

A lean year

This year's *International Design Yearbook 1988/9* (Thames & Hudson, \$36) remains the only attempt to draw together current domestic design

No amount of analysis of the trends in domestic design over the last year, however interestingly discussed by this year's guest editor, Japanese architect and designer Arata Isozaki, can hide the gaping holes that have appeared in the design world.

The section on furniture is packed full of wonderful star turns by most of the designers you would expect, and some surprises – like the two pages devoted to the furniture of the Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid.

But what has happened to product design? If we are to believe the evidence of this book, designers' creative juices have been poured into furniture, lighting, tableware and textiles – each with its own chapter – leaving products a wasteland of compromised ideas whose style leaders are the consumer electronics companies, like Philips and Panasonic, who seem to think that knocking off corners and colouring the plastic bright constitutes good design. The fact that the Panasonic liquid crystal television is a great technological achievement is, in itself, not enough.

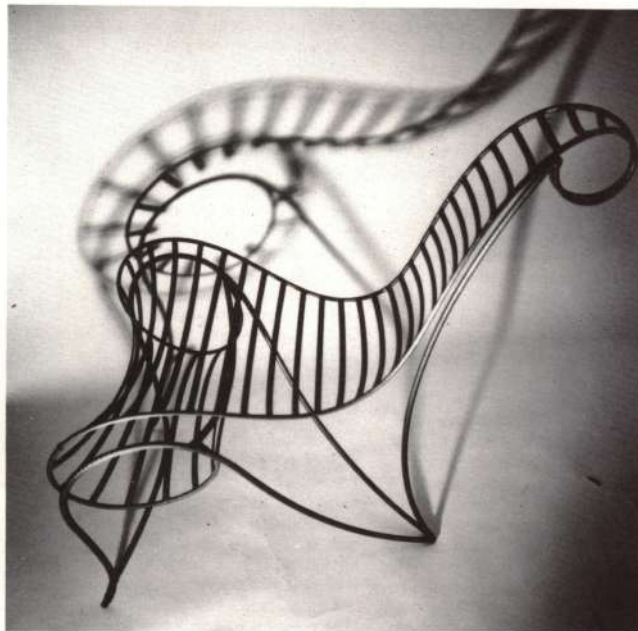
A door handle that glows in the dark and one that looks like a snail's shell, a watering can, a radio and a computer were the only representatives of UK-made products, with Italian status symbols like the Alessi coffee pot, US novelties and Japanese consumer electronics sharing the bulk of the pages devoted to products.

The dull, uninspired, even tired look to many of these may mean that the book's editors were at the mercy of those who chose to submit work for possible inclusion, or it may constitute one trend that they chose to ignore in their sadly uncritical look at the book's contents ■

Caroline Palmer



Derek Frost's stereo cabinet (with silver doors by Yumi Katayama), inspired by a 1950s jukebox, is shown by Isozaki as an example of a trend towards retrospection in domestic design. Isozaki uses such categories as a way of making sense of this year's products



One of the Yearbook's most exciting sections is furniture. Above Andre Dubreuil's elegant iron chair, manufactured by Personalities in Japan. Left is picnic cutlery by David Tisdale – typical of a particularly American 'fashionable' style that emerges from the book

