

COLLECTing



Afra and Tobia Scarpa, wife and husband who met as architecture students in Venice in the mid-1950s, enjoyed a successful collaborative career designing glass, lighting, and furniture for a who's who of the most prestigious modernist makers in Italy, among them Venini, Flos, Gavina, Cassina, B&B Italia, Poggi, and Stildomus; Knoll and Stendig distributed their furni-

ture in the U.S. Included in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum, the duo's upmarket oeuvre combines sumptuous materials and expert craftsmanship with innovative techniques. They were also practicing architects, notably realizing factories and stores for Benetton.

For Compasso d'Oro Award-winning designers of their stature, the Scarpas are decidedly under the radar in today's collecting market. Pieces by the couple can be sourced via online platforms and auctions, though they show up more often on better-curated sites such as 1stdibs and Wright. Though their work is mostly out of production, Flos still offers five Scarpa lighting designs. Here's a quick guide to collecting their pieces.

Clockwise from top left:
Afra and Tobia Scarpa. Model #925 lounge chair for Cassina, 1965. Occhi glass vase for Venini, circa 1960. The 1963 Jucker table lamp for Flos.

Design dealer and scholar Larry Weinberg gives us the scoop on what's worth collecting now

afra and tobia scarpa

glass

Tobia Scarpa apprenticed at Venini, where his father, renowned architect Carlo, was an acknowledged master. The glass designs of Scarpa *figlio*, often based on his father's work, are achieving blue-chip status. A magnificent Murrine Opache bowl, circa 1958, sold for \$37,500 at Wright last year. But the majority of Scarpa's *occhi*, *murrine*, and hammered *battuto* vases can generally be had for well under \$5,000...for now.

furniture

Top-of-the-line is the mid-1970s Artona series, the first designs produced by the craft atelier Maxalto. The sleekly handsome Africa chair is the stand-out, composed of walnut, ebony, leather, and brass, with a seat back shaped and polished like a gun stock. It's one of the few Scarpa designs, besides glass, that turns up at Sotheby's and Christie's, but prices tend not to exceed \$2,000. Look also for the sofa, armchairs, dowel-base cocktail table, and cabinets from this series.

Among their seating for Cassina, keep an eye on model #925, a fluidly dynamic 1965 lounge chair in ash with leather-clad molded plywood seat and back. The example shown here, with a green aniline-dyed finish, is an uncommon but striking variation. Consider also the 1967 ➤



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF WRIGHT (3)



sleeper hit

My pick is the line of luxe, handcrafted fireplace tools produced by Dimensione Fuoco in the 1980s. The Scarpa design I'd most like to take home, they mix iron, brass, leather, exotic woods, and even stone in architecturally resonant compositions.

the verdict

There is plenty of opportunity to collect vintage Afra and Tobia Scarpa pieces at reasonable prices. Examples of their two most popular seating groups—the simple and well-proportioned Bastiano for Gavina/Knoll and the more unconstructed, urethane-padded Soriana for Cassina, both from the 1960s—can still be found at entry-level prices. But don't wait too long: the cat is already out of the bag.

Carlotta armchair, a departure in the use of low-cost, knock-down elements but with a rakishly stylish composition of rectangles—a stunner, especially early examples with original red, yellow, or green frames.

lighting

The standout is the 1968 Biagio table lamp, a hollowed disk of luminescent Carrara marble, still available from Flos. Prices on vintage examples are generally pegged to the new list price of \$7,995. Look for dramatic variations in the marble graining and be sure to scrutinize condition. Another design still available from Flos is Fantasma Piccolo, a 1961 floor lamp of cocoon resin sprayed over an eccentric wire framework, à la Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni. Vintage examples have a warmer, yellower tone; as with Isamu Noguchi paper Akari fixtures, palpable differences between early and current productions differentiate them in the market. Scrutinize the body for holes or heat spots. And a no-brainer is the quirky, helmeted 1960s Jucker lamp, which can be had for as little as \$200 in white, though an early example in orange will fetch more.



Clockwise from top left:
 Fantasma Piccolo floor lamp for Flos, 1961. Murine Opache bowl for Venini, circa 1958. A 1960s Cassina ad for Carlotta chairs. Carrara marble Biagio lamp for Flos, 1968. Fireplace tools for Dimensione Fuoco, 1981. Africa chairs for Maxalto, 1975.



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: COURTESY OF WRIGHT (3); COURTESY OF CASSINA HISTORICAL ARCHIVES; SANTI CALECA; AVAILABLE ON 1STDIBS