



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## Oral history interview with Massimo Vignelli

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman  
Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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## Collection Overview

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| <b>Repository:</b>      | Archives of American Art  |
| <b>Title:</b>           | Oral history interview with Massimo Vignelli  |
| <b>Date:</b>            | 2011 June 6-7   |
| <b>Identifier:</b>      | AAA.vignel11  |
| <b>Creator:</b>         | Vignelli, Massimo (Interviewee)<br>Riedel, Mija, 1958- (Interviewer)<br>Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America   |
| <b>Extent:</b>          | 9 Items (Sound recording: 9 sound files (6 hr., 52 min.))<br>153 Pages (Transcript)   |
| <b>Language:</b>        | English .   |
| <b>Digital Content:</b> | <a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with Massimo Vignelli, 2011 June 6-7, Transcript</a><br><a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Massimo Vignelli, 2011 June 6-7, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)</a> |

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

This interview is part of the Archives of American Art Oral History Program, started in 1958 to document the history of the visual arts in the United States, primarily through interviews with artists, historians, dealers, critics and administrators.

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## Biographical / Historical

Massimo Vignelli (1931- ) is a designer in New York, New York. Mija Riedel (1958- ) is an independent scholar in San Francisco, California.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview of Massimo Vignelli conducted 2011 June 6-7, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Vignelli's home and office, in New York, New York.

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## Scope and Contents

Vignelli speaks of his youth and early start in art design and architecture; his early work at Catiglione architects at the age of 16; his father; his education; meeting his favorite architects; his influences;

architecture and design magazines; organic and rationalist architecture in Italy; influence of Ignazio Gardella; Adolf Loos' idea of spoon to the city; European, American, and Italian architecture; education in Milan; his work with Venini Glass; Italian design; his early graphic work; design and vulgarity; marriage and working with Lella Vignelli; graphic design work at the Container Corporation; concept of design as a whole; his work on corporate identities; his establishment of Vignelli Associates; introduction and use of Helvetica in the United States; working with Knoll; choosing clients; design and culture; his work on St. Peter's Lutheran Church; design work for the United States National Parks newspaper design and layout; Unimark; timelessness and design; working with Poltrona Frau, Zero Labor design; major influences; his work for the United States Postal Service; connectivity and context in architecture; his clothing designs and historical perspectives on clothing; postmodernism; his work on the New York Subway; design work before and after computers; Japanese architecture and design; his work as a teacher; Oliviero Toscani and working for Benetton; America and international design; modernism and the office building; modern design and furniture; a timeline of his career; the Vignelli Center at RIT and archiving. Vignelli also recalls, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Giuseppe Terragni, Giuseppe Pagano, Domus, Gió Ponti, Metron, Bruno Zevi, Ignazio Gardella, Ray and Charles Eames, Giancarlo De Carlo, Venini Glass, Carlo Scarpa, Ralph Eckerstrom, Umberto Eco, Sansoni Publishing House, Vignelli Associates, Walter Kacik, Helvetica, Knoll, St. Peter's Lutheran Church, National Parks, New York Herald, Unimark, Lella Vignelli, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Poltrona Frau, Dieter Rams, Louis Kahn, Stendig Calendar, A to Z, Salon de Mobile, Michael Graves, Robert Venturi, Oliviero Toscani, Benetton, Herman Miller, Steelcase, and the Vignelli Center.

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## General

Originally recorded as 9 sound files. Duration is 6 hr., 52 min.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

### Subjects:

- Architectural design
- Architecture -- Europe
- Architecture -- Italy
- Architecture -- United States
- Architecture, American
- Architecture, Italian
- Architecture, Japanese
- Art -- Study and teaching
- Costume design
- Design
- Designers -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews
- Furniture design
- Postmodernism

### Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

### Names:

- Benetton (Firm)
- Container Corporation of America

De Carlo, Giancarlo, 1919-2005  
Domus  
Eames, Charles  
Eames, Ray  
Eckerstrom, Ralph E. (Ralph Eugene), 1921-  
Eco, Umberto  
Frau, Poltrona  
Gardella, Ignazio  
Graves, Michael, 1934-2015  
Herman Miller, Inc.  
Kacik, Walter  
Kahn, Louis I., 1901-1974  
Knoll Associates, inc.  
Le Corbusier, 1887-1965  
Loos, Adolf, 1870-1933  
Metron Orts- und Regionalplanung  
Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig, 1886-1969  
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America  
New York City Transit Authority  
New York Herald. (New York.)  
Pagano, Giuseppe, 1896-1945  
Pomodoro, Arnaldo, 1926-  
Ponti, Gio, 1891-1979  
Rams, Dieter  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
Sansoni (Firm)  
Scarpa, Carlo, 1906-1978  
Steelcase, Inc.  
Terragni, Giuseppe, 1904-1943  
Toscani, Oliviero  
United States Postal Service  
United States. National Park Service  
Venini International  
Venturi, Robert  
Vignelli Associates  
Vignelli, Lella  
Zevi, Bruno, 1918-2000

Occupations:

Architects