

THOUGHTS

on design

On defining design

Design is everything. Everything!

Paul Rand, Graphic Design Pioneer and Educator

Design is an integrative process that seeks resolution (not compromise) through cross-disciplinary teamwork. Design is intentional. Success by design simply means prospering on purpose.

Michael Smythe, Partner, Creationz Consultants

Design – in terms of thinking and process – is the champion of the future, envisaging and interpreting insights and ideas through strategy, ideas, products, spaces and communications.

Peter Haythornthwaite, Principal, creativelab

Design is people.

Jane Jacobs, Urbanist

[A designer is] an emerging synthesis of artist, inventor, mechanic, objective economist and evolutionary strategist.

Buckminster Fuller

The habit of calling a finished product a Design is convenient but wrong. Design is what you do, not what you've done.

Bruce Archer, The Guardian

Design is a plan for arranging elements in such a way as best to accomplish a particular purpose.

Charles Eames, Architect, Graphic and Industrial Designer, Filmmaker

Design is challenge-solving.

Aaron Marcus, User Interface Designer, Founder and President, Aaron Marcus and Associates, Inc. (AM+A)

Design is more than meets the eye. Design is about communicating benefits. Design is not about designers. Design is not an ocean it's a fishbowl. Design is creating something you believe in.

Chuck Green, Principal, Logic Arts Corporation

Design is a field of concern, response, and enquiry as often as decision and consequence... it is convenient to group [design] into three simple categories, though the distinctions are in no way absolute, nor are they always so described: product design (things), environment design (places) and communication design (messages).

Norman Potter, an english furniture and environmental designer.

Design is the patterning and planning of any act toward a desired, foreseeable end... any attempt to separate design, to make it a thing-by-itself works, counter to the fact that design is the primary underlying matrix of life.

Victor Papanek, industrial designer (from his book "Design for the Real World")

Design is the intentional and altruistic act of sythne-sizing a harmonious response to a context. It is neither art, which embeds self, or science, which proclaims problem-solving.

Hanee Patenaude, Interdisciplinary Designer

The designer... has a passion for doing something that fits somebody's needs, but that is not just a simple fix. The designer has a dream that goes beyond what exists, rather than fixing what exists... the designer wants to create a solution that fits in a deeper situational or social sense.

David Kelley, Founder of IDEO (from Terry Winograd's book "Bringing Design to Software")

What is design?... It's where you stand with a foot in two worlds – the world of technology and the world of people and human purposes – and you try to bring the two together.

Mitchell Kapor, software designer (from his book "Bringing design to software")

For me, the concept of design is more than object-oriented; it encompasses the design of processes, systems and institutions as well. Increasingly, we need to think about designing the types of institutions we need to get things done in this rapidly accelerating world.

John Seely Brown, Chief Scientist, Xerox Corporation

Design is in everything we make, but it's also between those things. It's a mix of craft, science, storytelling, propaganda, and philosophy.

Erik Adigard

Design is a choice.

Davis Furniture advertisement

Our guiding principle was that design is neither an intellectual nor a material affair, but simply an integral part of the stuff of life, necessary for everyone in a civilized society.

Walter Gropius, Architect and Founder, Bauhaus

Design is art that makes itself useful.

1984 Poster, design museum, Munich

Design is a learning experience. So my agenda is to figure out what I want to learn next.

Ayse Birsel, Industrial Designer and President, Olive1:1

To design is to communicate clearly by whatever means you can control or master.

Milton Glaser, Graphic Designer

Design is the term we use to describe both the process and the result of giving tangible form to human ideas. Design doesn't just contribute to the quality of life; design, in many ways, now constitutes the quality of life.

Peter Lawrence, Founder, Corporate Design Foundation

Design should do the same thing in everyday life that art does when encountered: amaze us, scare us or delight us, but certainly open us to new worlds within our daily existence.

Aaron Betsky, Curator of Architecture, Design and Digital Projects, SFMOMA

Design is not making beauty, beauty emerges from selection, affinities, integration, love.

Louis Kahn, Architect

Design is directed toward human beings. To design is to solve human problems by identifying them, examining alternate solutions to them, choosing and executing the best solution.

Ivan Chermayeff, Graphic Designer, Founder, Chermayeff & Geismar Inc.

In most people's vocabularies, design means veneer. It's interior decorating. It's the fabric of the curtains of the sofa. But to me, nothing could be further from the meaning of design. Design is the fundamental soul of a human-made creation that ends up expressing itself in successive outer layers of the product or service.

Steve Jobs, Founder and CEO, Apple

The essential function of the (design) profession in our society is to enhance and cultivate communications toward: Easier understanding of ideas and complex problems, in the shortest possible time and higher visual and auditory retention of data.

Will Burtin, Graphic Designer

Design is the fundamental creative activity with which we direct our lives, and collectively, the earth's transformation from its original, natural state into our human - made world.

Michael Shannon

With function, flow, and form as basis, design is evaluated as a process culminating in an entity which intensifies comprehension.

Ladislav Sutnar, Graphic Designer

Design shapes the way we live. So it ought to serve everyone.

Eva Maddox, Interior Architect and Designer, Co-founder, Archeworks

Design is... above all an effort to improve reality... I always try to begin with considerations of its function... I ask myself, who needs it, which materials best suit its functions and so on...

Gianfranco Frattini, Industrial Designer

Designing is not a profession but an attitude. Design has many connotations. It is the organization of materials and processes in the most productive way, in a harmonious balance of all elements necessary for a certain function. It is the intergration of technological, social, and economical requirements, biological necessities, and the psychological effects of materials, shape, color, volume and space. Thinking in relationships.

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Photographer, Graphic Designer, Co-Founder, Bauhaus

For design is about the making of things: things that are memorable and have presence in the world of the mind. It makes demand upon our ability both to consolidate information as knowledge and to deploy it imaginatively to creative purpose in the pursuit of fresh in formation.

Krome Barratt, Logic & Design In Art, Science & Mathematics

Design, in its broadest sense, is the enabler of the digital era – it's a process that creates order out of chaos, that renders technology usable to business. Design means being good, not just looking good.

Clement Mok, Design Business: Multiple Media, Multiple Disciplines

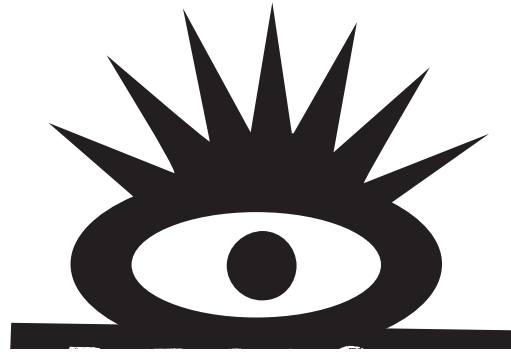
We are searching for some kind of harmony between two intangibles: a form which we have not yet designed and a context which we cannot properly describe.
Christopher Alexander

Architecture is really about well-being. I think that people want to feel good in a space... On the one hand it's about shelter, but it's also about pleasure. The intention is to really carve out of a city civic spaces and the more it is accessible to a much larger mass in public and it's about people enjoying that space. That makes life that much better. If you think about housing, education, whether schools and hospitals, these are all very interesting projects because in the way you interpret this special experience.
Zaha Hadid, Architect

Design is communication. Great design is rational. Rational design is filtered communication.
Thierry Loa, Web Designer, Director, Programmer

Now architecture consists of order, which in Greek is called taxis ... Order is the balanced adjustment of the details of the work separately, and, as to the whole, the arrangement of the proportion with a view to a symmetrical result.
Vitruvius

Architecture is the reaching out for the truth.
Louis Kahn



On design advice

All of the environment should express a higher, more-ordered, broadly-complete dedication to the well-designed.
John Massey, Graphic Design Pioneer and Educator

What works good is better than what looks good. Because what works good lasts.
Ray Eames, Architect, Graphic and Industrial Designer, Filmmaker

The recognition and understanding of the need was the primary condition of the creative act. When people feel they had to express themselves for originality for its own sake, that tends not to be creativity. Only when you get into the problem and the problem becomes clear, can creativity take over.
Charles Eames, Architect, Graphic and Industrial Designer

To whom does design address itself: to the greatest number, to the specialist of an enlightened matter, to a privileged social class? Design addresses itself to the need.
Charles Eames, Architect, Graphic and Industrial Designer

Who ever said that pleasure wasn't functional?
Charles Eames, Architect, Graphic and Industrial Designer. Asked whether he design for pleasure or function?

Good ideas come from everywhere. It's more important to recognize a good idea than to author it.
Jeanne Gang, Architect, Studio Gang/O'Donnell

To create one's world in any of the arts takes courage.
Georgia O'Keefe, Painter

Something that shapes our work as designers is personal experience. In my life I experience tremendous change, moving from Hong Kong to Los Angeles, from one person to the next, from advertising to design, my roles change every minute of the day. This minute I'm a friend, next minute I'll be a son. I can be an employer or an employee at the same time. Human experiences are multidimensional, and in my work I would like to reflect that.
Tung Chiang, Principal, Ah Tung Design

"To create one's world in any of the arts takes courage."

Our challenges for the future are the same as they have always been: Will our talents be used to divide or unite? For peace or for war? To replenish or deplete? Design brings emotion to a message. It takes an intellectual concept from the head into the heart. It is a powerful tool and, sadly, too often, a powerful weapon. As designers, we have incredible influence in shaping our cultural attitudes. We need to be more accountable for the selfish ways we use resources.
Joshua Chen, Founder and Creative Director, Chen Design Associates

The works must be conceived with fire in the soul but executed with clinical coolness.
Joan Miro, Painter

Don't make something unless it is both necessary and useful; but if it is both necessary and useful, don't hesitate to make it beautiful.
Shaker lesson

Architecture has to be greater than just architecture. It has to address social values, as well as technical and aesthetic values. On top of that, the one true gift that an architect has is his or her imagination. We take something ordinary and elevate it to something extraordinary.
Samuel Mockbee, Professor of Architecture, Auburn University

I have no recipe for how to combine things. But you must be sincere. And if you are, strangely, it will succeed.
Andree Putnam, Interior Designer

If the client is a vacuum, you're not going to get great architecture, you're just going to get whatever you want to do. Great architecture requires debate and challenge. Think about Michelangelo and Pope Julius – they didn't get along that well!
Ed Feiner, Chief Architect, General Services Administration

Simplicity and repose are qualities that measure the true value of any work of art.
Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect

Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context – a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan.
Eliel Saarinen, Architect

The more that a person brings to design, the better his or her ability to communicate.
Michael Vanderbyl, Dean, California College of Arts and Crafts

A common mistake that people make when trying to design something completely foolproof is to underestimate the ingenuity of complete fools.
Douglas Adams, Novelist

Something must have form to be seen but must make sense to be understood and used.
Klaus Krippendorff, Design Educator and Author

Be culturally literate, because if you don't have any understanding of the world you live in and the culture you live in, you're not going to express anything to anybody else.
Paula Scher, Graphic Designer, Pentagram

You have to be interested in culture to design for it.
Lorraine Wild, Graphic Designer

Fuck design, let's dance.
Andre Toet

Recognizing the need is the primary condition for design.
Charles Eames, Architect, Graphic and Industrial Designer

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Douglas Adams

"FUCK DESIGN, let's dance."

We're not trained to think about time in a systematic way, as a design dimension. But it's everything to the circadian system because it matters when you give users the light, not just whether it's blue or white. Design professionals are not real comfortable with thinking in the temporal dimension yet.
Mariana Figueiro, Architect, Lighting Research Center

Before you can execute the design, you've got to live the design problem.
Kathleen Brandenburg, Cofounder, IA Collaborative

The designer has an obligation to provide an appropriate conceptual model for the way that the device works. It doesn't have to be completely accurate but it has to be sufficiently accurate that it will help in both the learning of the operation and also dealing with novel situations.
Don Norman, Interview by Avi Parush, Carlton University

You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality.
Walt Disney

To provide meaningful architecture is not to parody history but to articulate it.
Daniel Libeskind, Architect

To create architecture is to put in order. Put what in order? Function and objects.
Le Corbusier, Architect

A modern building should derive its architectural significance solely from the vigour and consequence of its own organic proportions. It must be true to itself, logically transparent, and virginal of lies or trivialities.
Walter Gropius, Architect

On design and business

My whole theory on authenticity is that there is a triangle: consumer, manufacturer, and designer. If there's no consumer, there's no market and therefore no reason to knock off creative property. If there's no manufacturer, there's no production run: You own a one-off Nakashima table, which is beautiful, but not what people like the Eameses, who designed for mass production, were after. Now, what happens if there's no designer in the triangle?

Eames Demetrios, Principal, Eames Office

(Design is) the bridge that brings the business strategy to life. It can build intangible brand value for a business, so the business is worth more. We all know that the intangible brand value of Coke far outweighs the value of its tangible assets.

Geoff Suvalko, Creative Director and Partner, DesignWorks

Design, in terms of its relationship with business, should be seen as part of the business model. It should be understood and embraced by the company in general, and most certainly at Board level. From my perspective, I'm not interested in companies unless they have a strong attitude regarding the meaningfulness of their products in society. Ideally, a company will have a strong design-led ideology, because these are the companies – in my experience – that really have passion and integrity, and therefore perform.

Mark Pennington, Director and retained Consultant Designer, Formway Furniture

Design is the go-between. It is the interpreter of the intentions and ambitions of an organisation and the desires and needs (often hitherto unexposed) of the end user/recipient. Frequently companies have sound ideas, but they don't have the skills or experience – the creative wherewithal – to convert them into products and or services that are unique, prized and profitable.

Peter Haythornthwaite, Principal, creativelab product and graphic design consultancy, Auckland

It is not enough to have a talented designer; the management must be inspired too. The creative process is very disorganised; the production process has to be very rational.

Bernard Arnault, Chairman and Owner, LVMH

The details are details. They make the product. The connections, the connections, the connections. It will in the end be these details that give the product its life.

Charles Eames, Architect, Graphic Designer

There are three basic principles behind any well-designed product: truth, humanity, and simplicity.

Sohrab Vossoughi, Founder and President, Ziba Design Inc.

Design must reflect the practical and aesthetic in business but above all... good design must primarily serve people.

Thomas Wales

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Good design is good business.

Thomas Watson, Jr., IBM

Designer's derive their rewards from 'inner standards of excellence, from the intrinsic satisfaction of their tasks. They are committed to the task, not the job. To their standards, not their boss. So whereas most people divide their lives between time spent earning money and time spent spending it, designers generally lead a seamless existence in which work and play are synonymous. As Milanese designer Richard Sapper put it: 'I never work – all the time.'

Alvin Toffler, Future Shock, and Alan Fletcher

Design has allowed us to stand out; to look different and show that difference boldly.

Joe Mansueto, Founder and Chairman, Morningstar

It's important that design gets 'cooked' into the product at the start, whether you're talking about software, office space, or a web design. It's not an afterthought.

Alan Webber, Founder, Fast Company magazine

The most common misperception is the word 'design'. People think of primarily pretty pictures or forms. They don't understand the depth to which design goes – not only in products, but in every aspect of our life. Whether it is the design of a program, a product or some form of communication, we are living in a world that's totally designed. Somebody made a decision about everything. And it was a design decision.

Sam Farber, Founder, Copco cookware, OXO kitchen tools, WOVVO serveware

Design acknowledges change. Its meaning encompasses change in our times. To design is to 'create order and to function according to a plan. The notion of change and design move along the same path.

Sara Little Turnbull, Director, Process of Change, Innovation and Design Laboratory, Stanford's Graduate School of Business

Design must seduce, shape, and perhaps more importantly, evoke an emotional response.

April Greiman

On design and client relations

I wouldn't call it a retail store. It's a place where culture and commerce intersect. It's more like the Silk Road – a sense of exploration mixed with the exchange of things and ideas.

Ron Pompei, Architect

Each client is a partnership, a conversation. You're only going to be able to go as far as they wish to go, in a way. ... That makes all the difference.

Lindy Roy, Architect

On design and education

The principle is that learning happens in all kinds of ways: through interacting with your peers, in formal classroom settings, and even ... when you're teaching others.

From the article To Be Continued... by Aric Chen and Jonathan Ringen

We have to create an atmosphere and a space where students and teachers can do their most creative work. I compare it to being a film producer instead of a director. ... You produce a body of work ... by putting people, ingredients and stories together to make things happen. Education is invisible really. So you have to make certain intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual investments.

Toshiko Mori, Architect

Teachers of design should help a student to find their own voice. In other words, not be a templated version of the teacher, but rather to help them [the students] unfold what they already know and can bring to the table.

April Greiman, Graphic Designer and Educator

On design and society

The new "stars" are nothing like the old masters of design. Whereas Loewy, Earl, Rams, Sottsass, and Sapper first delivered the goods, then became celebrities, today's so-called stars have mastered the art of selling personae rather than groundbreaking ideas. The focus has moved from mass-produced objects to boutique work.

Gadi Amit, newdealdesign, LLC

As we move into the 21st century, it becomes ever clearer that the ultimate, most intimate territory for design is not electronics, or interiors, or furniture, or the Web. It's us—our own living, breathing, biological selves. ... the personal makeover has become our most fundamental design task.

Rick Poynor, Design Writer

On design and practice

A designer knows he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.

Antoinè De Saint-Exupéry

Design works if it's authentic, inspired, and has a clear point of view. It can't be a collection of input.

Ron Johnson, Senior Vice President of Retail, Apple

We're asking architecture to take care of mixing people of different races and incomes who normally sort themselves out; we're asking it to do a lot. Our job is to make livable environments, but we can't erase racism by the way we design a building.

Roberta Feldman, Professor, School of Architecture, University of Illinois Chicago

Too often we don't question whether celebrity status in design is a reward for good work. The combination of a well-known manufacturer and a big-name designer leads us to believe that a new product's utility has been well resolved. Whether you like it is, finally, an issue of taste.

Tony Whitfield, Designer, Chair, Product Design Department, Parsons School of Design, New York

If you want to push design into new areas, you have to work closely across the boundaries of people's trades and professions. If you know the questions to ask, you can pull out the expertise.

Jeanne Gang, Architect, Studio Gang/O'Donnell

Designers can create normalcy out of chaos; they can clearly communicate ideas through the organizing and manipulating of words and pictures.

Jeffery Veen, The Art and Science of Web Design

Making a system easier to use for someone does not, for me, make that system better. You bring a 'user experience' to life by designing with people, not for them. Users create knowledge, but only if we let them.

John Thackara, Doors of Perception

The idea that you make an experience that requires a conversation in a public place is training for the fact that culture is collective.

Edwin Schlossberg, ESI

Given the rising need for responsive and humane environments, architects' tendency for self-expression could result in the disintegration of the profession altogether, unless we rethink our role. T.S. Eliot urged poets to serve poetry by illustrating the capabilities of verse instead of their own personae. If places are to communicate fully through architecture, the architect must fade into the medium. Can we be selfless enough to silence our own voices?

Lance Hosey, Metropolis magazine

Architecture should speak of its time and place, but yearn for timelessness.

Frank Gehry

I design for real people. I think of our customers all the time. There is no virtue whatsoever in creating clothing or accessories that are not practical.

Giorgio Armani

A designer knows that he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.

Antoine de St-Expurey

There is no such thing as a boring project. There are only boring executions.

Irene Etzkorn

A spaceship is a delicately balanced environment. Every element that doesn't contribute to the overall functioning of the system is by definition working against it. The same is true of our planet – our mothership – though sadly, most architecture today is slowly fatal to nature's systems.

Constance Adams, Architect, NASA

There's nothing worse than a brilliant image of a fuzzy concept.

Ansel Adams, Photographer

The task of the architectural project is to reveal, through the transformation of form, the essence of the surrounding context.

V. Gregotti

You explore concepts and things that interest you, but you are also exploring inside of yourself.

Ed Paschke, Pain

"Computers are to design as microwaves are to cooking."

On design and technology

Interactive designers spend most of their time with who aren't at all like them: technologists, information architects, strategists, producers and others. Promoting communication among these individuals is paramount, as is educating decision-makers in corporate and management positions about what interactive design is, and what it can do for business.

Katherine Nelson, Editor-in-Chief, eDesign magazine

Computers are to design as microwaves are to cooking.

Milton Glaser, Graphic Designer

You're as sensual as a pencil.

Frank N. Furter, The Rocky Horror Picture Show

The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera.

Dorothea Lange

On good design

We who are clay blended by the Master Potter, come from the kiln of Creation in many hues. How can people say one skin is colored, when each has its own coloration? What should it matter that one bowl is dark and the other pale, if each is of good design and serves its purpose well.

Polingaysi Qoyawayma, Hopi

Good design is serious business.

A.G. Lafley, Chairman, President, and Chief Executive, Procter & Gamble

The urge for good design is the same as the urge to go on living.

Harry Bertoia

Good design is a renaissance attitude that combines technology, cognitive science, human need, and beauty to produce something that the world didn't know it was missing.

Paola Antonelli

The difference between good design and great design is intelligence.

Tibor Kalman

Good design is making something intelligible and memorable. Great design is making something memorable and meaningful.

Dieter Rams

Good design is innovative gives a product utility is aesthetic makes a product easy to understand is unobtrusive is honest is long-lived is consistent down to the smallest detail protects the environment. Good design is as little design as possible.

Dieter Rams

Rather than overpowering nature or limiting human impact, good design will affirm the possibility of developing healthy and creatively interactive relationships between human settlements and the natural world.

William McDonough and Michael Braungart, Buildings Like Trees, Cities Like Forests

Good design doesn't cost, but it pays.

Richard H. Driehaus, Chicago Money Manager and Philanthropist, Richard H. Driehaus Foundation

Good designers relentlessly generate lots of ideas and open-mindedly consider alternative solutions. At no time are good designers frightened to entertain a crazy, competing, or uncomfortable idea.

Karl Ulrich, CEO, Nova Cruz Products

When you feel the architecture just click, as though it couldn't have been anything else, it's due to a true understanding of the site and the plan and section.

Stephen Kanner, Architect

Good design is a visual statement that maximizes the life goals of the people in a given culture (or, more realistically, the goals of a certain subset of people in the culture) that draws on a shared symbolic expression for the ordering of such goals.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Author of Flow

Good design today requires more vision (a larger point of view versus the single brilliant idea), more consistency (a deeper underlying structure of language and form versus the simple, uniform application of visual elements) and more patience (persistence over time versus creative authoritarianism).

William Drenttel, partner, Jessica Helfand/William Drenttel

Good design is a form of respect – on the part of the producer for the person who will eventually spend hard-earned cash on the product, use the product, own the product.

David Brown, editor of Gain

Good design begins with honesty, asks tough questions, comes from collaboration and from trusting your intuition.

Freeman Thomas, Automobile Designer, DaimlerChrysler

The good designer aims at a perfect fusion of the various considerations which enter into his design. He aims at an untortured unity – a direct whole. He arranges his levels consciously or subconsciously, adhering to the requisites of the problem he is asked to solve or to his own inclination. Some designers see total act through a disc of aesthetic considerations – others, more practical minded, may put economic considerations at top level.

Leo Lionni, Graphic Designer

Good design should reflect a sense of human history – some aspect of where we've come from.

Harmutt Esslinger, Founder and CEO, FrogDesign Inc.

Good design is an act not an artifact. Good design can be achieved through resonance between various stakeholders.

Uday Dandavate, Principal, SonicRim

Good design, at least part of the time, includes the criterion of being direct in relation to the problem at hand – not obscure, trendy, or stylish. A new language, visual or verbal, must be couched in a language that is already understood.

Ivan Chermayeff, Graphic Designer and Principal, Chermayeff & Geismar

Good design helps build and sustain competitive advantage.

Brian Gillespie, "Strategic Design Management in 250 Floors or Less," Design Management Institute e-Bulletin, April 2003

"Design must seduce, shape, and perhaps more importantly, evoke an emotional response."

On forecasting design

Gone are the excesses of the '80s and the style-first approach of the '90s. In their place is an appreciation of everything that surrounds us and means something. We've recognized that in today's society of fear, we need mental comfort as much as physical comfort, and we're offering wit, irony, nostalgia, and imagery in everyday products. Charles Eames asked, "Whoever said that pleasure is not a function?"

Tovah Trace

Increasingly, corporations will look to advertising agencies for direction. Without an understanding of brand creation, messaging, and strategy, today's designers are destined to become the hairdressers of tomorrow's creative environments – great for styling but light on strategy.

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