserved), and we remain confident that further projects, whether realized or not, may still come to light, allowing us to reconstruct a clearer picture of Seassaro's interesting and deserving body of research as an architect and designer across the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly as a designer of interiors and furnishing elements.

Note 1.

At the time, degree theses did not have a specific advisor; rather, the thesis topic was chosen by the students themselves from among the research projects carried out during their studies. Seassaro and La Pietra selected a project begun in the *Istituto di Architettura degli Interni* [Institute of Interior Architecture], where, among others, Gio Ponti (with Vittoriano Viganò as assistant) and Carlo De Carli, himself formerly an assistant to Gio Ponti, were teaching.

It should be recalled at once that already during his university years at Politecnico di Milano, where he enrolled in 1959, an intense partnership, often rather tempestuous, yet clearly stimulating, formed between Alberto Seassaro and Ugo La Pietra, then students. This relationship consolidated and found significant expression in their co-signed 1964 thesis, *La ricerca morfologica. Proposta di lavoro per gli Istituti della Facoltà d'architettura* [Morphological research. A work proposal for the Institutes of the Faculty of Architecture] ¹², a demanding

theoretical elaboration that aptly represents the epochal renewal the Faculty was undergoing in response to the increasingly forceful social demands of the period. The contents of the research, inspired by the principle of the *synthesis of the arts*, addressed in an unprecedented manner the interweaving of the new artistic cultures, the visual arts, and theories of form with a political-institutional commitment aimed at defining the scientific purposes of the renewed Institutes of the Faculty of Architecture, understood as places for exploring the deep relations between research and teaching. This thesis received a then-rare evaluation of *Centodieci e lode con bacio accademico* [110/110 with honors and special commendation]. From the university period, a number of *ex tempore* projects by Seassaro as a third and fourth-year student have also come down to us. Among these, one appreciates a surprising and fascinating project entitled *La casa sopra il tetto* [The house above the roof] [1](#), a theme that anticipates by far the idea of parasitic structures on rooftops, clearly inspired by the *correalist* suggestion of Frederick Kiesler's biomorphic *Endless House* (1959/1960), which was submitted for the course *Architettura degli Interni* [Interior Architecture] led by Gio Ponti (with Vittoriano Viganò as assistant). Equally appreciable is the courageous project for an *Museo Archeologico* [Archaeological Museum] in Milan on Corso Magenta [2](#) developed, regarding the historical research, in the course *Architettura degli Interni II* [Interior Architecture II] taught by Carlo De Carli and, regarding the architectural component, in the course *Composizione II* [Architectural Composition II] taught by Cassi Ramelli (1962-1963).



1. Alberto Seassaro, *La Casa sopra il tetto*. [Document →](#)



2. Alberto Seassaro, *Museo Archeologico in Corso Magenta*. [Document →](#)

During his graduation years, Seassaro worked as a skilled and recognized perspective draftsman in several Milanese practices. In particular, he collaborated with Vittoriano Viganò, whom he had met at the university as Gio Ponti's assistant in the course *Architettura degli interni* [Interior Architecture], to which both La Pietra and Seassaro became closely attached during their studies.

Newly graduated, he began an intense period of design activity with Ugo La Pietra. Both embarked passionately on research in the field of pure artistic experimentation, aligned with the contemporary experiences of concrete, programmed, and kinetic art, their design research manifested itself in interiors through provocative, avant-gar-

3. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Galleria d'arte privata Walter Spaggiari*, Milano.

[Document](#) →



de projects. The first realized work, marked by a strong and in some respects *aggressive* character imparted to the interiors, was the private *Galleria Spaggiari* (1965-1966) [3](#), created for

Walter Spaggiari, who a few years later would commission Nanda Vigo to design his home, the famous *Casa Blu* (1969). In these interiors, the composition of elements is strongly geometric, abstract, with three-dimensional textures, perforated sheet metal, platforms with upholstered seating, bearing a distinctive Greek-key motif, that float and intersect within black environments where the exhibited works stand



out, with all pipes and conduit runs intentionally left exposed, a design choice anticipated only by the famed *birreria Splugen* [Splugen beer hall] realized in Milan in 1961 by the Castiglioni brothers.

Evident in this project, as it would be in the domestic interiors designed shortly thereafter by Seassaro alone, is a three-dimensional compositional inquiry into the formal models that, in the same period, also took shape in his pure artistic research as the *Morfemi*: architectural microstructures composed of plastics and cut, bent, and perforated sheet metal, in the classic tradition of concrete art – almost a set of prototypes of technological nodes. This instinctive and conceptual passion – for technological forms intertwined with artistic research – would recur frequently in Alberto Seassaro's investigations and would undoubtedly accompany him along the path of industrial product design, ultimately informing the origins and development of our Faculty of Design (now School of Design). On the other hand, this is clearly intuited in the incipit of the *Note semiologiche* [Semiological Notes],

4. *Made In. Bollettino della Modern Art Agency*, gennaio-febbraio 1969.

[Document](#) →



written by Seassaro himself for the 1969 presentation of his artistic research in the *Bollettino della Modern Art Agency Made in* [4](#), directed by Lucio Amelio: «The production of the

Morfemi (morphological spatial models) – writes Seassaro – has, since 1966, accompanied my foundational architectural research (theoretical, didactic, methodological, and experimental/operational) carried out in academic and professional settings» (Seassaro, *op. cit.*, p. 10). In the same publication, Gillo Dorfles also contributes with an insightful critical analysis, commenting:

These objects are a significant indicator of the new sensitivity to formal and structural aspects that today prevail; not only that, but it is to be hoped that they might also prompt in the viewer a greater interest in a future arrangement – no longer on a reduced scale, but indeed on an environmental and territorial scale – of analogous structures. In other words, if the poetics and practice of 'Visual Design', of which our art and architecture schools are so lacking, were strengthened, they could draw on this work of Seassaro to obtain most useful evidence of how one can stimulate and increase the sense of form and of the form-structure relationship even through operations limited in size and in material use. [...]

(Dorfles, *op. cit.*, p. 4)

In this context, it is also highly interesting to read several passages from a long critical commentary by Ettore Sottsass Jr. on Seassaro's *Morfemi*, written on the occasion of the exhibition *Seassaro, I Morfemi* at Studio 2B in Bergamo, in May 1968 [↗](#):



5. *Seassaro. I morfemi.*
Presentati da Ettore
Sottsass Jr.
[Document →](#)

[...] I mean that there are a lot of young people who do whatever thing and then put it there as if it were the Parthenon, as if to say that the world begins there and ends there, and if that suits you – fine – otherwise you're an idiot, you understand nothing, and good evening; I mean that there are young and not-so-young people who have a monumental idea of the work of art, a mythical idea, things of that sort – they believe that art is a definitive and absolute whole to which one either arrives or not, and once arrived no one moves anything anymore. Instead, Seassaro's idea, and that of others along this line, is that art is a continual act of approaching something that one never really reaches, because that very something is itself in continual motion – it seems to me – and

so art is like a moment of passage, like a snapshot that has come out more or less blurred depending on the exposure time: art, in substance, is a contribution to a more general process, rather than a definitive, total, absolute assertion. It seems to me that's more or less how things stand, and Seassaro has on his side youth, the strength and happiness of all the body's cells working well: he has hope on his side, and so all these things are part of the game we are witnessing, transferred into these white and red 'things' that are leaning here against the wall of my studio, and it truly seems to me that all this is worth trying and continuing. (Sottsass, in Seassaro. *I morfemi*, 1968, p. 3)

6. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, *Il Cenobio*, in *Domus*, n. 451. [Document →](#)



Different, however, is the project – again developed together with La Pietra – for the spare and incisive installation of the interior of the *galleria d'arte Il Cenobio* [Il Cenobio art gallery] (1966). From the editorial presentation in *Domus*, n. 451 [65](#), June 1967, one understands the more absolute and homogeneous character of this project:

The environment itself is a single, large, unitary 'object' to be entered, in which the continuous and total use of a single element for the installation – corrugated aluminum sheeting applied to vertical and horizontal planes – causes the usual points of reference (wall, ceiling, floor) to disappear, in the impression of a single luminous space, a homogeneous space. The corrugation of the sheet, which deepens distances perspectively and multiplies and diffuses reflections, turns the wall into a kind of continuous luminous surface that evenly bathes the entire space in light. [...] (Per una galleria d'arte a Milano, 1967, p. 47)

This project, in particular, recalls the work of Nanda Vigo, who in those years was devoted to researching what she calls *oggetti* or *spazi cronotopici* [chronotopic objects/spaces] – think of *casa bianca*, also significantly named *casa Zero*, 1959-1963; the already mentioned *casa Blu*, 1967-1971; *casa Gialla*, 1970-1971; and *casa Nera*, 1970-1972 – (Bosoni, 2025; Cattiodoro, 2022-2023 and 2025; Pastor, 2006), where space and time interact, dilating the perceptual dimension; environ-

ments that are generally monochromatic and tend to elicit unexpected and uncertain perceptions; and where the dynamic involvement of the entire body within the setting produces a deliberately crafted experiential phenomenon [7](#).

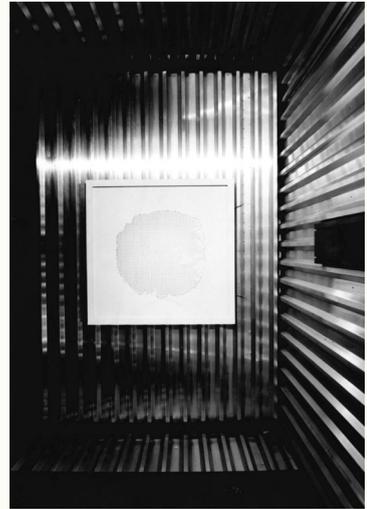
Following these two interior projects for exhibition spaces, as already mentioned, come two residential interiors – very particular for the complex weave of multifunctional frames intersecting in space – both designed by Seassaro alone: an apartment in Milan for his sister, Paola Seassaro, in 1968 [8](#), and a holiday house in Camogli in 1969 [9](#).

Although set in two very different contexts, these interventions on pre-existing buildings aim to construct an absolutely autonomous diagrammatic space, where a modular grid determines an elaborate system of service elements that permeates the entire house. Published in *Abitare* in December 1968, and accompanied by an intriguing *assonometria alla cavaliera* [cavalier axonometric drawing] that explains all the dynamic-functional aspects, it is described as follows:

The key takeaway from this proposal lies precisely in the fact that the house was not 'furnished' by simply introducing pieces; rather, the exactly opposite operation was carried out: namely, the entire inhabited volume was first studied and then constructed in its entirety, intervening on all surfaces – ceilings included – and equipping them with fixed or movable elements designed for maximum functional flexibility and, consequently, use. Only two standard elements were introduced to integrate the already complete layout of the house: a chair and an armchair. In the designer's utopian conception, this example could be configured, in its totality and in the elements that constitute it, as a handcrafted prototype of a possible industrialization of the elements themselves, which ought to be extended, with constant modularity, to cover all the possible requirements for the formation of equipment, furniture, and, in general, 'tools for inhabiting', ultimately coordinating with a parallel modularity in the building industry [10](#). (Geppetto '70 sul sentiero dell'industrializzazione, pp. 8-11)



7. Ugo La Pietra, Alberto Seassaro, Galleria d'arte *Il Cenobio*, Milano. [Document](#) →



8. Alberto Seassaro, *Spazio abitativo a Milano*, in *Interiors '70*. [Document](#) →



9. Alberto Seassaro, *Casa Rizzi a Camogli*, in *Interiors '70*. [Document](#) →

Similarly, the project for the holiday house in Camogli features the blue color of the ceiling, the large window opening onto the terrace facing the sea, and the seating and the chaise longue – designed by Seassaro himself – made of orthogonal square-tube bearing frames from which cylindrical orange upholstered elements are suspended. Here, too, the theme of his *Morfemi* recurs, and in this sense one recognizes wall-mounted luminous structures very similar to one of his best-known *Morfemi* [11](#).

However evident the exemplary references and citations may be, above all concerning the idea of a Cartesian, neoplastic open space, from Frank Lloyd Wright to Theo van Doesburg and Gerrit Rietveld, passing also through Josef Hoffmann and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, without forgetting his university mentor Vittoriano Viganò with his brutalist approach, as in the interiors of the *Galleria Apollinaire* or his celebrated house in via Crivelli (1956), or again in the near-contemporary project for *Mollificio Bresciano* (1967-1982), one must acknowledge that Alberto Seassaro's mark carves out its own specific recognizability and autonomy.

Following these interior projects came several interesting explorations in the field of design for domestic systems: the *programma di tavoli componibili Addition* [Addition modular table program] for Acerbis (1969) and, in the same year, a modular, transformable central element in *stratificato Print ABET* [ABET print laminate], co-signed with Casertelli and Valota, with which they won the *MIA (Mobile Internazionale Arredamento Monza)* competition [12](#), whose jury included, among others, Joe Colombo, Giotto Stoppino, Gianemilio Monti, and Carlo Pagani. In 1970, *Domus* n. 489 published the prototype of one of his projects (1968): a compact, multifunctional, reconfigurable monoblock [13](#), again realized with the support of Acerbis and clearly conceived for new dwelling spaces with fully open plans; it was later included, in 1972, in the catalogue of the celebrated MoMA exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* under the title *Central Block, containing bed, table, wardrobe, toilet, shelves* (Ambasz, 1972, p. 132) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) [17](#).

In this period (1966-1969), another interesting design experience, initiated with Ugo La Pietra, was the consulting for the prefabricated-systems company *Silicalcite*, for which he



12. *Diploma 1° premio MIA-Abet Print, Monza 1969.*

[Document →](#)



13. *L'intero mobile corre su rotaie, Alberto Seassaro, in Domus, n. 489.*

[Document →](#)



14. *Estratto del Catalogo della Mostra Italy: The New Domestic Landscape, MOMA.*

[Document →](#)

15. Alberto Seassaro,
Addition, Tavolo
 attrezzato componibile,
 Acerbis.
[Document →](#)



developed several studies, also in competition formats: we may recall the project *Tuberie*, co-signed with La Pietra and involving Nanda Vigo; the realization, again with La Pietra, of a public fountain in Caiazzo, built with *Silicalcite* prefabricated



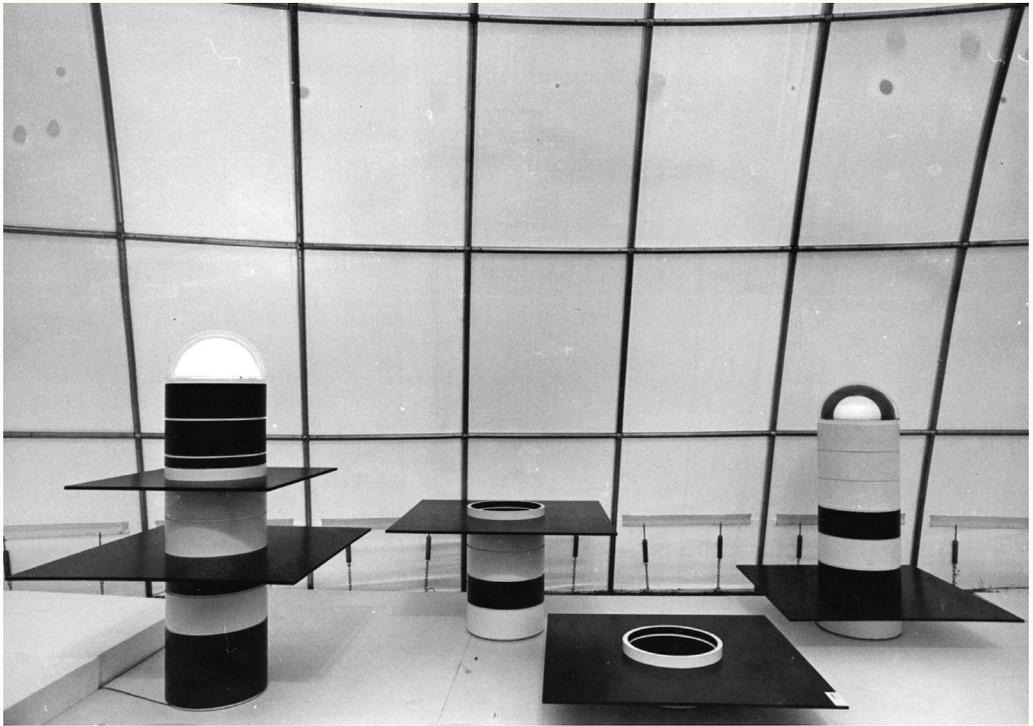
18. Alberto Seassaro,
 Stand *Silicalcite*,
 Montecatini Edison, alla
 Fiera campionaria di
 Milano.
[Document →](#)



modules; and typologies of housing units employing the same construction system. Also in 1965 he designed a coherent and well-controlled small pavilion for *Silicalcite-Montedison* at the Fiera di Milano [18 ↘](#). Alberto Seassaro saw in the prefabricated module the hope of a democratic building culture; in this sense, modular design and the industrial technologies of component prefabrication constituted a fundamental part of his design research in the professional field as well.

Even with just these few yet significant milestones, an intriguingly clear trajectory emerges of Seassaro as a designer, marked by a strong experimental vein, immediately put to the test in real projects, with the same spirit effectively displayed by some of his Milanese friends from those years, such as the group De Pas, D'Urbino e Lomazzi, with whom he also crossed paths professionally at the company Acerbis during that period. His vision of inhabited space, open, relational, interactive, diagrammatic, flexible and mobile, interprets with a strong individuality the themes of the historical *avant-gardes*, above all Constructivist and Neoplasticist. It almost certainly also draws on research into building prefabrication by Angelo Mangiarotti and Bruno Morassutti, often intersected with furniture design, on Marco Zanuso's investigations into technological systems, and on Giuseppe Ciribini's theoretical-disciplinary studies.

It further resonates with Ettore Sottsass's 1960s research on the color/structure relationship, with Joe Colombo's contemporaneous ex-



16. 1° premio concorso *MIA-Abet Print*, Sistema componibile per
Arredo in laminato plastico.
[Document →](#)



17. Alberto Seassaro, Monoblocco per arredo integrale.
[Document →](#)

periments from 1963 onward, and with the early manifestations of Radical Design thought in Italy and abroad, as well as, given the evident affinities, with the experimentations of Liisi Beckmann, specifically the *Karelia* armchair (1966) for Zanotta, and of Fabio Lenci for Comfort Line in 1967.

In this complex trajectory of Alberto Seassaro's design research, several traits can be discerned that would remain central to his meta-design thinking (later reflected as well in his important work as a university teacher and as a designer of educational structures), namely a passion for an elaborate conception of technology as paradigm/metaphor to be assumed also as an ethical and aesthetic principle, an interest in the diverse and most innovative forms of environmental perception (color, light, sound, new industrial materials), and an idea of design that is as programmatic and systemic as it is open to continuous verification, in line with his anarchic and heterodox view of the rationalist methodological approach.

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