

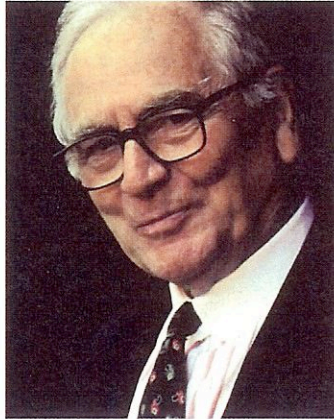
# Pierre Cardin

The French fashion designer has put his name on myriad products, but none are so coveted as his mod home furnishings

By Shax Riegler

For someone whose name is ubiquitous—he has used it to sell everything from haute-couture gowns to orthopedic mattresses—Pierre Cardin is a hard man to pin down. By all accounts, the octogenarian still steers a Paris-based design empire reputedly worth more than a billion euros. By licensing his name so freely he has largely been dismissed by fashion-industry colleagues, but Cardin has shown the world just how successful a runway eminence can be putting his signature on more than clothing and fragrances.

Pioneering has always been the name of Cardin's game. He was the first Western designer to show his fashions in China and the Soviet Union and to sign a licensing deal for shirts and ties. Prophetically, in 1968, he was the first to license his name for a nonfashion item—crochery, of all things. "If someone asked me to do toilet paper, I'd do it," Cardin once brazenly said. But rather than being diminished by the sheer volume of repetition, the Cardin mark is alive and well, lending prestige to approximately 900 products worldwide, including sardines and cigarette lighters,

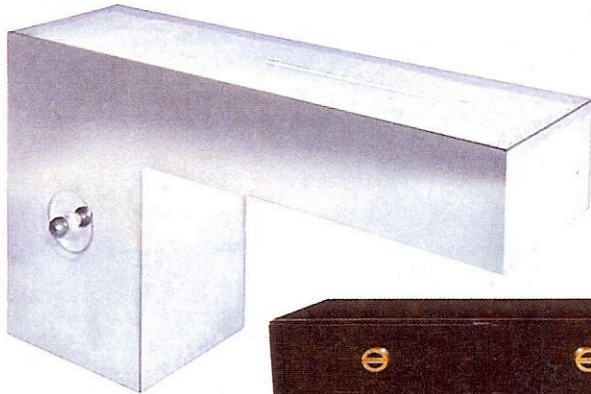


according to one report. The most important from a collecting standpoint are his home furnishings—especially the furniture, lighting, and rugs produced from the 1960s through the '80s.

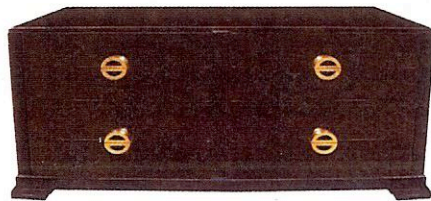
In his streamlined fashions Cardin—an Italy-born Frenchman who worked for Elsa Schiaparelli and Christian Dior before opening his own company in 1950—embraced futurism. His furniture followed suit, combining the bold outlines and lacquered surfaces of Asian art with the sharp linearity, simple geometry, and stylization of Art Deco. The designs' collective breath of fresh air still seems to promise a new way of life without sacrificing an iota of style. "He used industrial materials, but they feel really

luxurious," says Liz O'Brien, a New York dealer whose gallery occupies the same space where Cardin once had a boutique. "They're very well-done and precisely fitted." Dealer Todd Merrill agrees, calling his pieces "space-age without being campy."

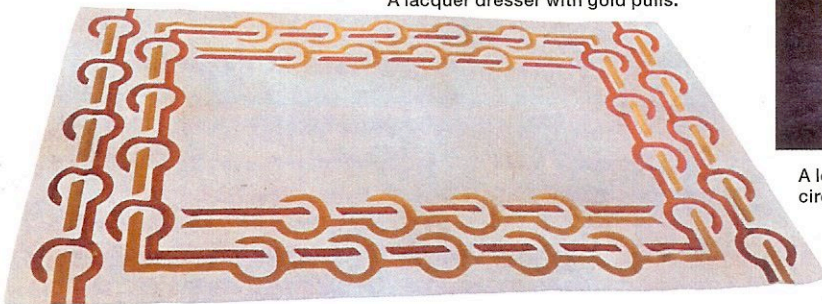
At the time he began designing furniture, however, Cardin's own apartment was outfitted in classic French taste: Louis XV antiques;



A chrome desk lamp.



A lacquer dresser with gold pulls.



Barstools, 1986.

A logo-motif rug, circa 1970.



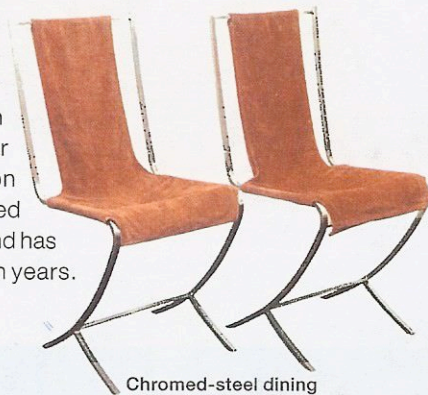
A burlwood-and-brass table.

Chinese and Middle Eastern art; and a pair of glamorous lacquer screens from the imperial palace in Tokyo, a gift from Emperor Hirohito's sister-in-law Princess Takamatsu. But the question on his and so many other people's minds at the time was how to put a youthquake spin on those traditional decorating elements. "Cardin, like Maria Pergay, Gabriella Crespi, Willy Rizzo, and others created avant-garde pieces that mixed well with antiques and Persian rugs," says O'Brien, who includes cocktail tables and expansive seating in this category. Also, she explains, "These new furnishings weren't made in the 18th century, so they appealed to collectors who still wanted to live a modern life."

Part of the progressiveness came from Cardin's multifunctional custom-made chests, tables, and seating—some designed in collaboration with other talents of the day—which could be appreciated from any angle and didn't have to be pushed up against the wall. He described making them as "sculpting" and referred to the resulting one-off works as *sculptures utilitaires*. Such furnishings represent the limited-production end of Cardin's design studio. He licensed his logo to other manufacturers, but even those pieces possess his distinctive look.

"I love his laminated dining tables, buffets, and bars with inlaid metallic accents," says Bill Stewart, an Atlanta-based interior designer. He also regularly snaps up lighting, glasses, and ice buckets and notes that Cardin's rugs are often woven with logo-inspired motifs such as interlocking P's. "I'm fascinated by branding, especially by fashion designers branching out," he says, adding that Cardin also owns the Maxim's de Paris restaurant-and-hotel chain. Stewart's Palm Springs residence is outfitted with furnishings by Cardin, Gucci, Hermès, and Dior. "The average person immediately recognizes these names and their logos," he says. "They often don't know Royère, Prouvé, or Eames. That's elite design—this stuff is definitely populist."

And Cardin is arguably the best known of the bunch. "He is a huge name, but we still don't know everything he's produced," Merrill says. "The excessive licensing has overshadowed his best work, so it has taken time for people to separate the artistic and mercenary spheres—but the furniture is really great." With enthusiasm like that, it's no wonder that Cardin himself has jumped on the bandwagon. He recently opened a home-furnishings shop in Paris and has filled it with his first new designs in years. Start collecting now. ■



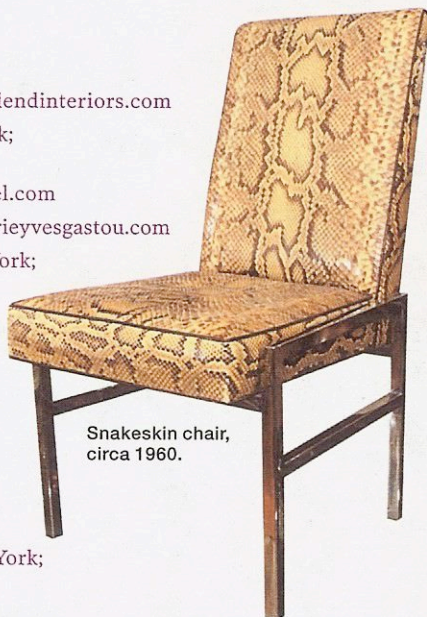
Chromed-steel dining chairs, circa 1970.



A metal-and-chrome low table, circa 1970.

Where to Find It:

- 1stdibs.com
- Blend Interiors, Los Angeles; blendinteriors.com
- Craig Van Den Brulle, New York; craigvandenbrulle.com
- Eric Appel, New York; ericappel.com
- Galerie Yves Gastou, Paris; galerieyvesgastou.com
- John Salibello Antiques, New York; johnsalibelloantiques.com
- Liz O'Brien, New York; lizobrien.com
- Pierre Cardin, Paris; pierrecardin.com
- Talisman, London; talismanlondon.com
- Todd Merrill Antiques, New York; merrillantiques.com
- Van den Akker Antiques, New York; vandenakkerantiques.com



Snakeskin chair, circa 1960.



Bronze table lamps with inlaid logos, circa 1970.

FROM TOP: CRAIG VAN DEN BRULLE; BLEND INTERIORS; TODD MERRILL ANTIQUES; LAMPS: VAN DEN AKKER ANTIQUES; SNAKESKIN CHAIR: JOHN SALIBELLO; ALL PHOTOS COURTESY 1STDIBS.COM