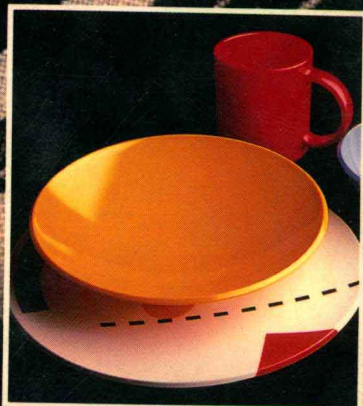
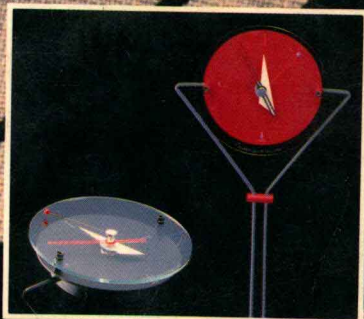


PRODUCT DESIGN

INTERNATIONAL
AWARD-WINNING
SELECTIONS OF
THE MID-EIGHTIES
by Sandra Edwards
and the editors of
ID Magazine

2



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Distributor to the book trade in the United States:
PBC INTERNATIONAL, INC.
P.O. Box 678
Locust Valley, NY 11560

Distributor to the art trade in the United States:
Letraset USA
40 Eisenhower Drive
Paramus, NJ 07653

Distributor to the trade in Canada:
General Publishing Co. Ltd.
30 Lesmill Road
Don Mills, Ontario M3B 2T6, Canada

Distributed throughout the rest of the world by:
Hearst Books International
1790 Broadway
New York, NY 10019

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Edwards, Sandra, 1941–
Product design 2.

Includes indexes.
1. Design, Industrial. I. Industrial design magazine. II. Title.
TS171.E38 1986 745.2 86-9395
ISBN 0-86636-008-5

Color separation, printing, and binding by
Toppan Printing Co. (H.K.) Ltd.

Typesetting by Vera-Reyes, Inc.

Printed in Hong Kong
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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Distributed throughout the rest of the world by:
Hearst Books International
1790 Broadway
New York, NY 10019

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FOREWORD

Collections such as this, said Andres Malraux, are “‘museums without walls.’” In effect, *Product Design 2* is a retrospective of contemporary design, and the content, of course, is not encyclopedic, but curatorial. In such categories as tabletop and furniture, we find unshackled individual visions driving the designs; these are our new “‘tastemakers.’” In other categories, such as recreational and business products, what we illustrate defines the contemporary market, mid-eighties state-of-the-art design.

Here, we promote design for design’s sake, first, because the forces that promote mediocrity remain so powerful, and second, because refined, thoughtful design contributes tangibly to the quality of our culture. Though many of these designs take huge risks, the majority correlate with Raymond Loewy’s MAYA principle: given an assignment, a designer is duty bound to create the “‘most advanced yet acceptable’” work. Manufacturers that ask less from designers squander talent and opportunities.

An important trend Sandra Edwards has isolated in *Product Design 2* is the increase in limited production— especially in furnishings, tabletop, textiles and scientific equipment. This is good news, for it correlates with Robert Reich’s observation in *The New American Frontier*: “‘The central problem of America’s economic future is that the nation is not moving quickly enough out of high volume, standardized production. . . . America must focus on precision manufactured, custom tailored, and technology driven products.’” The implication of this is that “‘inherently non-routine problem solving requires close working relationships among people at all stages in the process.’” And this is why one finds many design credits associated with sophisticated products; it is collaboration in action.

However much one wants to locate bias, the editing process that yields a book like *Product Design 2* is based on much more than personal taste. In fact, the days of the genius curator are over. There is too much to know about, too many sources. No one in America is as well positioned as Sandra Edwards to

undertake such a book as this one. Not only is she an *ID* contributing editor, but she has been deeply engaged in the *ID Annual* for the last two years as coordinator, moderator and editor. In addition, Edwards compiled and wrote the highly acclaimed *Office Systems* (PBC International, fall 1985), and is writing another groundbreaking book, *Designing Childhood*. Moreover, working out of *ID*'s headquarters, she had access to the hundreds of design projects submitted to *ID* and the *ID Annual Design Review*, the world's largest and broadest design recognition program. In this edition alone, there are products created by more than five hundred designers from around the world. Finally, to help gather and review material, Edwards was assisted by Donna Green and Lauren Lambert, and received input from *ID* editors Steven Holt, Annetta Hanna and Chee Pearlman.

In addition to material from *ID*, Edwards drew on most of the international design competitions. Most important, however, rather than rely on the hyped, haute-design products that are promoted regularly, she took pains to explore the world of design and discover products that otherwise might have gone unnoticed. In this sense, *Product Design 2* is an important piece of design criticism.

"There is no such thing as criticism, there is only history," Italian architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri told the *Design Book Review*. What should interest historians, he says, are the *cycles* of design, how a work fits in its own time. "To do otherwise is to impose one's own way of seeing." He believes it is essential to understand the "mental structure" of a period and recreate its intellectual context—evaluate all the elements that surround a work, all of its margins of involvement. Only then, says Tafuri, can we "discover the margins of freedom or creativity that were possible."

An editor faces the same problem when trying to comprehend and select current work. "Distance is fundamental," says Tafuri, "and those who examine current work must create *artificial* distance, because through the differences we can better understand the present." Though he attributes such discipline to historians, much the same process is used when jurying the *ID Annual* or selecting projects for this book.

Finally, says Tafuri, "One of the greatest problems of our own times is dealing with the uncontrollable acceleration of time, a process that began with the 19th century industrialization; it keeps continually disposing of things in expectation of the future of the next thing. All avant garde movements were in fact based on the continual destruction of preceding work in order to go on to something new."

The collection captured in *Product Design 2* is one way to "save the present," to postpone its destruction, to prevent it from being crushed by the hype of the next trend, the next new wave; for, like Tafuri, we believe that the media's habit of destroying the present "contributes to the nihilism of our times." Too many thoughtful designs are overlooked because they will not fit into trendy schemes.

It is ironic that ten years from now many of the products illustrated here will be forgotten, the entire collection mere footprints on a beach. Though individual items may be irrelevant, the collection will have meaning in the way it relates to the problems of living and designing in the mid-1980s. In the end, *Product Design* and now *Product Design 2* will tell us something about our current design cycle—and about ourselves.

RANDOLPH McAusland
Publisher, *ID* magazine

INTRODUCTION

Design, craft, and art have meshed with past and present to set up a lavish smorgasbord of design elements and philosophies from which designers may choose. Textures and materials combine in manners that both defy and exalt conventional forms. Color, perhaps the most striking departure of this collection, is served up in larger portions and with greater variety than ever before, adding the finishing touches to visions that range from grandeur to whimsy.

The ranks of industrial designers—historically the providers of product—have been joined in record numbers by architects, craft artists, and even fine artists. Not surprisingly, an architectonic composure or craft's Oriental-rooted love of beauty, marks the objects created by these allied disciplines. Architects, who have previously undertaken the design of furniture to preserve an aesthetic purity with their architecture, have now discovered whole new industries open to their smaller scale imaginings.

While the record prices commanded by architects for their earlier products reinforced a hierarchy within the design profession, similar historic price hikes have legitimized the coming of age of an entire discipline—the American craft movement. Designs suitable for limited edition or, in the case of artists such as Dorothy Hafner, for mass-production techniques, alert the design world that this new influence is not likely to be a fleeting presence. Feverish collecting in this area by museums and individuals underlines the notion. Craft artists, working in a tradition rich in experimentation with shape and color, are well-suited to take on the post-Modern challenge.

While it may be less apparent as to exactly who is responsible for a particular design, so too design distinctions of geographic origin have become less pronounced. American manufacturers, inspired by Europe's co-option of an increasingly large percentage to the product market, are now competing with the sleek, recognizable design known as "Eurostyle." Meanwhile, and not without irony, Europeans are modifying their approach to reach new segments of the coveted American market. In addition, bolstered by a growing nationalism on their own front, American companies appear to have finally rebounded from the swift turnaround in public opinion on goods from Japan and are matching the high-performance image that Japanese manufacturers enjoy.

If we have multiplied the creative sources for design, likewise, the recipients of design's many benefits have dramatically expanded. Design has become more accessible to a greater proportion of the populace, cropping up in every ritual of our daily living, from the shape of our toothbrush and how we make our morning coffee, to the tools we use to sustain, and save, our lives. The decorative and the functional—present throughout history—co-exist today in unprecedented fashion. Product designers are combining sensitivity and beauty, creating real solutions for real lives.

Contemporary designs incorporate influences from every major design tradition, representing styles that span the entire design spectrum: avant-garde, late Modernism, post-Modernism, and revivals. Each style exists out of a specific set of expectations relating to cultural requirements or transitions. We see in the voluptuous lines of Hollein's "Marilyn" the credence the post-Modern doctrine lends to sensuality, while avant-garde's flamboyance is evident in the exaggerated, elegant forms of the Zabro table/chair by Studio Alchimia and in the ribald application of color on Arquitectonica's "Madonna."

Refinements that adhere to the principles of a specific doctrine are included in the collection. However, the overriding design message of the mid-80's is the sampling of elements and the cross-referencing of styles. Randolph McAusland, publisher of *ID*, postulates on the composite elements of New Design: "Maybe it comes down to this: the Bauhaus provides forms based on principles of functionality, post-Modern graphics and architecture provide styles full of flair and Memphis provides creative license."

But, if this creative feed is stimulating for some, it is unsettling for others. What we have is a product *Amazon* with design streams reflecting or persuading consumers at every level—a new mobility of taste. We have broken up "good design," and conventional design approaches do not always work anymore. Peter Wooding (Providence, Rhode Island) while jurying the furniture category of 1986 *ID Annual*, voiced some of the conflicts that have arisen: "There is a whole set of conditions that art furniture cannot meet, and should not be made to. The problem is this: all the criteria that industrial designers use as the basis for solving design problems no longer apply. We lose our common reference points, the things we have been educated in, our understanding about what good design is."

Concerns, like the designs, vary. Products can serve as symbols of an upwardly mobile rise in lifestyle. When forms and colors once reserved for the "top of the heap" are applied to mass-marketed wares, it causes consternation for high-end users quite accustomed to the exclusive rights to "good design." But, no need to fret. That age-old delineator, the price tag, safeguards elitism (at least in some areas), for if design options are expanded, so also have prices.

In our age, inculcated with the idea of specialization, removing obvious distinctions between the work of allied disciplines can reek further havoc with the categorization process. Take, for example, the recent experience of Beth Forer at the Accent on Design Show in New York. "They thought my pieces were beautiful and wanted to give them some kind of recognition. However, according to their previously established guidelines, they couldn't determine exactly *where* I fit in. So, what happened was they created a new design award."

While relishing the challenge and opportunity inherent in the new design polemics, many designers remain sensibly cautious in awarding primary jurisdiction to any single school of thought. Neither form nor function should be sacrificed. Their goal is balance. "I would be very reluctant to encourage design for art's sake while the fundamentals of 'people-machine' interface is at stake," said Robin Chu, Director of Industrial Design, ID Two, San Francisco. Philippe Starck, French furniture designer, puts it another way. "For an object to be worth anything, it must be functioning in one way or another. People talk of a Starck style. I prefer a Starck logic." (*New York Times*, 12 Dec. 1985) But still, even after the rationale is determined, the aesthetic choices remain wide open.

Whether designers (or consumers) choose to dive in head first, step in gradually, or just walk around the edges of the new design, there is no disputing that the temperature of the design waters has changed. (Granted, depending on the area one comes from, it can still seem either warm or cold.) However, most would agree, the outlook for design awareness and appreciation has warmed considerably.

Unquestionably, the contemporary consumer is more *design literate* and has more disposable income—a fertile combination indeed for design acceptance. Chances have also jumped markedly that a particular consumer will be either older or younger. The elderly constitute the fastest-growing segment of the population, while those adolescent allowances are adding up—often to significant purchasing power. Product designers are beginning to target the needs of these newly expanded markets.

Again, we are reminded that successful design does not happen in a vacuum. The atmosphere for design is created by the repeated interplay, not only between the designer and production techniques, but between the object itself and the constants of popular culture and the marketplace. *The climate of consumption*.

It appears to be fact that people no longer want a homogeneous setting. What remains more difficult to assess is whether this desire is the cause or the effect of current product offerings.

A profound sense of individualism and risk-taking is pervading our society and is mirrored in the products being designed. In the current mood, it is now possible to create products that seduce us personally. Enter the new retail outlets for design. Design "galleries" (or in larger department stores, store-wide product promotion galas built on the idea of *design*) typify the circular current necessary for the present product design renaissance. Born out of the steamy design atmosphere, these outlets provide a lifeline for new designers and, almost, guarantee that the recent design exploration will stay around for a while longer. Designers' ability to embody in their product designs the images we *need* or *want* to hear translates, manufacturers are slowly realizing, into that profit-generating competitive edge.