

Disegno

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This issue includes:
Bio-based design from *Natsai Audrey Chieza*; *Lars Beller Ejetland* and *Hydro's* plan to promote post-consumer aluminium; living legacies at the *Eames Institute of Infinite Curiosity*; a journey into the Ouagadougou atelier of *Hamed Ouattara*; a study of interspecies complexities in pet design; *Nitzan Cohen's* exploration of do-it-yourself *DIYR*; the designers tackling Vietnamese diacritics; and *Inga Sempé's* tragic tram fictions for the home.



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Museums on the other hand, tend to do the opposite. They take objects out of use, storing them for posterity and handling them with utmost care. When they are displayed, it's often on plinths and behind glass, as rarefied artefacts, even when that object may be mass produced and available to buy in any store. "I don't really appreciate exhibitions on contemporary design presented like medieval sculpture," Sempé tells me. "I think it's quite ridiculous, as you can easily buy them on Craigslist for a really good price."

Imagine Sempé's conundrum, then, when Milan's Triennale design museum made contact to discuss staging an exhibition of her work in spring 2024. On the one hand, a museum exhibition offers critical recognition of a kind different to everyday use, but it nevertheless condemns objects to be devoid of their original purpose. In considering an exhibition, therefore, Sempé (together with Marco Sammiceli, the Triennale's director) conceived of a different way of interpreting her more than 20 years of work as a designer for companies such as Alessi, Hay, Mutina and Ligne Roset. Rather than an exhibition in the traditional sense of the word, they conceived *La casa imperfetta* ("The Imperfect House"), a display that would invite visitors into the home of a fictional character, a man of indefinite description. It's a one-bedroom apartment, designed with the help of Studio A/C, which contains traces of everyday life. "I wanted to create the feeling that the man who lives here has just left to buy some butter, but on his way back they were tragically hit by a tram," she says. "So as you enter you could imagine it's like the first visit of the police."

Sempé has spent time sourcing the right material to scatter around the house and significant time locating her own designs, including on various online forums. "The companies I worked with were not really interested in me it seems," she says. "They haven't kept any of the designs, so I've tried to gather them for the show in other ways. I bought the Tratti tiles I designed for Mutina from a builder outside of Paris that I found online, and yesterday I was on a kind of Italian Craigslist to put an offer in on one of my lamps for under the asking price." There is poetry in the idea of a designer so invested in the use of objects that she is tracing the trajectories of her own designs via online shopping platforms. Then again, it also reaffirms the significance of museums as repositories of objects and platforms for stories that might otherwise go untold.

What follows, however, are stories of a different kind. In anticipation of *La casa imperfetta's* display at the Triennale (16 April – 15 September 2024), *Disegno* asked Sempé to create a series of design fictions exploring her imagined home and its absent resident. They invite us to open the door and step into the *casa imperfetta*.

The owner of casa imperfetta rushed out of his house to buy butter this morning and was hit by the No. 29 tram. The following notes, found on his desk, reveal what he loved about his home.

Hallway

Having a proper entrance hall, a real separate room, is a privilege – an intensely desirable thing. In the last flat, the coats hung around on the kitchen chairs; shopping bags and school bags lay on the diminutive table; the floor was littered with the hastily torn-open packaging of long-awaited parcels.

And now I have this lovely, spacious hallway, a welcoming transition space for unloading and a place of organised passage. A real hall is a kind of giant wastepaper basket, filtering comings and goings; like ants, we deposit mounds of variable consistency. A hall is like a three-dimensional doormat, it keeps the house clean. It makes it calm.

I'm waiting for another builder's quote to move the partition. The hall is really far too big and the sitting room much too small.

Sitting room

When my mother finally changed the sofa of my childhood – a mattress with pillows that I dropped on the floor and never picked up – I was disappointed. After years of deliberation, of careful consideration of this long-postponed purchase, I suddenly found myself encased in a sort of rigid box – a receptacle for flabby rectangular cushions, covered in a fluffy herringbone that the rivets on my jeans caught on. And still the cushions needed picking up.

I was less disappointed in the modern telly that arrived while I was at riding camp. With a remote control! I LOVED that remote control. Decades later, I saw the same one in a car-boot sale. That magical object looked so huge and unwieldy, like a specially oversized orthopaedic boot – Italian size 36, French 37.

Another hi-tech gadget, another remote control: my father's tweed jacket was deformed by a strange





A model of the casa imperfetta, the real-world version of which will be built at Milan's Triennale design museum in spring 2024.

device that he kept in his pocket. Yellowish, like a pat of butter, with a perforated receiver ridged like a hippo's incisor, it allowed him to check his answering machine when he was out. He would dial his office number and place the device on the handset. In the ensuing tête-à-tête between those two perforated creatures, high-pitched signals screeched down the line to trigger playback of the recorded messages. He never worked out how to rewind those tapes, in spite of his general capacity for winding people up. He lost the thing once. We found it months later under the squidgy cushions of the horrid sofa, along with a four-colour biro, a die, the letter Q from the Scrabble set, and some giant breadcrumbs, which I ate. It was all very modern.

When I go to people's houses, I still slip my hand under their cushions and surreptitiously examine my excavations on the pretext of having felt something prick me.

Bathroom

Rooms that are dedicated to cleanliness get dirty very fast. Is it that we seize on the slightest bit of dust, an affront to our purified bodies? Or that tiling is such a treacherous surface because it's so clean, each grouted tile framing the slightest hair, creating a sort of museum of deficient hygiene?

Francesca washes herself using techniques more suited to a garage. You'd think she was washing the mud off a rally car. Foam everywhere, and she uses one of those huge sponges (which she holds to be natural) to which we have all fallen victim at red lights, our windscreens suddenly obscured by their deposit of greying scum. I have often imagined her standing between the shaggy rollers of an automatic carwash. Sucked in by its vertical brushes, twisting her long hair like giant curlers, she would end up bald on one side, the other erupting with the blue fibres of those bristling rollers.

When she washes her hair at home, water spirals down the drain, leaving a black, greasy nest. She has unruly keratin; her toenails get so long that they curl up in her shoes. When she cuts them, the unpredictable nail clippers don't project fine lunules, red or white, like capital Cs, but plectrums of Francesca horn (available soon on Etsy?).

The kitchen is considered the hub of processing and production in the home, but a bathroom is the same. Stray hairs, nail clippings, sodden cotton-wool

balls, and white soap stains on the floor are the fruits of its labour. And, like the kitchen, it is rife with danger. When Francesca uses conditioner to bring out her curls, the floor is treacherous. Once I went flying and pulled off the hook for the shower head to save myself. It turned out to be metallised plastic and had snapped clean off. Metallised plastic is the equivalent of a soya steak.

Bedroom

I have changed the mattress religiously every 10 years, as instructed. The excitement of waiting for delivery of the new slice of foam, yellow like spring cheese, covered in a fabric that also has something of farmyard production about it – hand-woven in sustainable materials, heady with well-being. But it didn't make any difference, other than I now keep wondering about my old mattress. I wonder where it is, where it was taken. Is it in a charity shop, stacked between other discarded mattresses? Does it carry the weight of new sleepers? Has it been chopped up into a thousand tiny pieces to use for stuffing cushions or cuddly toys? Were the pieces graded by size and put in carefully labelled stackable storage bins? Or like many mattresses made homeless, perhaps it has been buried. But where?

Laundry room

I love this laundry room, or rather this drying rack between two walls. Laundry is the tyrant of the home. It comes in fits and starts, invasive, taking up residence in a range of spots around the house. At work – in recent, imminent or actual use – it can be found slung across furniture and window sills, or even draped around a body; on a minibreak, in the washing basket or machine, on a drying rack or ironing board; or relegated to the retirement home of a wardrobe or drawer, where it may be more or less well cared for. It disappears from view, we look for it, it reappears. Sometimes it is displayed for really quite long periods of time in a room, spoiling the decor, before returning to take refuge in a cupboard until its next scene. Other people's washing, in houses as ill-equipped in laundry rooms as mine have been in the past, always makes me deeply uncomfortable. When people entertain in tiny sitting rooms with wrinkled clothes drying next to the sofa, or in the kitchen, the sight of their washing is as distressing to me as talking to a superior when they have parsley between their teeth.



Office

Making this little office changed my life. It's nothing like working uncomfortably in the kitchen, or on the very, very low coffee table in the sitting room.

I measured the exact distance between my chair at the kitchen table and my desk chair: 4.58m. I chose science at school, so I've been trained to be rigorous in my analysis.

For 15 days in a row, I collected the crumbs beneath each of these chairs in two separate envelopes. The weight of those picked up under the office chair was greater than those from the kitchen: 25 per cent more. Using the microscope I bought on Amazon and plugged into my computer, I sorted the crumbs by type and colour. Conclusion: I follow a more diverse diet in my little windowless office.

I have put up a hook for a dustpan and brush.

Kitchen

It's amazing how stupid we can be when we already know that what we're going to do is stupid. Why did I put half an onion back in the fridge? Because I told myself that we were going to be less wasteful, that I'd use it that evening. Ecological. Yes! That was on Tuesday and now it's Saturday, and the butter tastes of onion and the whole fridge stinks. My coffee is hot, the toast is waiting for spread. But not with that smell. Well done. Toast works in symbiosis with butter, which hydrates it, softening the surly little chap, stooped over after his long stay in the toaster.

I neglected the sensitive butter for the sake of half an onion. If I had just put the whole thing in the sauce on Tuesday, would that really have been overdoing it? Would I have ruined the meal? Would I have been admonished? "You might have put a little less onion in. A bit heavy on the onion," perhaps? No. It would have been good; not bad, anyway. I must be braver. I let myself be intimidated by the recipe, as if it were watching me. It was because I didn't have any cumin – I could already feel failure looming and decided that an extra half an onion was a step too far hors-piste. The result is a breakfast that smells like a Molotov cocktail. Recipes always intimidate me. The pleasure of hosting is more about the danger of disappointing. And double-sided disappointment: the disappointment of bad food, and the disappointment of guests overstaying their welcome. **END**



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—Inga Sempé