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House & Home

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# Click-start design

**Interiors** From the shop floor to 'digitally curated showrooms'. By Rachel Sanderson

In the lobby of the Milan headquarters of Yoox.com, the online luxury retail giant, a big screen relays details of its 14.6m monthly visitors shopping in real time.

At 3pm on a Wednesday in late May, shoppers from Corvallis in the US, Naples in Italy, St Petersburg in Russia and Kent in the UK are all online and clicking "buy".

The diversity of customer locations is matched by the diversity of their purchases. Half of all the orders placed on Yoox.com – which sells brands from Stella McCartney and Prada to Kartell and Fornasetti – combine design items with fashion, or art with fashion. The other 50 per cent of orders are either for fashion, design or art.

"People want to buy their Venini vase with their Valentino shoes," says Yoox.com founder, the firecracker entrepreneur Federico Marchetti, in an interview in his sleek white cube office in Milan.

While buying fashionable clothes and accessories online has been well documented, the new trend today is that consumers are also gobbling products for design and the home just as fast, if not faster.

Marchetti was at the vanguard of putting high-end fashion online, setting up Yoox.com in 2000 – the website runs his own multibrand sites as well as running the online stores for dozens of brands including Dolce & Gabbana, Stella McCartney and Brioni. More recently, he added design and art.

Today, his fastest-growing product categories are shoes and design. This is not a coincidence, he believes.

"Imagine a photo of a beautiful product from Fornasetti, or of shoes from

Bottega Veneta. They have a photographic impact that is much stronger than a pair of black trousers. A person does not buy the object but they buy the photo of the object and it becomes an object through a long UPS journey. It is almost alchemy," he says.

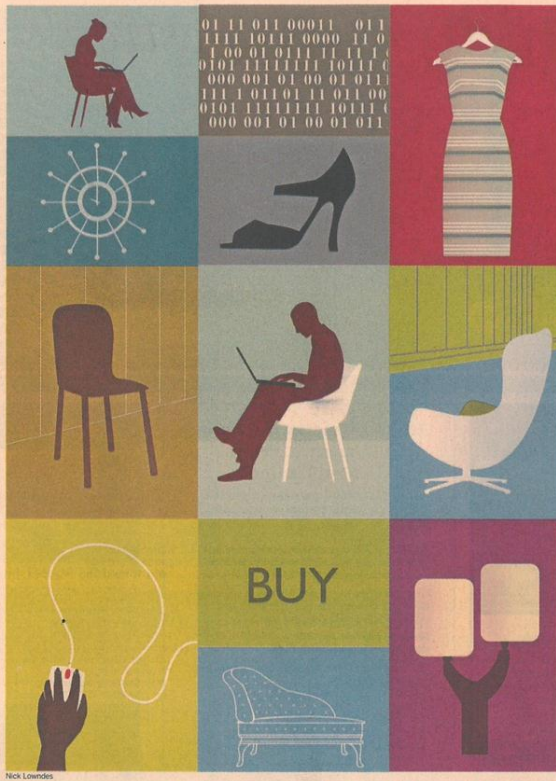
Marchetti thinks that design is also doing well online because consumers are moving from just wanting to look fashionable to wanting an entirely fashionable life. "We started from a solid base of 30-somethings who, through fashion, have taken a step to dress themselves. But then they wanted to dress their houses too. That is where design comes in," he says.

From the beginning, Marchetti says he envisioned Yoox.com as a lifestyle online store. But it started with fashion, then moved into design, and more recently introduced art. "All with a strong Italian imprimatur," he says.

"Thus on Yoox.com one can buy a range of Fornasetti objects, with a specific online 'shop within a shop' planned for this Christmas. There are also tiles by De Simone and Kartell furniture, plates by Gilbert & George and Paola Navone, wine glasses by Carlo Moretti and custom-made vases by Milanese jewellery designer Osanna Visconti di Modrone.

Marchetti himself has Fornasetti and De Simone tiles at home, having spotted them in Sicily while on holiday. "Everything is born from a personal passion," he says.

A personal desire to find unusual objects for his home is also shared by Sal Mattei, founder of Milkster.com, a website maintained by an international team that aims to tap into the fast-growing consumer trend for acquiring experiences over just buying "stuff".



Nick Lowndes

When moving into a new home, Mattei discovered how hard it was to decorate in a way that fitted his budget without having to buy mass-produced products.

"I researched the market and found that designers were having a hard time reaching their audiences directly. Only about one in 10 products that a designer made was hitting the market in a

way that was visible to most people," he says.

With Milkster.com he says he set out to change that "by creating a digitally curated showroom that puts the designer and the consumer" in direct contact with each other, he says.

On Milkster.com, cutting-edge modern furniture such as Seat/Magazine Rack by Agata Nowak or Bimbi chairs by T Magpie are just a click away.

Disintermediating the design weeks and trade shows – the design world's equivalent of "catwalk shows" where they seek to grab the attention of buyers – is one thing. But for customers, putting design online has demanded even tougher curation than for clothes or shoes to help them make sense of the cluttered world of furniture and fabrics.

Twentytwoone.com, the website of the cult London modern and contemporary furniture store, has built a following by providing sharp curation that educates as much as sells.

Joss & Main, a US interiors site with 10m members, launched last month in the UK. It looks more like an interiors magazine than online store. Martin Reiter, head of international at Joss & Main, says the aim is to "make it simple for our members to spot trends and recreate the looks in their own home".

Another recently launched website that indicates the future of design online is Kartell.com, which is one of the few design websites for a standalone brand. It launched in May, backed by Yoox.com, promptly winning one of the well regarded Awwwards "Site of the day" honours.

**Consumers are moving from just wanting to look fashionable to wanting an entirely fashionable life**

Kartell.com is a cornucopia of content showing Kartell furniture in lush locations such as Castello Monaci, near Lecce in Italy, or chic cafe Dem Kanakby in Istanbul. All of Kartell's catalogue is available to shop.

"We are fortunate with a product like ours that is very iconic and recognisable for people to buy online. Online may have more difficulty. But everyone needs to internationalise. We have the possibility of reaching clients that we otherwise would not be able to reach," says Kartell president Claudio Luti.

Luti, who is also chairman of Milan's Salone del Mobile international furniture fair, says he sees a future where "everything will be integrated" for design brands.

"The world has become very small. I believe very much that for an international brand the same quality of distribution and the same pricing will be necessary everywhere. Online is part of this. It's an extra window," he says.

Rachel Sanderson is the FT's Milan correspondent