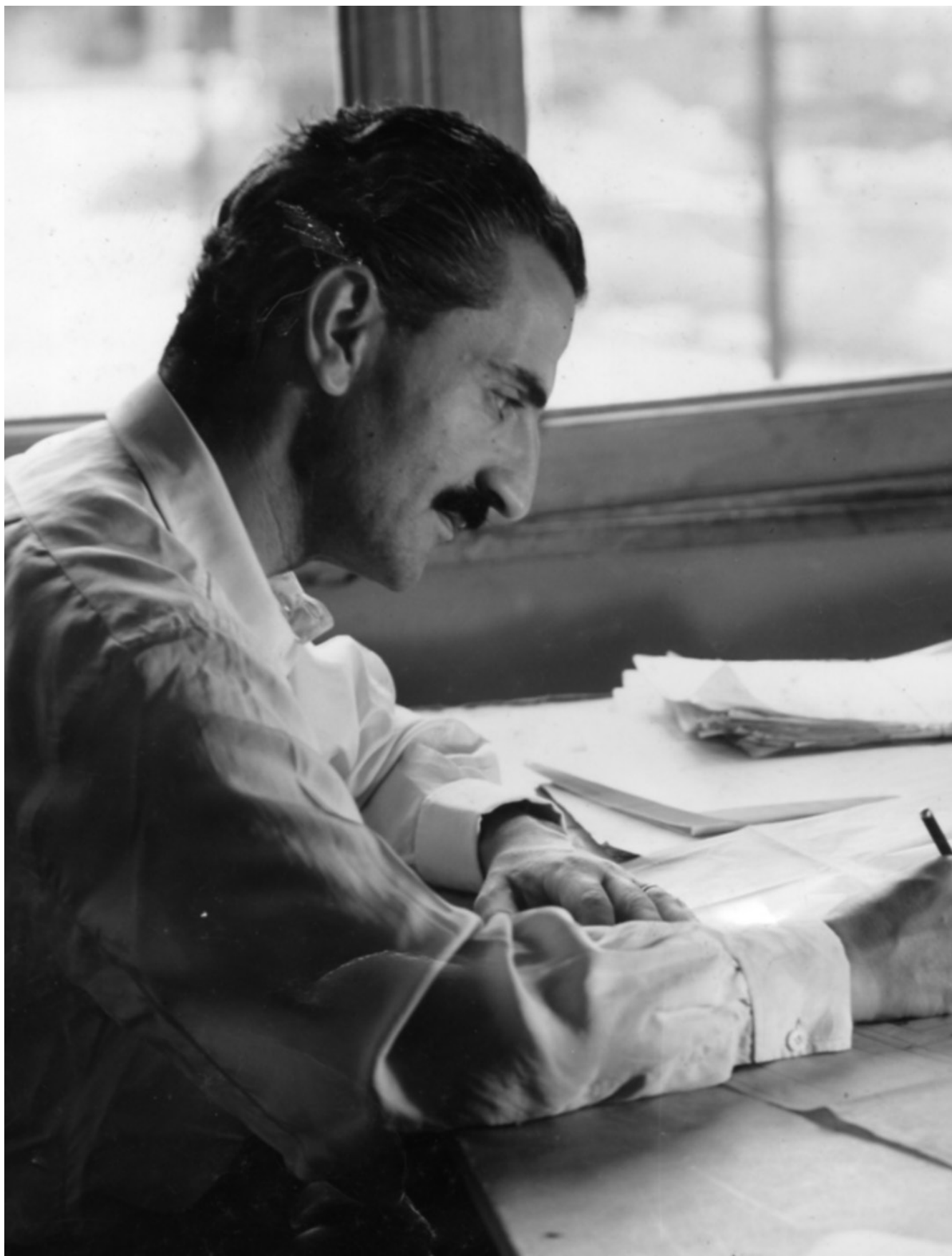


**GUBI**

Designer portrait  
2025

# CARLO DE CARLI





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## *Scholar of Space*

Born in Milan in 1910 and closely connected to the city until his death in 1999, Carlo De Carli is a highly influential figure in 20th-century Italian design. His legacy extends not only to the buildings, interiors, and furniture he created as an architect and designer but also to his profound impact as a writer and academic. De Carli's exploration of the poetics of space, the integration of human behavior, and the ethical and political dimensions of architecture has had a lasting influence on architects worldwide.

Growing up through the interwar period, De Carli belonged to a generation of Italian architects whose work was driven by a need to seek the foundational principles of architecture after a long period of chaos and uncertainty.

Taken as a whole, his work reflects an ongoing attempt to understand the role of design in shaping a complex web of relationships: between a building and its materials, the lives and behaviors of its inhabitants, its dialogue with its surroundings, and the broader ethics and politics of the society it serves.

### **Learning from a master**

After graduating with a degree in architecture from the Politecnico di Milano in 1934, De Carli spent a year working in the studio of Gio Ponti – a key figure in the Italian cultural sphere

of the time. Ponti published a number of De Carli's articles and projects in the magazines *Stile* and *Domus*, and in 1948 invited him to collaborate on his interior architecture course.

De Carli went on to open his own studio in Milan in 1939, where he expanded his knowledge of industrial production and exhibited a flair for experimentation, pushing the limits of both new and traditional materials. In 1940, he began working with the Triennale di Milano, serving as a member of the Executive Committee for the 10th and 11th Triennale, and joining the board of directors from the 12th to the 15th.

### **From architecture to art**

By the 1950s, De Carli's furniture designs had earned widespread recognition and secured him manufacturing partnerships with leading Italian design companies, including Tecno and Cassina. In 1954, his Model 683 chair was awarded Italy's highest honor in industrial design, the Compasso d'Oro, and the Good Design Award from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and in 1957 his Balestra armchair received the Grand Prize at Milan's 11th Triennale.

At the same time, De Carli gained a reputation for interior architecture, building a rapidly growing portfolio of public and private projects across residential, workplace, educational, and religious settings.





His architectural achievements include the residential and office building at Via dei Giardini 7, designed with architect Antonio Carminati. The building's irregular corner-plot footprint included the celebrated Sant'Erasmus Theatre, with its distinctive octagonal stage at the center of the space. Elsewhere in Milan, he also designed the Opera Don Calabria and the Church of Sant'Ildefonso, both characterized by complex geometry and spatial articulation.

Like many post-war architects in Italy, De Carli was also a keen artist, and produced a number of mixed-media paintings, especially in the later stages of his life, many of them inspired by the olive trees and lemon groves around Lake Garda, where he spent much of his early life, and where his wife and children took refuge during the war.

#### **Designing for life**

Across all disciplines, De Carli's design practice was distinguished by its emphasis on integrating space, behavior, and the human body. His buildings and furniture were designed to be lived in, not merely admired.

He brought this philosophy to his academic work at the Politecnico di Milano, where he succeeded Gio Ponti as professor of Interior Architecture, Furniture, and

Decoration in 1962. De Carli also served as Dean of the Faculty of Architecture from 1965 to 1968, and continued to teach at the university until 1986.

In addition to founding the magazine *Il Mobile Italiano* in 1957 and directing *Interni* from 1967 to 1971, De Carli compiled his reflections into various writings. Many of his most notable ideas are collected in the 1982 book *Architettura, Spazio Primario*, which explores his concept of architecture as 'primary space' – given meaning and definition by human action – and emphasizes the unity between buildings, interiors, and the furniture within them. For De Carli, architecture and design derived meaning from their relationship with human lives, with no distinction to be made between a building and an item of furniture.

When he died beside his beloved Lake Garda in 1999, Carlo De Carli left behind an extraordinary intellectual legacy, managed and maintained today by his family. His remarkable body of design work at all scales elegantly expresses his vision of human-centered architecture. This was founded on principles of continuity, simplicity, and balance – spaces of gesture and encounter, where the value of humanity and the sentiment of solidarity could be truly felt.