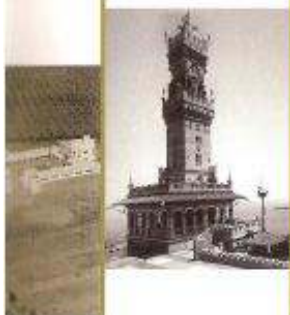


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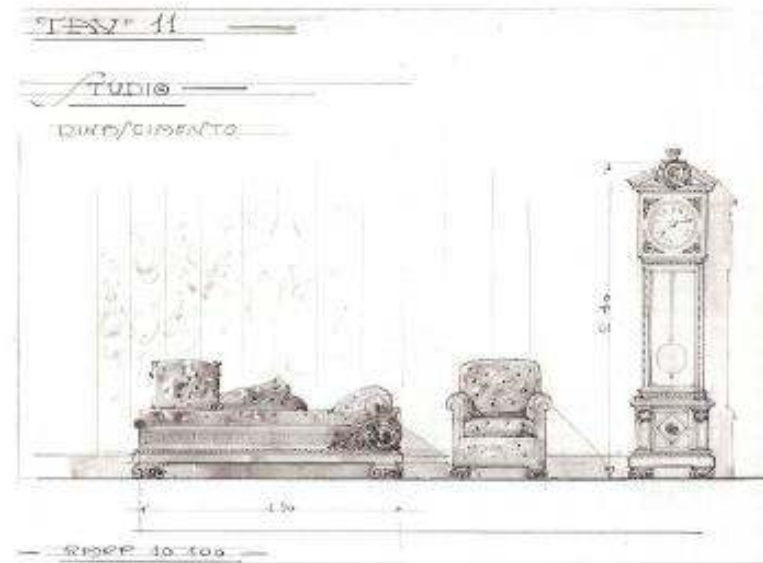
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From Luxury Handicraft to Design: Interior Architecture and Decorative Arts in the Drawings of the Archive of Mario Quarti

Paola Cordera



Royal Palace of Tirana. Study in the Renaissance Style, n.d. [1929] (RSAB, Fondo MQ, Disegni 1588)
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Witness and protagonist of fundamental changes in taste, style, production methods, and the organization of labour, the Quarti firm constitutes a significant chapter in the history of Milanese furnishings and its relation with the universe of architecture. Inaugurated with an orientation towards refined crafts in the 1890s by Eugenio Quarti (1867-1929), the activity ceased manufacturing in 1968 under his son, Mario (1901-1974). The reason for such an inexorable decline perhaps is to be found in the difficulty of adapting and modernizing production according to the needs of the market. Despite claims of modernity, the last works were still anchored in an essentially traditional vocabulary, which was almost completely extraneous to then-contemporary experimentation in the sector of furnishings.¹ The apparent discrepancy in the use of terms is ameliorated, however, when read in the light of the assertions in the Quarti catalogue of 1948: "The character of the modern ambiance consists in the distinctive novelty, in the preciousness of the materials, in the refinement of execution, in the delicacy of tones conferred to the rooms in an atmosphere of joy, repose and refined curiosity".²

Faithful interpreter of the paternal tradition, Mario Quarti was - at least initially -

creator and executor of furnishings, drawn beforehand in small scale and 1:1 detail. The use of the *spolvero* technique permitted the translation in finished product of the idea drawn on paper, as revealed by some drawings.³ Privileged instrument for the control of the entire planning process, the drawing assured the coherence of every single element. After the planning stage, models were constructed - at least in the case of products of particular complexity - and then the objects were produced. The size of the plant,⁴ the exceptional number of commissions and the holdings of the archive (almost 4000 drawings and more than 2000 photographs, in addition to certificates and models for decoration) recreate the image of an illustrious art industry, renowned for quality and efficiency that during its period of greatest splendour depended on more than 200 qualified employees, prepared even for the execution of particularly demanding commissions.⁵ Only some of the preserved drawings were the product of Mario Quarti's pencil. Some bear his signature, while others seem instead to be the work of anonymous helpers charged with laying out the initial idea in definitive form.

"[N]ot tied, like his father, to that mission of modernity that singularly restricted Eugenio Quarti to the expression of his