

INNOVATION BY DESIGN

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INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

Natural marketing tool, functionally relevant, seductive add-on, or all of the above?

Couple art with engineering and in a sense you get industrial design – a form of applied arts, which is more than just cosmetic. This particular creative act, originally that of the design of items to go into industrial production, is nowadays used for processes and services, even entire systems. Industrial design can improve the working environment by making office chairs ergonomically correct, by making peeling potatoes easier – even enjoyable – by creating a heftier handle on a potato peeler, or by turning a hospital into a friendlier environment by cleverly integrating patients' special needs into the design. The industrial designer concerns herself with the strategy and production process as well as the final product – if there is one at all. Aesthetics is but one aspect to consider – usability, ergonomics, and thus, the location of details with respect to one another and their functions, are as important – if not more so – in the process. Ergo, two more points for early trends of Scandinavian functionality and simplicity.

A two-day workshop at Scandinavia House in New York, arranged by the Consulates General of Sweden and Finland and the Finnish-Swedish Industrial Design Academy, was topped off with a symposium at The Museum of Modern Art. The workshop seminar, Innovation by Design, brought together participants from leading Swedish, Finnish, and American industrial design firms, who got to know each other while comparing notes. Participants were, among others: Tapani Hyvönen from ed-design, Arto Ruokonen from Desigence, Manuel Saez from Human Scale Design, Scott Spratford from MAKE Product Development, Inc., Carl Hampf from Hampf Industrial Design, and Jakob Boije from Ergonomidesign. The motive behind Innovation by Design was to spur conversations, which can help build bridges and solve problems.

The increasing interdependence between nations – the globalization – has led to a number of changes in the industry, leaving the shape of things to come somewhat unclear. Designers find themselves struggling with being creative and simultaneously forced into having to put one foot in business. Senior Industrialist Krister Ahlström, who was instrumental in bringing the workshop to Scandinavia House, observed:

"I am struck by the fact that there's so little research and understanding of how design firms and clients ought to work together. Obviously this relationship needs more attention."

And indeed, the sigh, "We don't speak the business language!" was heard again and again.

Morten Bergström from Zenit Design Group argued that, "as designers we love design so much, we tend to forget it's a business!" But, Fredrik Magnusson, CEO of Propeller, insisted on dropping the word design altogether and use, in lieu thereof, the word creativity.

"The word design is so hyped now – because everything is "designed" – it doesn't have the same positive effect of building credibility anymore."

Business Week's Assistant Managing Editor, Bruce Nussbaum, who moderated the workshop, said design has gone from being more of an afterthought to something quite powerful.

"It used to be what we slapped on at the end; we'd pick a color or smooth out the edges. But design is much more, it's about being able to see around corners, see into the future." Electrolux CEO, Hans Stråberg, agreed fully, adding a metaphor: "[Design] used to be an afterthought, much like throwing the yeast in the oven after the bread. Today, you have it, or you are just not considered an alternative among consumers."

The better part of the workshop was dedicated to trying to solve the communication problems between the designer and the client. Assistant Professor Lisbeth Svengren Holm, from Stockholm University School of Business, presented academic research on topics like Where do Industrial Designers want to be in the future? What innovative market research do designers have access to? Should one hire designers with backgrounds in advertising and business or businessmen with a passion for design? Should a design company stay broad or have a focus? The participants were divided into rotating groups in which the issues were discussed. And what was the consensus? Anna Valtonen, Senior Design Manager for Design Research, Nokia, summed up the day's exercises at the seminar held at The Museum of Modern Art, saying design is no longer about products only but also involves branding and the overall corporate vision.

"There's a need for designers to explain what their company can do rather than to just design," she said. "As the usage of industrial design firms increases, so does competition from new players on the field, like ad agencies."

Interestingly, everyone seemed to be in agreement with each other. As an incentive, Hans Stråberg, CEO of Electrolux, invited all participants for a follow-up session, scheduled to take place in Stockholm next September.



"Successful companies today create the tools that enable people to produce themselves. Design used to be what we did at the end; we'd pick a color and smooth things out. It's so much more. Design is being able to see around corners." – Bruce Nussbaum

- 1) Ed Gallagher, Scandinavia House
- 2) Yrjö Sotamaa, Headmaster Helsinki University of Art & Design
- 3) Debera Johnson, Pratt Design, IPSA NYC
- 4) Thomas Lockwood, DMI
- 5) Fredrik Magnusson, Propeller
- 6) Bruce Nussbaum, BusinessWeek

- 7) Arto Ruokonen, Desigence
- 8) Cecilia Hertz, Umbilical Design
- 9) Krister Torssell, Ergonomidesign
- 10) Lisbeth Svengren Holm, School of Business, Stockholm
- 11) Manuel Saez, Humanscale Design Studio
- 12) Morten Bergström, Zenit Design Group AB

- 13) Robin Edman, svid
- 14) Tapani Hyvönen, ed-Design
- 15) Scot Spratford, MAKE, Inc.
- 16) Jakob Boije, Ergonomidesign
- 17) Magdalena Herrgård, Consulate General of Finland
- 18) Lars Östling, Consulate General of Sweden



“Design used to be an afterthought, like throwing the yeast in the oven after the bread. Today, you have it or you are just not considered. Scandinavian design in particular is user-centered. Today design is cross-functional and crossing borders, it’s integrated in the process. Yes, design means it’s nice-looking and useful but there’s also a meaning to it.” – Hans Stråberg

“Design is no longer about products – it’s about brand and corporate vision.” – Anna Valtonen

“It makes me happy to come about a Finnish design product that is self explanatory, functional, and still beautiful to the eye. That is a clear sign that an industrial designer has been involved in every aspect of the product development process.” – Magdalena Herrgård, Media Relations Coordinator/Finnish Consulate General, who, in cooperation with Östling, locally made sure the vision for a design seminar in New York became a reality.