

La Cornuta Coffee Machine

La Cornuta and Gio Ponti

One of Gio Ponti's early studios was a converted garage. It was so huge that his employees drove their motor scooters right up to their desks.

Was La Cornuta inspired by those nearby engines? It resembles perhaps a racing car engine with exhaust manifolds. Or is it, rather, like a musical instrument: some strange, twisted trumpet or tuba? La Cornuta means, in fact, "The Horn." But that is just its nickname. It is actually an espresso and cappuccino machine, made for the Italian company La Pavoni.

La Pavoni holds a special place in the history of espresso machine manufacture. At the turn of the 20th century, Desiderio Pavoni purchased a historic patent from Italian engineer Luigi Bezzera, and manufactured the Ideale. That was the world's first commercially produced espresso machine. Subsequently, other companies and individuals made contributions. In 1935, the Illy company pioneered the use of compressed air instead of steam, reducing burning and bitterness. And in 1945-47, the Gaggia company's Crema Caffè model first produced the crèma (froth) we associate with good espresso today. But then, with La Cornuta (1948), the La Pavoni company achieved a classic design.

The designer of La Cornuta, Gio Ponti (1891-1979), seems to have reinvented himself on a regular basis, over a long and varied career. Trained as an architect, he earned fame also as an industrial designer and design theorist. At the 1925 "Art Deco" Paris Expo, he won the Grand Prix for his elegant ceramics designs. These designs featured simple shapes and neo-classical motifs. In 1928, Ponti founded the magazine *Domus*, and wrote for it, off-and-on, for the next five decades.

Ponti organized a Biennale and then a Triennale exhibition for the decorative arts. He designed furniture, ceramics (for Richard Ginori, from 1923-1930), glassware, flatware (for Krupp), plumbing fixtures (for Ideal Standard, 1954), and La Cornuta (1948). His designs and decorations were adopted in ocean liners (the *Andrea Doria*, 1951), cathedrals (Taranto, 1971), and casinos (San Remo, 1950). He designed opera sets and costumes (for La Scala, 1949), too.

Ponti made his mark as a furniture designer as well. His "Superleggera"