

Olivetti, design in industry

Date

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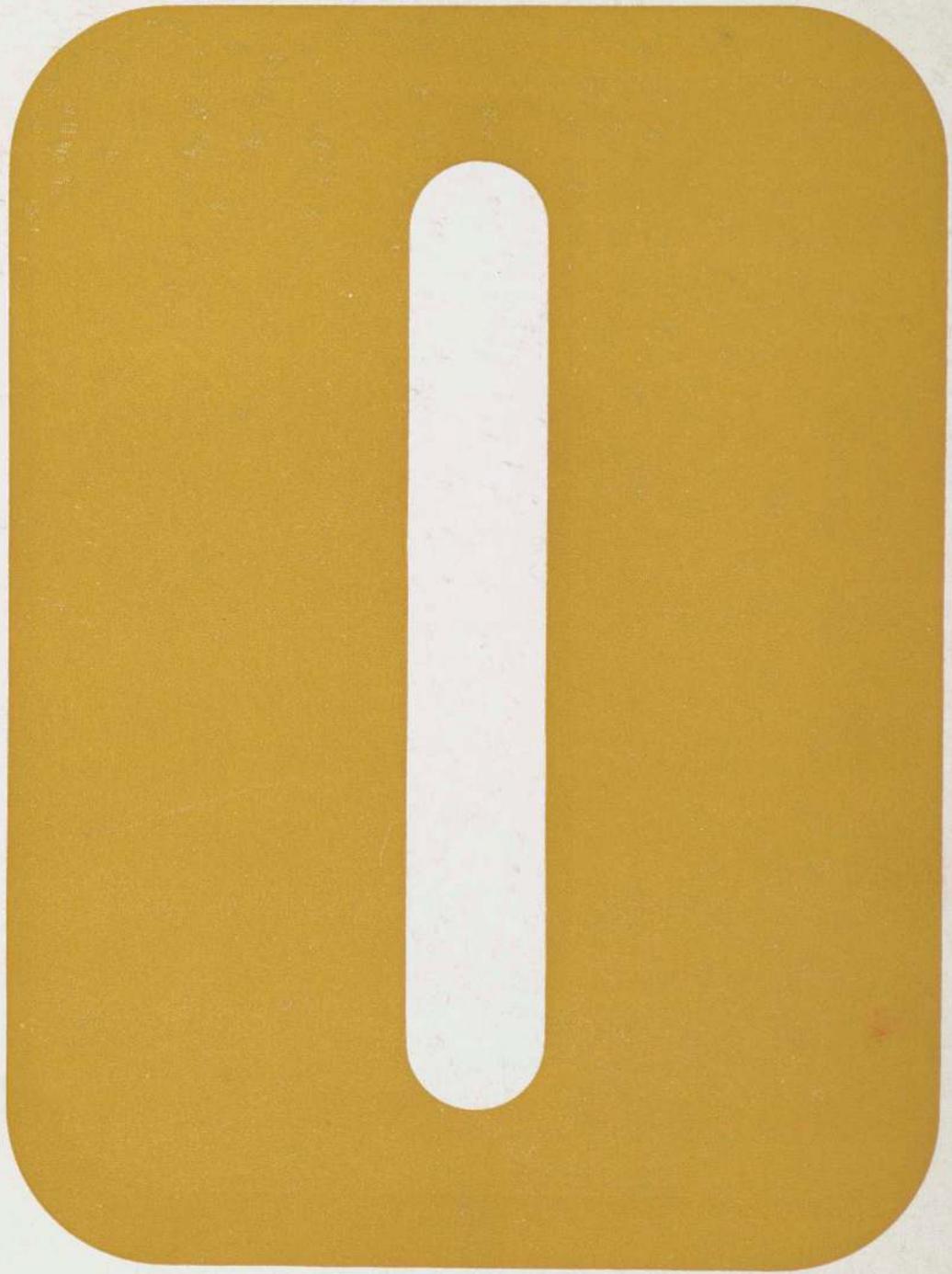
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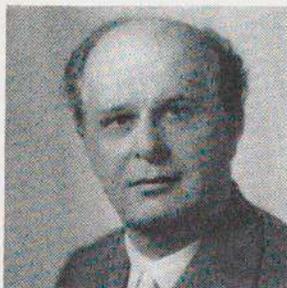
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Olivetti: design in industry



This issue of the Bulletin appears in conjunction with the Exhibition of the work of the Olivetti Company, at the Museum of Modern Art, from October 22 to November 30, 1952. The Exhibition and Bulletin were designed by Leo Lionni in cooperation with the Department of Architecture and Design.

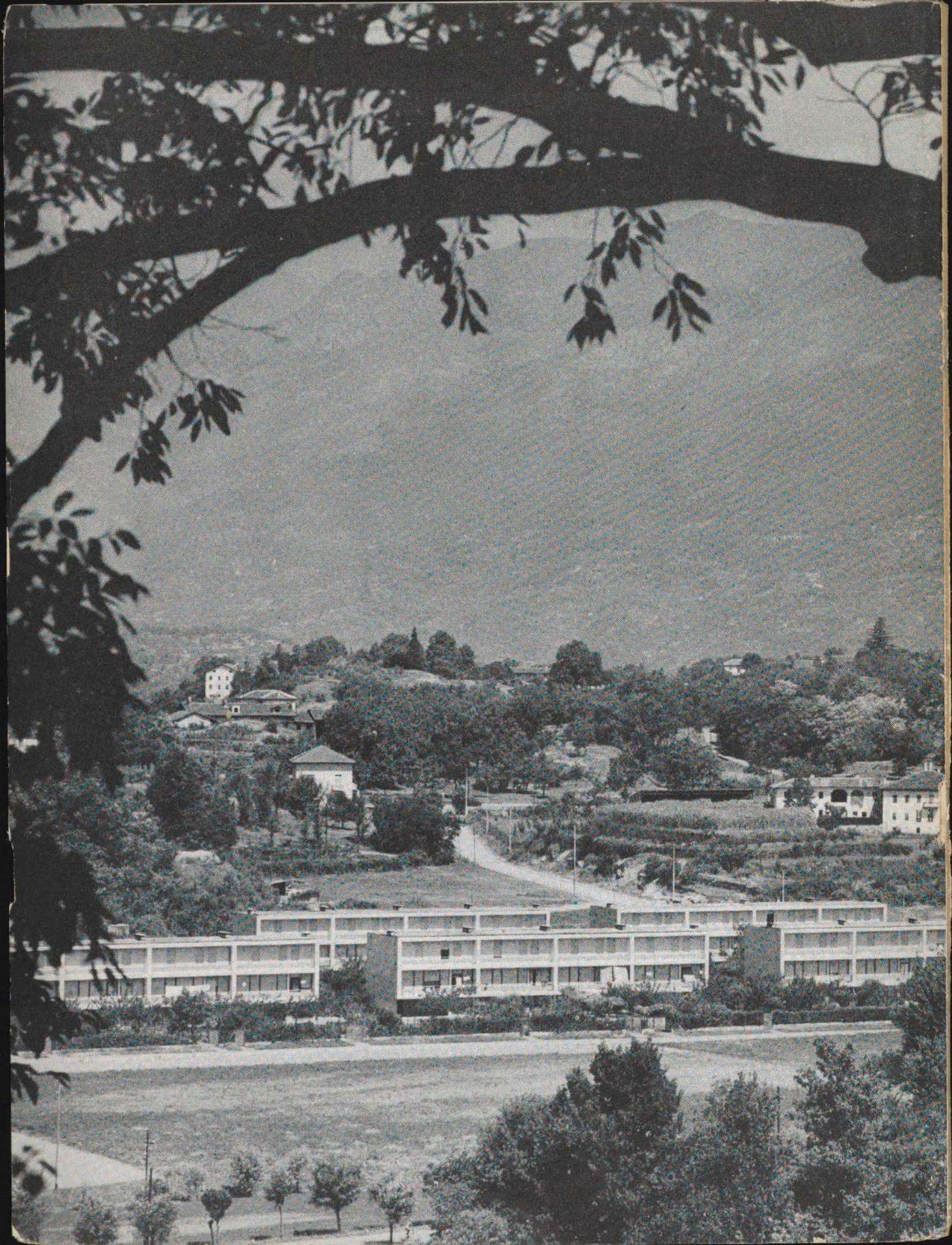
The Olivetti Company, many critics agree, is the leading corporation in the western world in the field of design. For patronage in architecture, product design and advertising, it would indeed be difficult to name a second. No company has designed a typewriter as handsome as the *Lexicon 80*; none surely has commissioned a building more distinguished than the Nursery School at Ivrea. Even *Fortune* magazine joins the critics concerning Olivetti's excellent advertising. And lastly, what other corporation has commissioned an artist with the distinction of Picasso to paint a mural for its sales rooms?

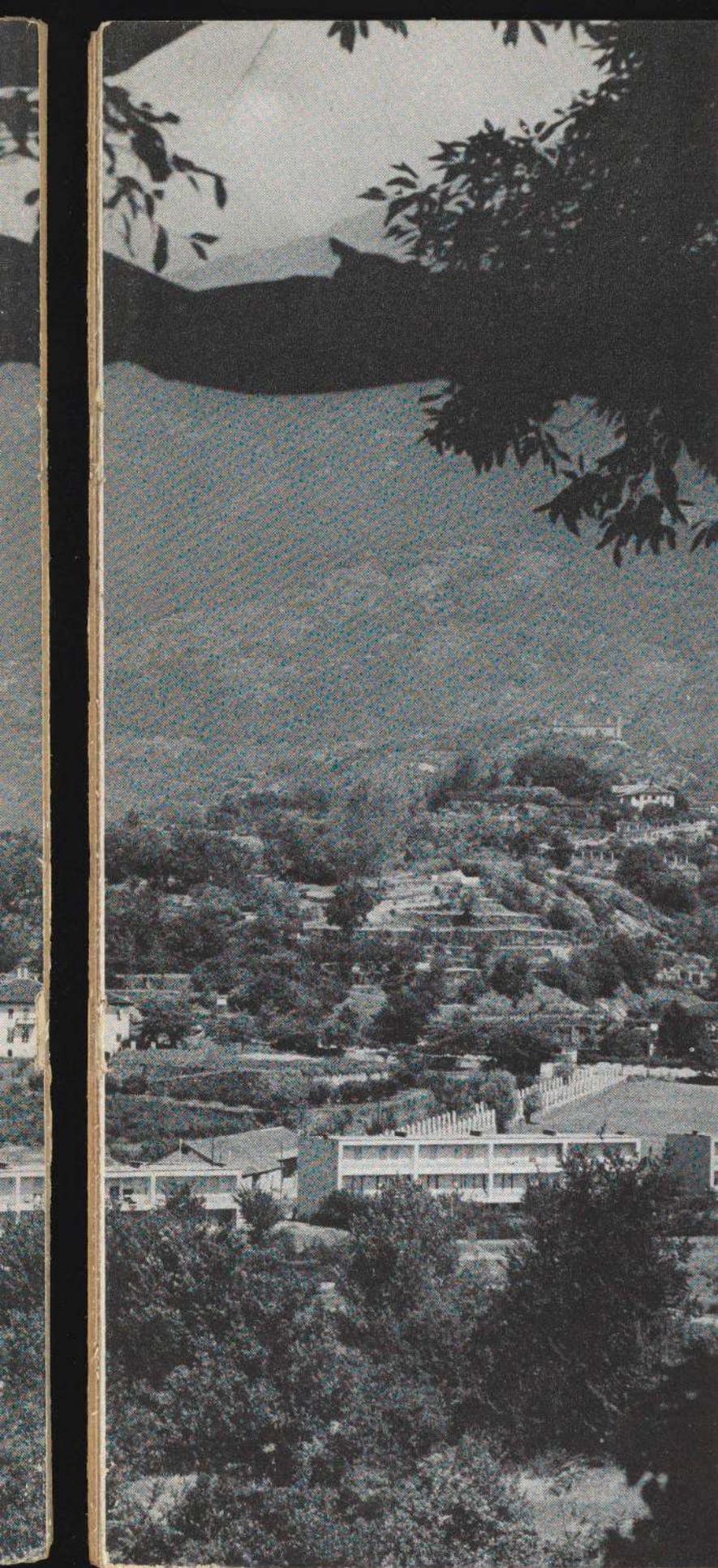


Adriano Olivetti, President
of the Olivetti Company

It is not only the esthetic quality of these achievements that is remarkable. More important as a lesson in our industrial world of today is the organization of all the visual aspects of an industry, unified under a single high standard of taste.

Many corporation officials in our country have earnestly tried to achieve good letterheads, good packaging, or good architecture. The wish is there but as yet the leadership in integrated design remains Italian. It is the purpose of this exhibition and bulletin to encourage our industries in the battle for good integrated design by illustrating the excellence of the Olivetti program. Not only is it pleasanter to write on a beautiful typewriter, not only is it pleasant for employees to work in a handsomely designed factory and live in well designed housing, but it cannot fail to be profitable in many ways, even perhaps in terms of money, to present all the visual aspects of an industry so that they become, like the lettering on a *Coca Cola* sign, a trademark to the world.



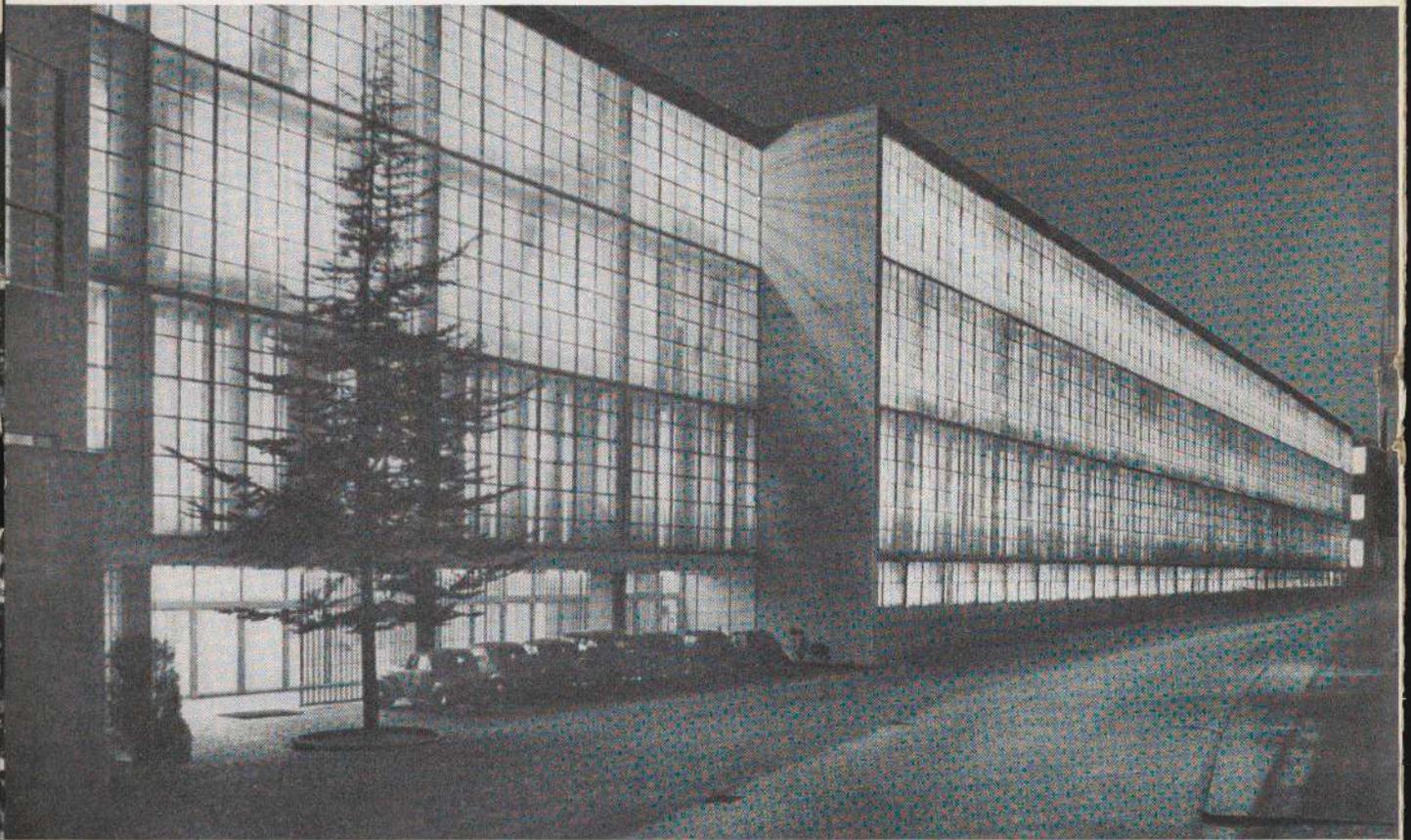
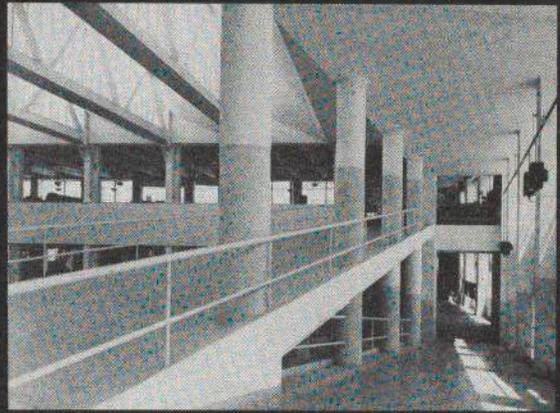
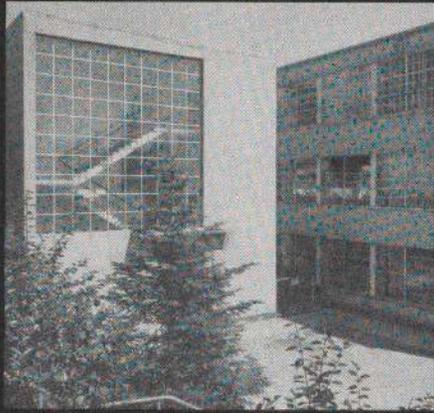


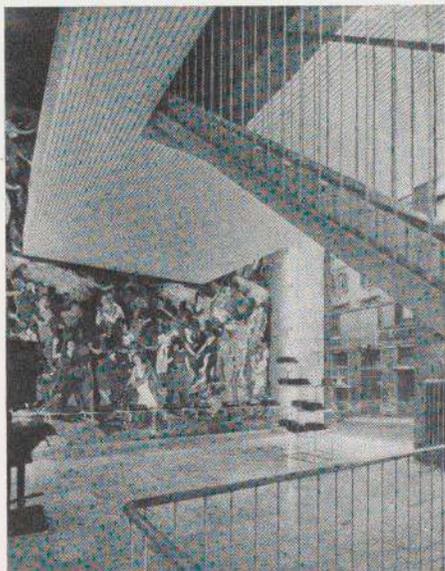
Directing the Olivetti program is fifty-one year old Adriano Olivetti, the Company's president since 1938. His awareness of social and esthetic developments, together with efficiency and foresight has made his forty-three year old company a leader in the production of office machines. He has also made it an industry acting on its social responsibilities, following the precedent of its founder, Camillo Olivetti, an engineer and humanist who built the company's first factory in 1908.

Although there are Olivetti plants in Turin, Apuania, Barcelona and Glasgow, and Olivetti stores in Milan, Rome, Paris, London, Mexico, Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, and elsewhere, it is the "town within a town" that Olivetti has created at Ivrea, a Roman site some 50 miles north of Turin at the foot of the mountains around the Valle d'Aosta, which best expresses the Olivetti idiom. A factory, modern low-cost houses, a kindergarten, and educational and recreational facilities for the workers are contained in an independent community functioning in harmony with the native villagers.

In the early years of its existence, the Olivetti Company housed its workers in the kind of brick, fortress-like factory building familiar to us in the American landscape. However, in 1940 Olivetti planned a new factory designed to produce an environment expressive of the company's progressive policies. Unlike so many American companies who give the job of designing their factories to construction firms, Olivetti went to two of Italy's foremost architects, Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, who had earned their reputations with the Casa Elettrica in 1930, the Studio House in the Milan Triennale in 1933, the Aeronautical Exposition in 1934, and numerous private houses executed in 1934 and 1935. Olivetti asked the architects to design a factory that would be suitable for human beings as well as machines, appearing hospitable and colorful, both in its facade and its interior. Later they were concerned with solving such employee problems as low-cost housing, day nurseries, clinics, and recreational facilities.

Low-cost employees' houses for the Olivetti Company, Ivrea (1939)
Figini and Pollini, architects





above
Interior, Olivetti store, Rome
Ugo Sissa, architect

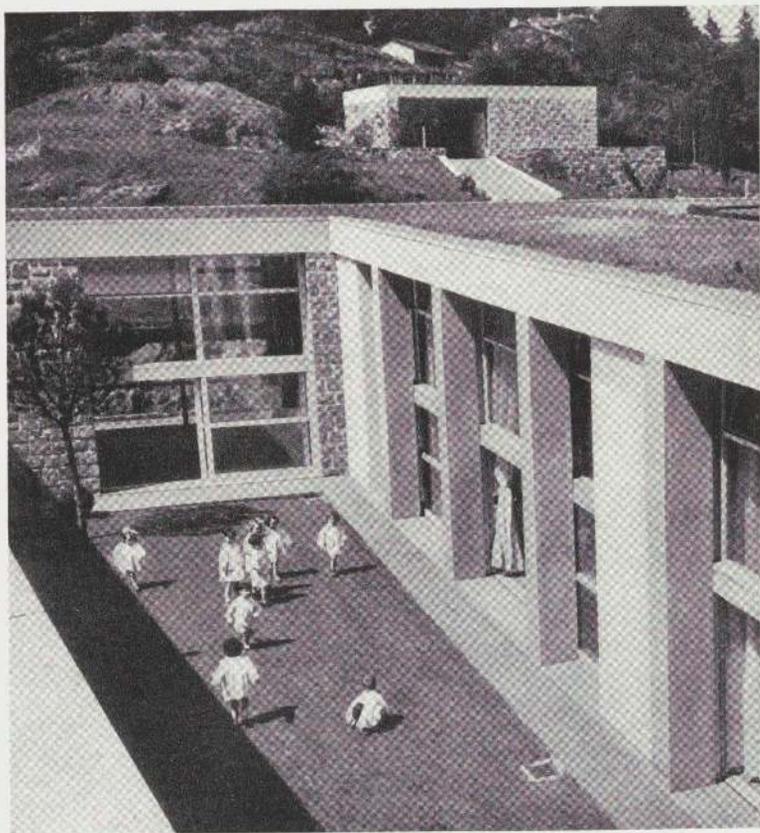
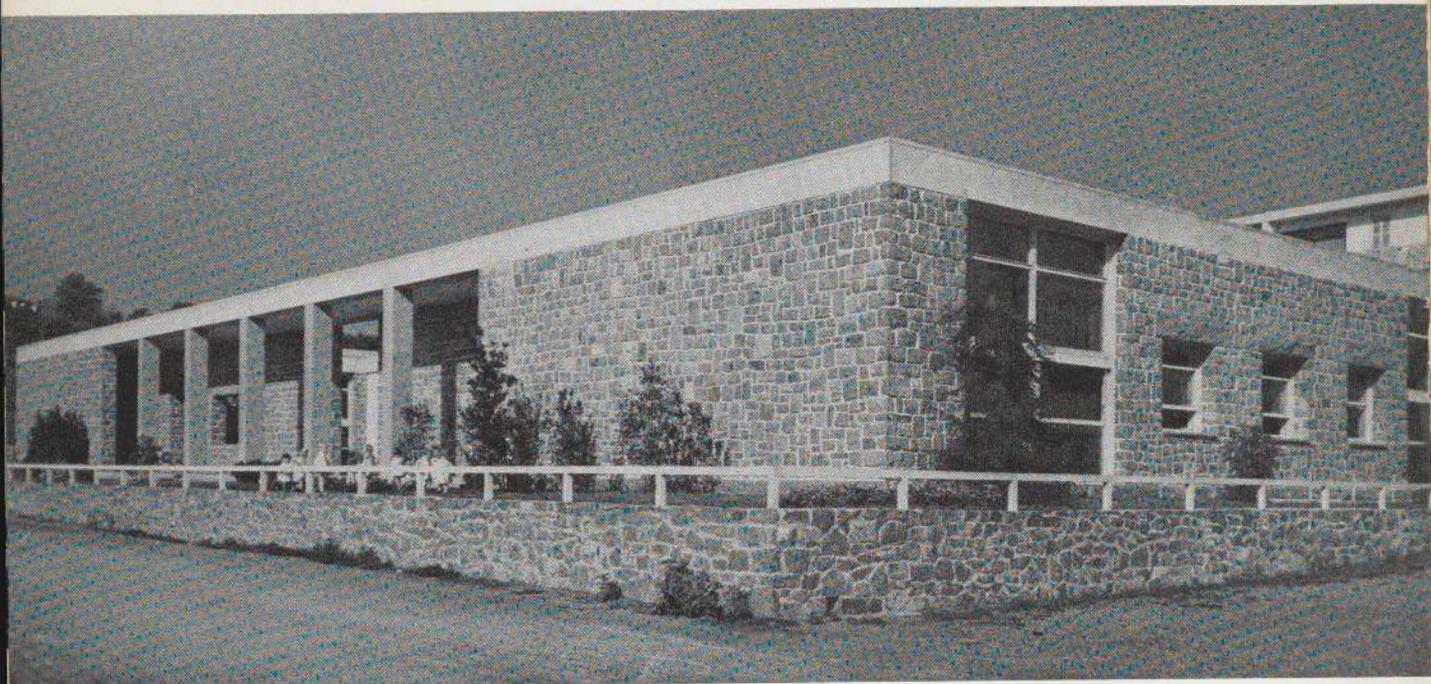
opposite, above
Courtyard, Factory
Factory Interior

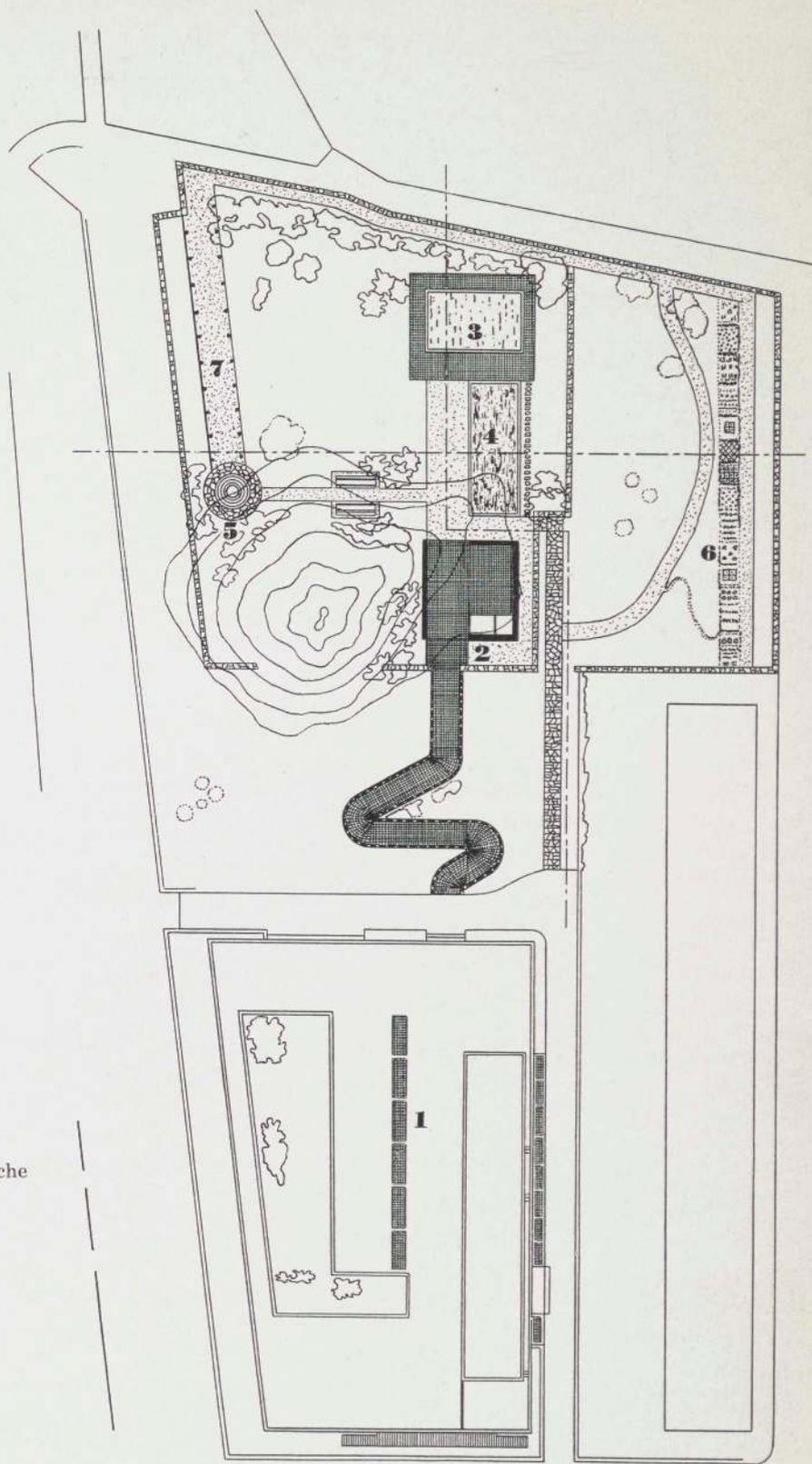
opposite, below
Olivetti factory, Ivrea (1940)
Figini and Pollini, architects

Olivetti's factory at Ivrea is a concrete building, 60 feet high, with enormous glass facades—one of them is 350 feet long. These glass walls illuminate an interior carefully planned to expedite production without sacrificing the comfort of employees. Much of the effect of uncluttered space, divided by columns and ramps of sculptural plasticity, is derived from concrete construction. But beyond the inherent character of the material used, it is apparent that the space, as well as the structural detail, has been organized by architects concerned also with an esthetic character appropriate to the building. Perhaps the best illustration of this concern occurs at the entrance, where a simple opening and carefully proportioned iron grilles replace the Greek or Colonial stage sets which often ornament comparable American buildings.

Olivetti's low cost workers' houses number among the most distinguished modern housing developments. The architects have given distinction to the buildings by projecting the concrete skeleton five feet beyond the front wall. This heavy cage look obscures the variation of window size, which often ruins the facades of housing developments, and gives the buildings a disciplined order.

In 1940-41, the company replaced a nursery school, by that time found to be inadequate, with a new building designed to accommodate 150 children of women employees. The architects have provided a bright and cheerful atmosphere avoiding an unduly institutional character. The building is placed between one of the company's chief housing projects and the factory itself. Raised above the adjoining road on a stone podium, the building is low and horizontal with rugged materials echoing the surrounding mountains. A greenish grey stone from the Valle d'Aosta is used in random form for the retaining walls of the earth podium and in irregular courses for the building itself. Its exposed concrete frame is sheathed with a light grey stone from the same region.

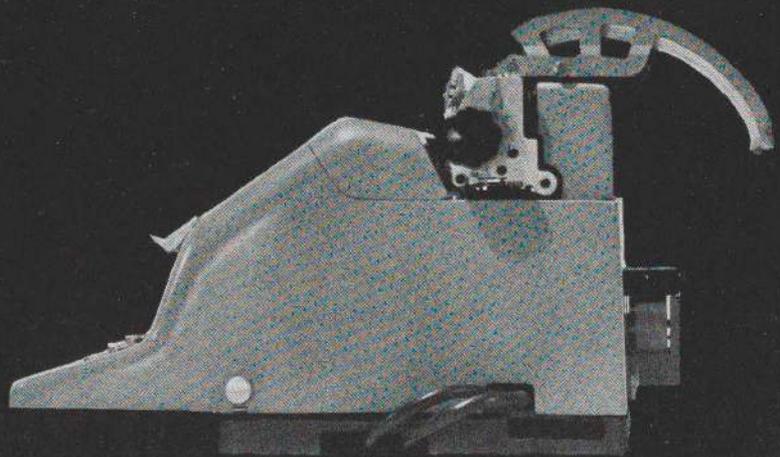
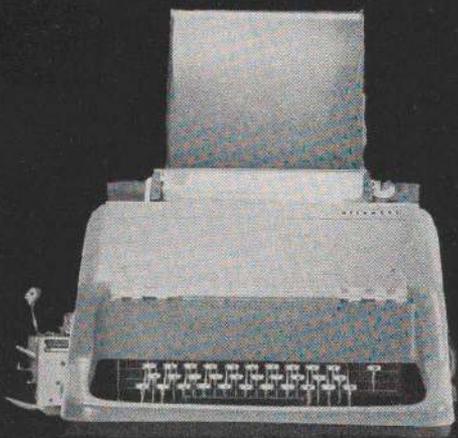
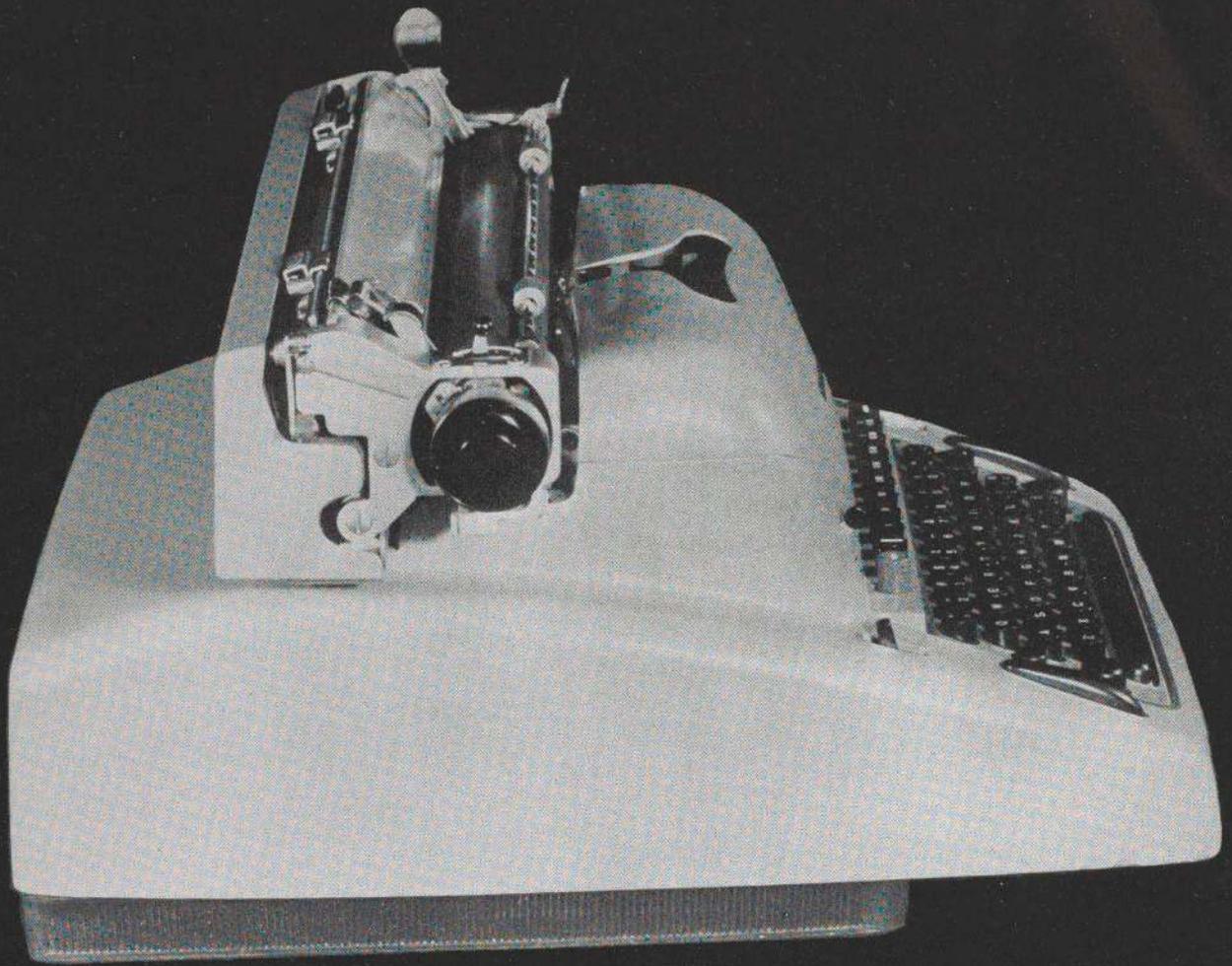




- Plan: 1. Nursery School and Creche
 2. Portico
 3. Pool
 4. Solarium
 5. Fountain
 6. Kitchen Garden
 7. Pergola

opposite, above
 Nursery School at Ivrea (1900-41)
 Figini and Pollini, architects

opposite, below
 Garden, Nursery School



The pronounced verticality of this exposed structural frame is a detail characteristic of much contemporary Italian architecture, but it is here combined with panel walls of stone clearly separate from the building's concrete floor slab and crowning roof fascia. The fixed and sliding glass walls are divided by a heavy horizontal member which provides a contrast to the vertical supports. A paved serpentine walk lined with flowers leads up the hill to a play pavilion. Here there is also a solarium adjoining a pool. Resembling the main building, this pavilion also has stone walls, but without vertical concrete supports, so that the roof is simply a concrete lid. The site allows space for a fountain, stone tables, vegetable plots and a rabbit warren.

Office machines, like watches and automobiles, are compounded of many elements. These separate parts have to be unified and protected by a single shape — usually a box. The problem for a designer is the shaping of both the box and the number of appendages which are necessary for the manipulation of mechanical parts.

The first Olivetti typewriter, designed in 1908 was the *M20*, a factory product without the benefit of a designer's touch.

The machines manufactured today by the Olivetti Company, such as the *Lexikon 80* Office Typewriter, the *Lettera 22* Portable Typewriter, and the Printing Calculator, have the performing features of standard machines, and architect-designer Marcello Nizzoli has made all of them visually appealing. He has combined sculptural mass with architectural balance in machines which number among the best in the field of contemporary industrial design.

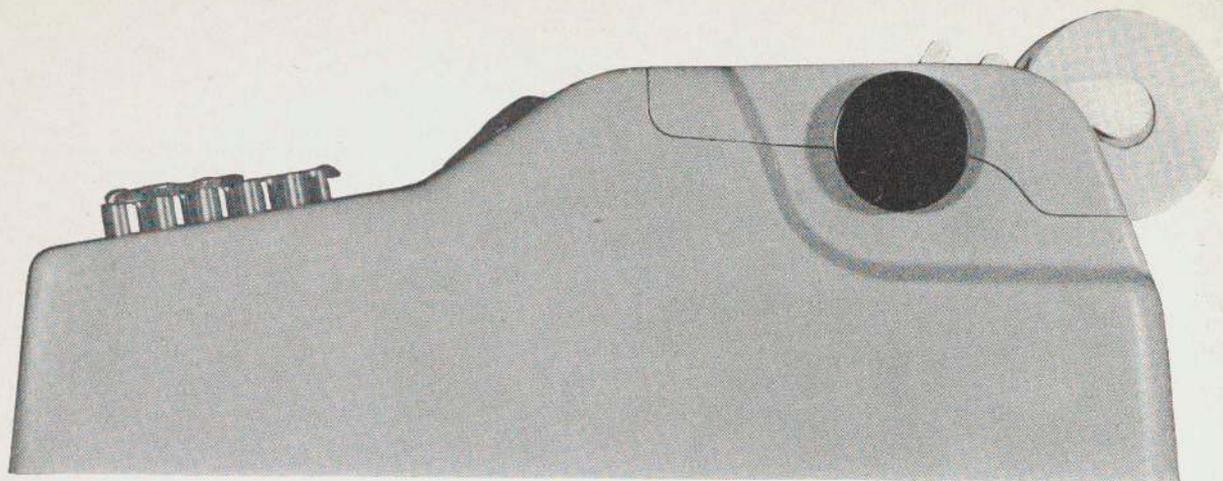
The *Lexikon 80* Office Typewriter is the most beautiful of the Olivetti machines. The blank metal envelope in the hands of a sensitive designer has become a piece of sculpture. There is a precision in the balance of planes, in the relationship of curved to flat surfaces, and in the modeling and bold jutting-out of the large handle which moves the carriage. The dip and rise of the hood, tightly fitting over the mechanical parts,



above
Lettera 22 Portable Typewriter (1949)

opposite, above
Lexikon, Elettrica (1949)

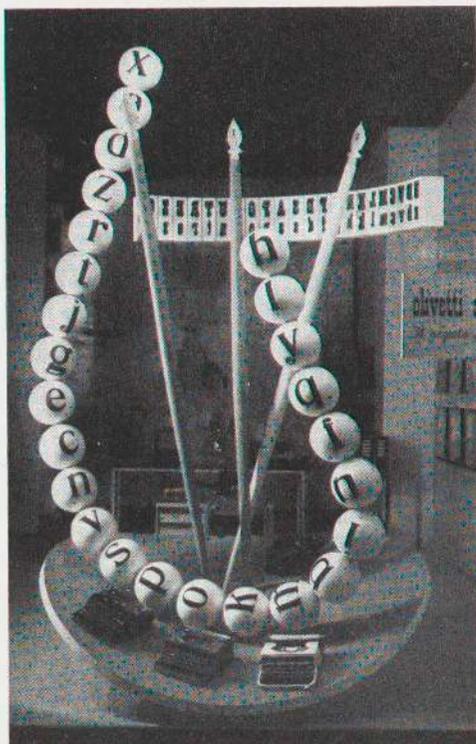
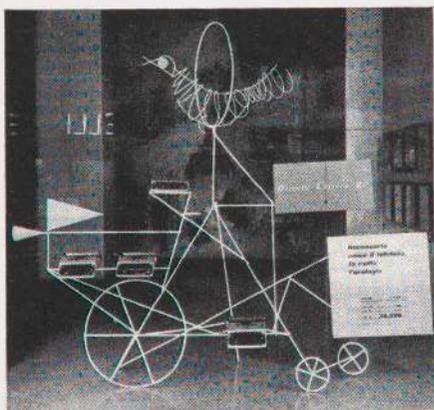
opposite, below
Sending-Receiving Teleprinter (1948)
Marcello Nizzoli, designer



Printing Calculator (1946)
Marcello Nizzoli, designer



Lexicon 80 Office Typewriter
(1947)
Marcello Nizzoli, designer





above
Billboard along an Italian highway
advertising Olivetti teletype machine

opposite
Three-dimensional displays for store
windows and industrial shows
Giovanni Pintori, designer

enlivens the front plane without interrupting its smooth descent to the keys. The carriage, when moved into central position, fits precisely into the side profiles of the stationary back-bar like a jig-saw puzzle falling into place. Many of the little levers and handles which one finds grouped at both ends of the carriage as an essential part of any typewriter and which are responsible for the bristling look of most models, are thus ingeniously bound up with the larger body. By this means a look of order and simplicity is achieved. The name Olivetti is carefully located for balance and visibility, being placed adjacent to the knob one turns when putting a piece of paper into the carriage. The color of the typewriter, a soft putty-beige uniformly used for all machines, gives it a trademark of distinction.

In the *Lettera 22* Portable Typewriter, which is light in weight and compact in shape for ease of transportation and storage, the designer has preserved more clearly the appearance of a box. This appearance is enhanced by a subtle integration of parts. Here the uniform putty-beige color is punctuated by a most effective accent — one single tabulator key of brightest red. The keys themselves are modeled like shallow bowls, a shape inviting both to the eye and to the finger.

A block-like shape of excellent proportions envelopes the Printing Calculator shown in profile on page 12. Its ridged back indicates that the metal envelope not only covers but also follows closely the interior arrangement of mechanical parts. A thin line created by the joining of the hood to the body cuts across the smoothly flowing sculptural indentation at the back. The keyboard on the gently slanting front section is a black-rimmed white field, with keys and levers in black, white and red. The keyboard arrangement, evaluated for color, shape, and organization of space within a limited field, is an abstract composition which enlivens the entire design.

Olivetti's office machines are shown to good advantage in the smooth simplicity of their stores. Designed by architects, these

fully automatic

...the most important feature of the Olivetti Lettera 22 is its fully automatic operation. This means that the machine will automatically correct any errors made by the typist. It will also automatically advance the carriage and insert a new line of paper when the current line is finished. This makes the Olivetti Lettera 22 a truly modern and efficient typewriter.

Olivetti di Ivrea

visita a una fabbrica

LEXIKON

olivetti

A typewriter in every home

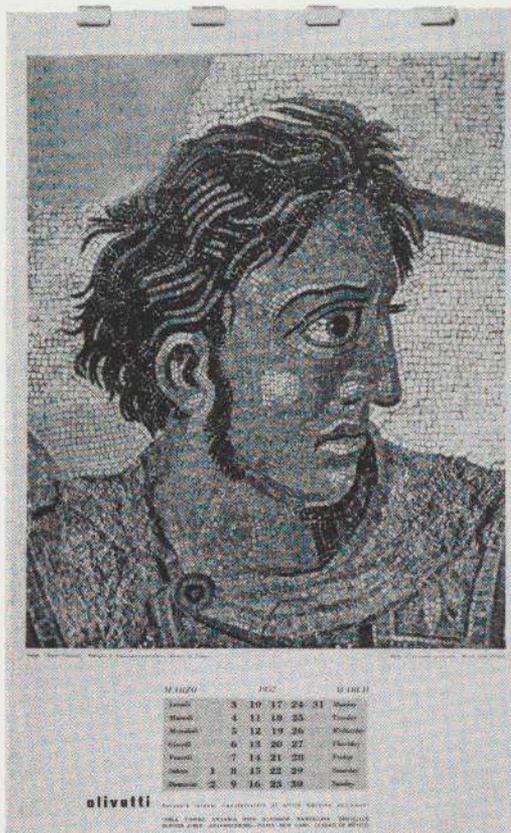
Olivetti Lettera 22

The new Olivetti Lexikon 2200

...the most important feature of the Olivetti Lexikon 2200 is its fully automatic operation. This means that the machine will automatically correct any errors made by the typist. It will also automatically advance the carriage and insert a new line of paper when the current line is finished. This makes the Olivetti Lexikon 2200 a truly modern and efficient typewriter.

olivetti

Olivetti Corporation of America
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above
Page from Olivetti Calendar
reproducing a selection of
Pompeian paintings

opposite, above
Ad by Leo Lionni
Book jacket by Giovanni Pintori
Poster by Giovanni Pintori

opposite, below
Poster by Giovanni Pintori
Ad by Leo Lionni

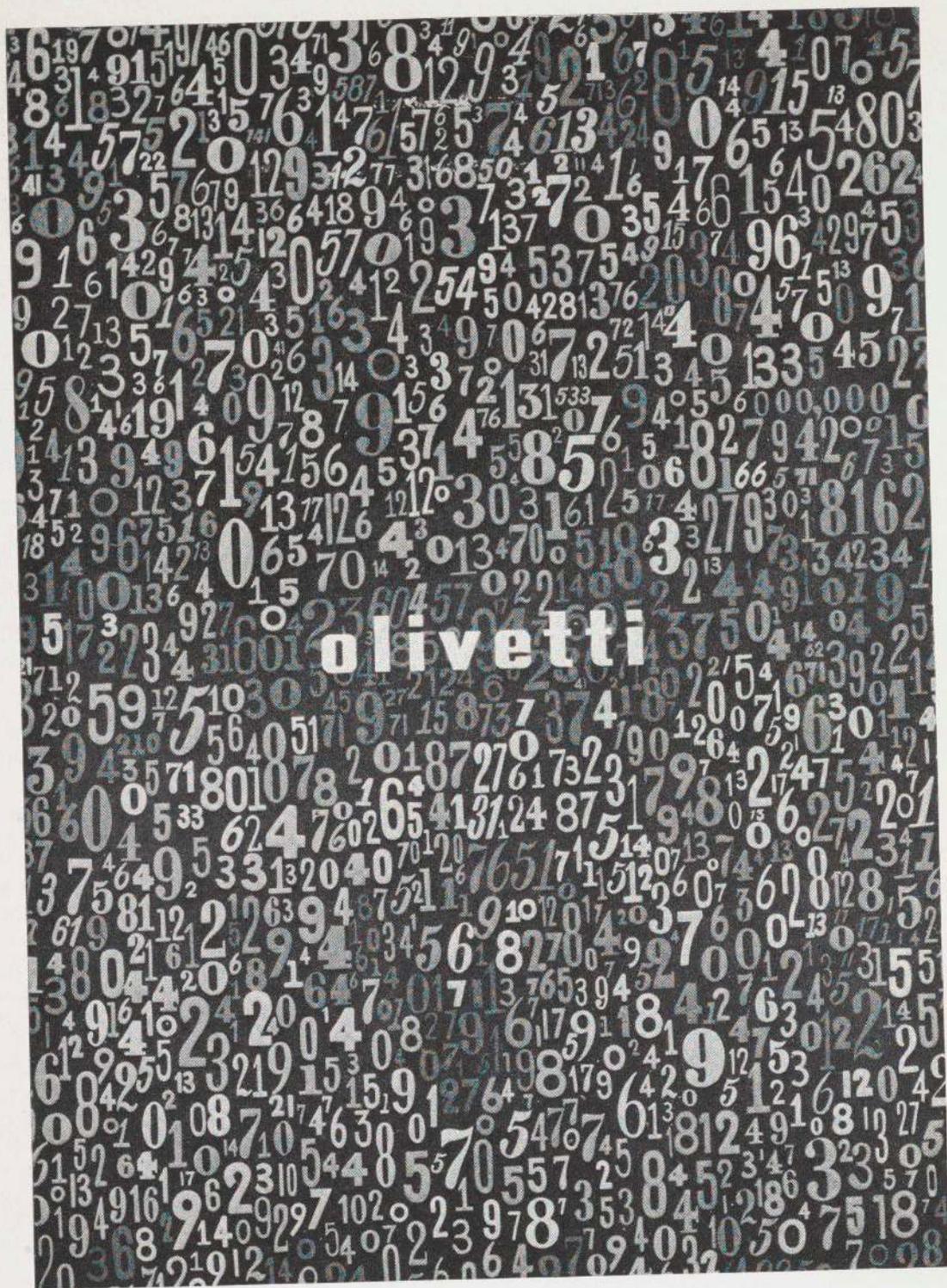
stores are strong public relations features, subtly planned with the same attention to detail given to all Olivetti productions. In an atmosphere of spaciousness, and surrounded by opulent materials (travertine floors, murals by some of the best Italian painters) the machines are displayed like jewels in appropriate settings.

The stores, executed in different years, are the work of different architects, but the understatement of the interiors and the clear and uncluttered handling of the facades make them easily identifiable no matter in what city they appear. Though the displays are underplayed, it is not only the machines which are sold: it is the overall taste of the company.

Like its architecture, every piece of printed advertising and promotional material, from letterheads to outdoor billboards, evokes both the products and the company behind them. Four characteristics of Olivetti's advertising bring this about: (1) a sober use of language; (2) imaginative pictorial symbols; (3) presentations unified by one esthetic concept; (4) emphasis on the company's high standard of design.

The men who have created the advertising for products normally considered dull — office machines and equipment — have not permitted tradition to hamper them. They have in effect ignored and flouted the cliché: without rendering their advertisements ineffectual, they have abandoned turgid presentation. This is applicable to the artists who worked many years ago, like Xanti Schawinsky and Costantino Nivola or to Leo Lionni who today produces the promotional designs for Olivetti in this country.

Olivetti's present art director, Giovanni Pintori, maintains that "a page or a poster must be rich in significance and that its meaning must derive from the inherent qualities of the object or of the function to be publicized." These requirements can be met with conviction, lucidity, and taste, but another ingredient is needed to put the breath of life into print or a three-dimensional display — the personality and the vision of the artist. Pintori, graphically and in three-dimensional form, telescopes the over-all idea of Olivetti and the specific idea of a particular product into one image.



Cover designed by Giovanni Pintori for a booklet on the Printing Calculator

Among the best illustrations of this concept of presentation are the following pieces:

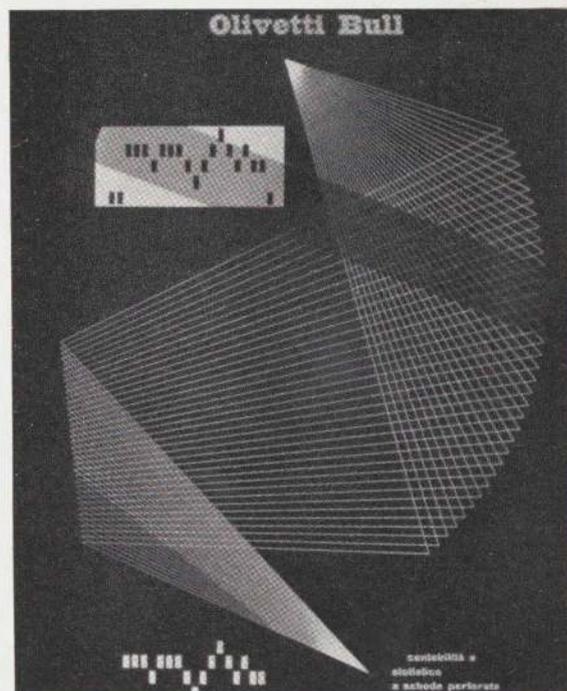
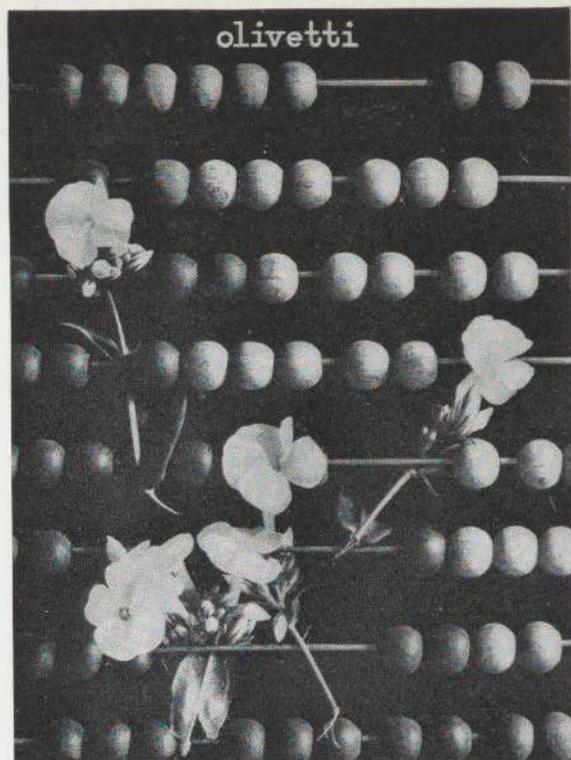
In a bookjacket for a volume entitled "A Visit to a Factory," published by Olivetti in 1949, a typewriter key in silhouette is used as a single symbol and serves as a background for the simple message. The three-dimensional display illustrated on page 14 is created out of an alphabet strung up on beads. Both these symbols easily recall the typewriter itself.

The design incorporating the abacus (*right*), was used as the cover of a technical pamphlet for the Printing Calculator and was later enlarged and used as a poster. The abacus is a symbol easily identified with calculation and suggests the machine itself. The playfulness of the interwoven flowers lends a light touch which would seem to emphasize the ease of calculation by means of an abacus and a Printing Calculator.

Another cover for a booklet on this same machine is the advertisement shown on page 18. Its symbols for calculation, the hand drawn numbers, are used as the sole background element, but, with variation in size, shape and color (oranges, reds, blues, greens and yellows), they become a mosaic against which, with compactness and weight the white machine-cast letters assume their proper importance.

The three-dimensional displays range from table size (see page 14) to the full scale outdoor billboards (see page 15). Often they are designs which produce strong sensation, using dynamic rhythm as the main element of attraction. Additional interest is gained by the fanciful relationship of linear forms to solid masses, the latter often being recognizable as objects, though just as often they are entirely without specific reference. In the outdoor billboards such as the one illustrated on page 15, the designer has built an abstract construction suggesting architectural space by its linear skeleton. A contrasting sculptural solidity is given by the ribbons of sheet metal which are woven around the tubular steel skeleton. With playful and decorative color, these Olivetti advertisements make discriminating taste, good will, and effective salesmanship synonymous.

Department of Architecture and Design



above
Cover designed by Giovanni Pintori

below
Poster designed by Giovanni Pintori

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We regret that lack of space prevents the listing of more than 14,000 Regular Members whose interest in and support of the Museum insures the continuance of our activities in the various fields of creative expression.

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