



Photo: Darren Bradley

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The Return of the Conversation Pit



4

**What's a Conversation Pit
and How Do I Fake One?**

An Interview with Patricia Urquiola



8


Content

**The Search for Equilibrium
Between Shapes
and Materials**

16

modularity from the 1970s, revisited	6
modern personality that is unquestionable	10
gestures of a sculptor	12
shaped by subtraction	14
to add a coffee table, or not. that is the question	19
a combination of contrasting materials	21

prints



The first time over 400 people, together, felt so inclined to double-tap the architect Craig Steely's Instagram, it was because of a conversation pit. That is, a built-in sunken sofa, in a rich, deep purple, that looks like something between a bed, a tufted couch, and a Chuck E. Cheese ball pit, but without the balls. He had designed it for a house in California because the entire back wall of the house was a window looking out into an almost-forest full of trees, and he didn't want any furniture obstructing the window or the trees. Anyway, that was back in March, and then a few months later that same purple-sofa pit made the August cover of Dwell magazine.

What's a Conversation Pit

Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

And How Can I Fake One?

"decadence of a sunken, low-profile couch where you can look at nothing but the people around you"

By Lauren Levy
Courtesy of New York Magazine

These comfy pits are actually relics of the sunken living rooms of the '50s, '60s, and '70s, where people would descend into living rooms of built-in sofas and very permanent-looking furniture. Now, somewhere between the design world's mid-century-modern revival (obsession) and the return of Memphis Milano (a Memphis designer once made this crazy boxing-ring conversation pit), the glamour and decadence of a sunken, low-profile couch where you can look at nothing but the people around you has returned.

Then, just a couple of weeks ago, the women's club The Wing unveiled the first pictures of its new space in Dumbo, Brooklyn. Right there in the middle of the renovated warehouse, surrounded by tables and banquettes and really high ceilings, was an emerald-green conversation pit. "Since those pictures came out, so many people have asked me about it," says Chiara de Rege, the interior decorator behind the space, who prefers the term "sunken living room" to conversation pit. She was inspired by the sunken look and feel of Eero Saarinen's now-defunct TWA terminal at JFK Airport and the Miller House he designed back in 1957 in Columbus, Indiana, that she'd been obsessed with as a teen. Now they're all making their way back.

While it's tricky to achieve the look without digging straight down into your apartment floor, we've gathered some other ways to achieve a sunken look. First, with the fancy

sofas Steely and de Rege used in their own projects. Even if these aren't embedded into the floor, they're still low profile, made of components, and modular, so they can be combined and organized into a pit structure. And then we spoke with an interior designer at Homepolish, who gave us some of the cheap suggestions for giving your existing living room a more conversation-y feel.



Courtesy of the Wing



Bunch

It looks like a bunch of flowers, with the stems gathered together as if it were the perfect bouquet. **Designer:** Naoto Fukasawa | **Typology:** Accessories | **Collection:** B&B Italia | **Material:** glossy ceramic

Serie Up 2000

The chair is a metaphor of a large comfortable womb and recalls ancient statues of fertility goddesses.

Designer: Gaetano Pesce

Typology: Armchairs

Collection: B&B Italia

Material: Bayfit® flexible cold shaped polyurethane foam

Tobi-Ishi

The table that became a sculpture. **Designer:** Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby

Typology: Small tables

Collection: B&B Italia

Material: Oak wood coffee table



Tufty-Time

It was 2005, and the designer Patricia Urquiola, said: "I wanted to take a new look at capitonné and Chesterfield styles, with a special reinterpretations of 1960s and 1970s". Tufty-Time modernises them with a free and casual lifestyle.

Designer: Patricia Urquiola | **Typology:** Sofas | **Collection:** B&B Italia | **Material:** Bayfit® (Bayer®) flexible cold shaped polyurethane foam, polyester fibre cover

Button Tables

Multipurpose tables with lacquered cylindrical bases that taper in slightly at the bottom smoothing out their geometry.

Designer: Edward Barber and Jay Osgerb | **Typology:** Small tables | **Collection:** B&B Italia | **Material:** Marquinia black marble, satin or glossy painted polyethylene tubular

**modularity from
the 1970s, revisited**



"one of the world's most
sought-after names in
modern interiors"

URQUIOLOLA

AN INTERVIEW WITH

PATRICIA



Urquiola's design for a bedroom suite in Patrizia Moroso's home in Italy | Courtesy of Livingetc

DESCRIBE YOUR DESIGN APPROACH...

I like to connect people to their spaces – to give them flexibility. I also like to use quality materials such as wood, stone and glass and to make things very clear and uncomplicated. I like to open people's minds to thinking about mixing and matching.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

I'm an observer – I try to look at society around me to understand how I can interpret and translate what I see in the present day into something that is still going to be contemporary in two years' time. This is the most difficult part, but I'm lucky because with work, I travel a lot and see great diversity.

WHAT MAKES THE PERFECT SPACE?

If it's a private project, it must feel personal and allow for the evolution of a person's needs. Public spaces should welcome all walks of life and make a lasting impression.

Spanish-born, Milan-based architect and designer Patricia Urquiola is one of the world's most sought-after names in modern interiors, having collaborated with everyone from Italian furniture brand Cassina to iconic fashion house Louis Vuitton. She's also designed hotels such as the Mandarin Oriental in Barcelona and the W Retreat & Spa in Puerto Rico and masterminded shop interiors for shoe emporium Gianvito Rossi, lifestyle stalwart Missoni and watchmaker Panerai. Patricia has also designed kitchens for Boffi.

WHAT ARE YOUR EARLIEST DESIGN MEMORIES?

My mother went to London when I was little and returned inspired by [designer] David Hicks – our playroom had orange carpet, white furniture and brown and white wallpaper with giant letter Cs. It was perfect. She also bought me a functionalist doll's house with flat roof.





gestures of a sculptor

Bend Sofa

A product with a great personality that can be used to produce original and alternative seating solutions that are outside traditional canons. **Designer:** Patricia Urquiola | **Typology:** Sofas | **Collection:** B&B Italia | **Material:** Bayfit® (Bayer®) flexible cold shaped polyurethane foam, polyester fibre cover



Fat-Fat

The theme of the tray offers an extremely convenient surface when placed by the sofa. **Designer:** Patricia Urquiola |

Typology: Small tables | **Collection:** B&B Italia | **Material:** black painted steel sheet and steel profiles, chalk white painted

Lys

Body of glazed ceramic and metal base in various finishes and colours. **Designer:** Jakob Wagner | **Typology:** Accessories | **Collection:** B&B Italia | **Materials:** enamelled ceramic shell and metallic base-frame



Gold Collection

Icons of luxury not without a certain sense of humour. **Designer:** Marcel Wanders | **Typology:** Accessories | **Collection:** B&B Italia | **Materials:** enamelled ceramic

Overscale Flames

These are not in wax but in opaque black ceramic, and have space inside for oil and a wick. **Designer:** Jean-Marie Massaud | **Typology:** Accessories | **Collection:** B&B Italia | **Materials:** structure in painted metal profiles, shell in high density polyurethane resin



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