

# CHRISTIE'S

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## UNIQUE WORKS BY CARLO MOLLINO DESIGNED FOR *CASA CATTANEO - 'VILLA K2'*

To be offered in the sale of *20<sup>th</sup> Century Decorative Art & Design*  
at Christie's London on 23 October 2012



**London** – Christie's is delighted to present a collection of furnishings from the Casa Cattaneo designed by Carlo Mollino, the most sought-after Italian designer of the twentieth century, in the sale of *20th Century Decorative Art & Design* on 23 October 2012. Constructed on the foothills of the Alps, and benefitting from majestic views over Lake Maggiore, the Casa Cattaneo endures as a unique and complete surviving expression of Carlo Mollino's distinctive architecture and interior design. Casa Cattaneo is the only private villa ever designed by Mollino and is one of very few of his structures to remain intact. Comprising 10 lots the collection is expected to realise in excess of £700,000.

**Simon Andrews, International Specialist, 20th Century Decorative Art & Design:** *"Carlo Mollino is today acknowledged as one of the most strikingly original creators of twentieth century Italian architecture and design, whose few remaining works are today preserved in international museums and private collections. It is therefore a great privilege to present at auction the furnishings from one of Mollino's most important domestic commissions, the Casa Cattaneo of 1953. Having remained in use by the family since the villa's construction, these unique furnishings are now being presented to an international audience for the first time, and offer fluent insight into Mollino's inimitable personality as architect and designer."*

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## THE PROJECT

Completed in 1953, the Casa Cattaneo is the only private villa ever designed by Mollino. Commissioned by Italian industrialist Luigi Cattaneo, who had been introduced to Mollino by his cousin, the engineer Aldo Celli, the villa was the consequence of two distinct yet complimentary personalities who were able to share in the conception of a unique family retreat. The secluded site, benefitting from magnificent views over Lake Maggiore, had been selected by Cattaneo to provide a peaceful respite from his business in Milan. Mollino, in 1951, was then at the height of his talents, having recently completed the Lattes publishing house and the RAI auditorium in Turin, exhibited his furniture designs at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, and had embarked on the first of a series of buildings in the Alpine resort of Cervinia.



During the 1930s, Mollino had conducted a detailed photographic survey into the traditional regional architecture of the Val d'Aosta. These timber buildings, with raised superstructures, open galleries, and pitched roofs, were to provide the architectural inspiration for the Casa Cattaneo, allowing Mollino to design a building that embraced modernity, whilst retaining a local, nationalistic identity that was appropriate for the setting. The architectural innovations, as well as many of the furniture models created for the house, were to provide the prototypes for Mollino's further development of the Alpine ski resort at Cervinia, the

following year, 1954. Shortly after completion the home acquired the title *Villa K2* – in homage to the mountain peak scaled by an Italian expedition in 1954. In the decades since completion, the intimacy of the perfectly-designed interior has continued to provide inspirational refuge to successive generations of the Cattaneo family.

## THE COLLECTION

The furnishings that Carlo Mollino designed for the Casa Cattaneo represent a unique aesthetic that perfectly complemented the modernistic yet traditional styling of the villa's architecture. For this interior Mollino elected to use a variety of natural materials that echoed the villa's construction. To panel the interior of the villa, imported Oregon pine was fastened to the wall by a rhythm of brass bolts. Other walls were rendered with a textured, granulated surface containing shimmering crystal fragments, and the floor of the entrance hall was laid with a mosaic of locally-sourced cut and polished river pebbles. The natural materials of the interior were selected to enhance the building's honesty of construction, and to offer balance to the natural panorama towards Lake Maggiore and the surrounding mountains.

Highlighting the collection is the dining suite which was the central focus for Luigi Cattaneo's extended family gatherings (estimate: £500,000-700,000). Constructed of oak and chestnut, and with a green linoleum top that echoes the ceramic tile of the room's fireplace, the dining table was designed with an understructure that responded to the villa's beams and buttresses. Surrounding the dining table was a suite of visionary chairs, carved from chestnut and secured by brass bolts that corresponded to the wall panelling.



With a distinctive bipartite back, a gently carved seat and tapering splayed legs, the chairs evoke both the styling and construction of traditional Alpine stools. Furthermore, to this design Mollino brought his own coded mythologies, incorporating his familiar 'cloven hoof' symbolism to the sectional back. The chairs, and also the two sizes of dining table, were conceived specifically for Casa Cattaneo (*chair illustrated on page 2; the suite illustrated below left*).

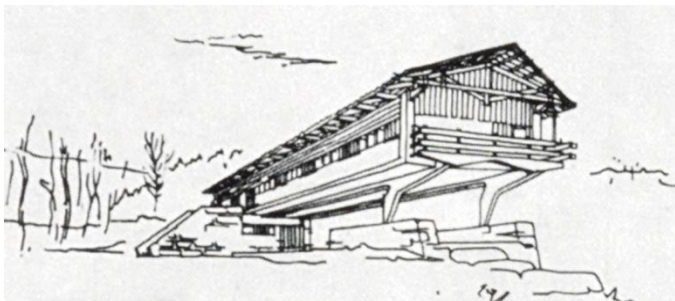


Suspended above the dining table was an elegant painted steel and brass ceiling light, with a perforated canopy that allowed light to be gently diffused across the room. As well as being a designer of considerable subtlety and sensitivity, Mollino maintained a strong passion for the technicality of his objects, and this unique lamp was constructed with a canopy that could be adjusted in order to modify luminosity. This lamp, unique amongst Mollino's designs for lighting, was calculated to bring a sense of modernity – of aerial flight – into the appealingly rustic primitivism of the dining room. Again, as with the dining chairs, to this lamp Mollino incorporates his own discreet symbolism with the diablo-horn handle, styled to complement the flue-handle of the room's fireplace (estimate: £150,000-200,000; *illustrated left*).

Accessing the villa by the main entrance ramp, one is directed into a long corridor, from which the living and sleeping quarters are issued. To welcome the visitor were a series of distinctive coat-hooks, brightly-coloured and suggestive of blossoming Alpine flowers. Coat-hooks occupied a special place in Mollino's architecture – in every interior different examples were featured, these having been manufactured by the ViBi ceramics studio in Turin, and selected specifically for the Casa Cattaneo. Proceeding down the corridor, lined with Resinflex panels and a pebble-mosaic floor one arrives at the numerous bedrooms, many of which are fitted with the bunk-beds and wardrobes created by Mollino to accommodate the Cattaneo family. Two sets of these coat hooks will be offered and are estimated at £10,000-15,000 per set of four, *illustrated above*.



As a private home, the Casa Cattaneo occupies an unparalleled position within Mollino's activity, having survived intact since 1953. Mollino enjoyed a rare gift as an architect – the complete faith of clients such as Luigi Cattaneo, who entrusted Mollino to deliver in his unique architectural vocabulary. With the exception of Turin's Teatro Regio and the Lutrario Ballroom, and the recently preserved Lago Nero Alpine lodge, all of



Mollino's other structures have either been destroyed, or modified beyond recognition. What little furniture remains is now preserved in international museums and collections. The furnishings of this interior endure as fluent, articulate talismans borne from passion and of innovation, and perfectly encapsulate the unique and singular spirit of the Casa Cattaneo.

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### **About Carlo Mollino (1905-1973)**

Born in Turin, Carlo Mollino was the son of the region's most prominent engineer and architect. Carlo Mollino initially studied art history prior to enrolling at the School of Architecture, University of Turin, from where he graduated in 1931. He subsequently worked in his father's practice, and in 1933 won first prize in the competition for the Federazione Agricoltori headquarters in Cuneo. From the late 1940s until the mid-1950s, Mollino produced a spectacular portfolio of works and projects, including domestic commissions, Alpine resorts, hotel interiors and commercial developments. It was, however, through the diversity of his own interest that his projects acquired such a personal resonance, and consequently one also encounters designs for automobile racetracks, for filling stations, and for airport hangars. Mollino's background in technical engineering supplied the inspiration not only for the types of architectural projects that many architects would deem too trivial, but also materialized as practical applications, illustrated by his skills as an automobile designer, his holding of various technical patents, and by his early designs for radio gramophones. Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s Mollino continued to work on numerous projects and exercises, however turned increasingly to concentrate on technical projects, such as aircraft design, and to pursue his dominant passion for photography. Mollino died in 1973, and for such a versatile creator there now remains remarkably little physical evidence by which to define him. Only a dozen of Mollino's buildings now remain, most having been destroyed, abandoned, or altered beyond recognition, and his furnishings were generally produced in limited quantities specific only to a particular commission. Christie's holds the current record for a work by Mollino sold at auction with a unique oak and glass table for the Casa Orenco, 1949, which sold at Christie's New York for \$3,824,000 in 2005. This is also a world record price for Italian Post-War design at auction.

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*\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.*

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*Images available on request*

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