

## Frustrating Designs

A rush of frustration hit when I came across in a magazine a red coral-shaped candlestick by Driade, an Italian furniture brand.

Seven candle-holders sit on the branch top of the red-colored, coral-shaped candlestick, which evokes the memory of a sentence from *The Song for Mochou*, a *yuefu* poem popular in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589), reading “The bronze mirror shines brighter offset by the coral stand.” The poem was dedicated to Mochou, a girl who enjoyed an extravagant life after marrying into a wealthy family at the age of 15 and who was thus thought to be lucky. For instance, Mochou had a coral-constructed mirror stand, among all luxuries in her chamber. The bronze mirror was shining on the red-coral mirror stand—what a lastingly impressive scene!

The magazine’s comment hits the point by saying that the coral-like candlestick is a fabulous interior setting in itself, because it looks like flaring flames in spite of being without candles. Moguls like Wang Kai and Shi Chong in 3<sup>rd</sup>-century China during the Jin dynasty (265–420) vied to show off with their tree-like coral decors. In *The Song for Mochou*, the coral-made mirror stand stood to be both a daily-use article and an interior setting, just as Driade’s design does. I then kept asking why no modern-version coral décors are constructed in China. Presumably, coral craze is out of place, because coral mining leads to deteriorating ecosystem in neritic zone and goes against the environmental approaches we pursue today. However, material can’t be an excuse as is seen in Driade’s aluminum-cast, red-coated candlestick, which perfectly depicts a “natural” red coral without consuming a natural one. It is a brainchild born to the industrial modern but rooted in the ancient past, and an art piece dedicated to the day.

In the meanwhile, Chinese designers are yet to properly transplant the rich traditional Chinese culture into modern designs. The Chinese-style home design popular in the recent is actually nothing more than a “photocopy” of the good old past, such as a *luohanchuang*, or couch bed, that is often found in a modern living room. The home owner is supposed to sit reading cross-legged on the couch bed, or invite

guests to enjoy tea, seated the same way. But can anyone truly enjoy things while sitting cross-legged all the time? Can anyone used to a cozy sofa allow himself the discomfort of a classical Chinese chair's solid seat panel? We have reason to doubt if the elegant-looking classical Chinese furniture like *luohanchuang*, *taishiyi* (armchair), and *meirenta* (couch) can properly work in a modern living room or study.