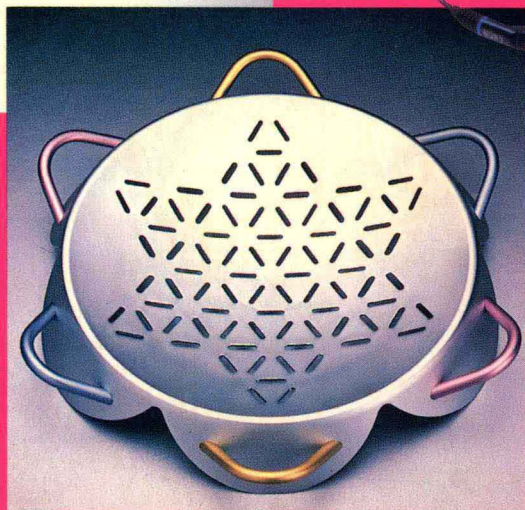
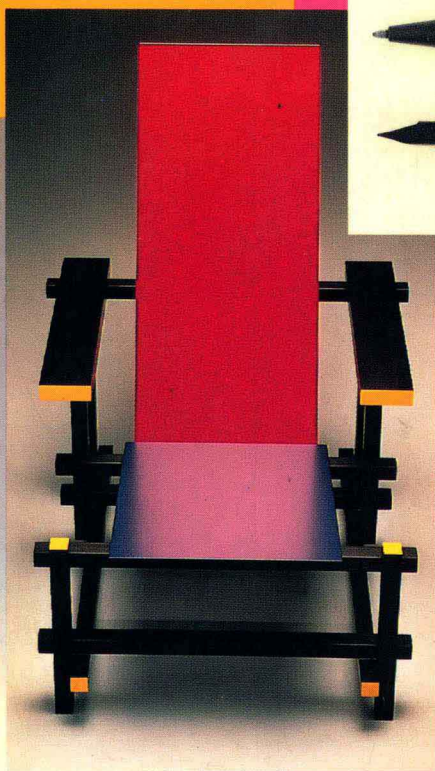
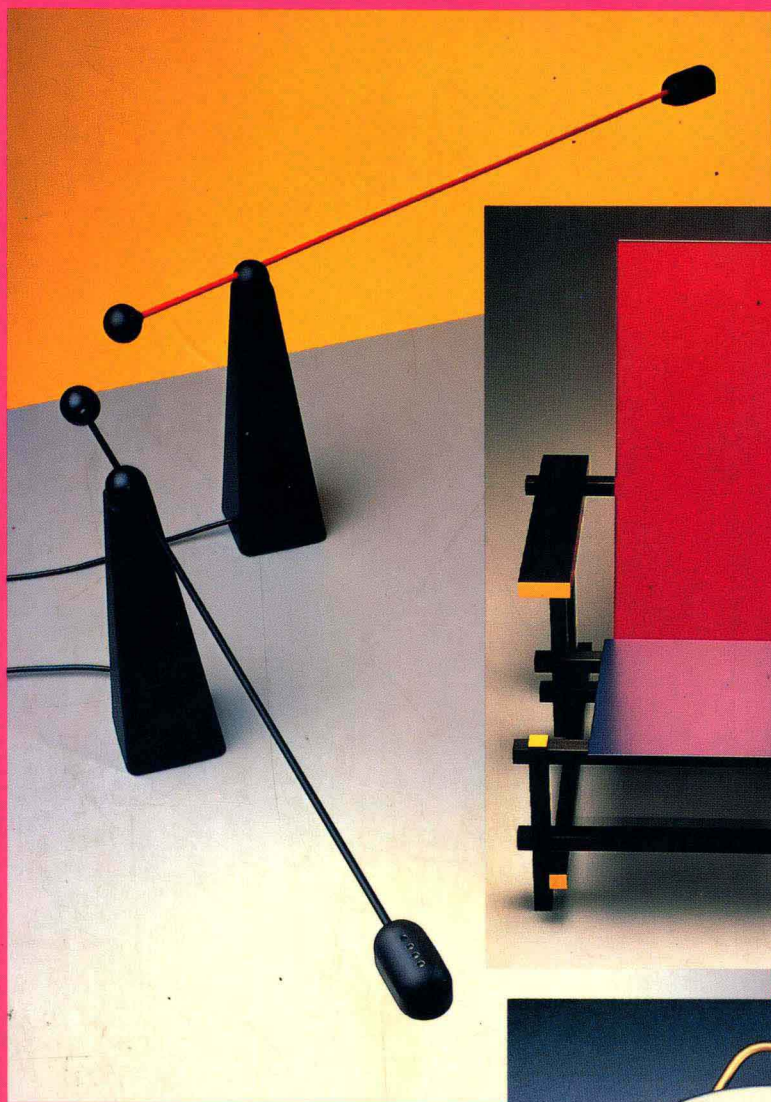


GREAT PRODUCT

Design



BY THE EDITORS OF PBC INTERNATIONAL

GREAT PRODUCT

Design



The Library
of Applied
Design

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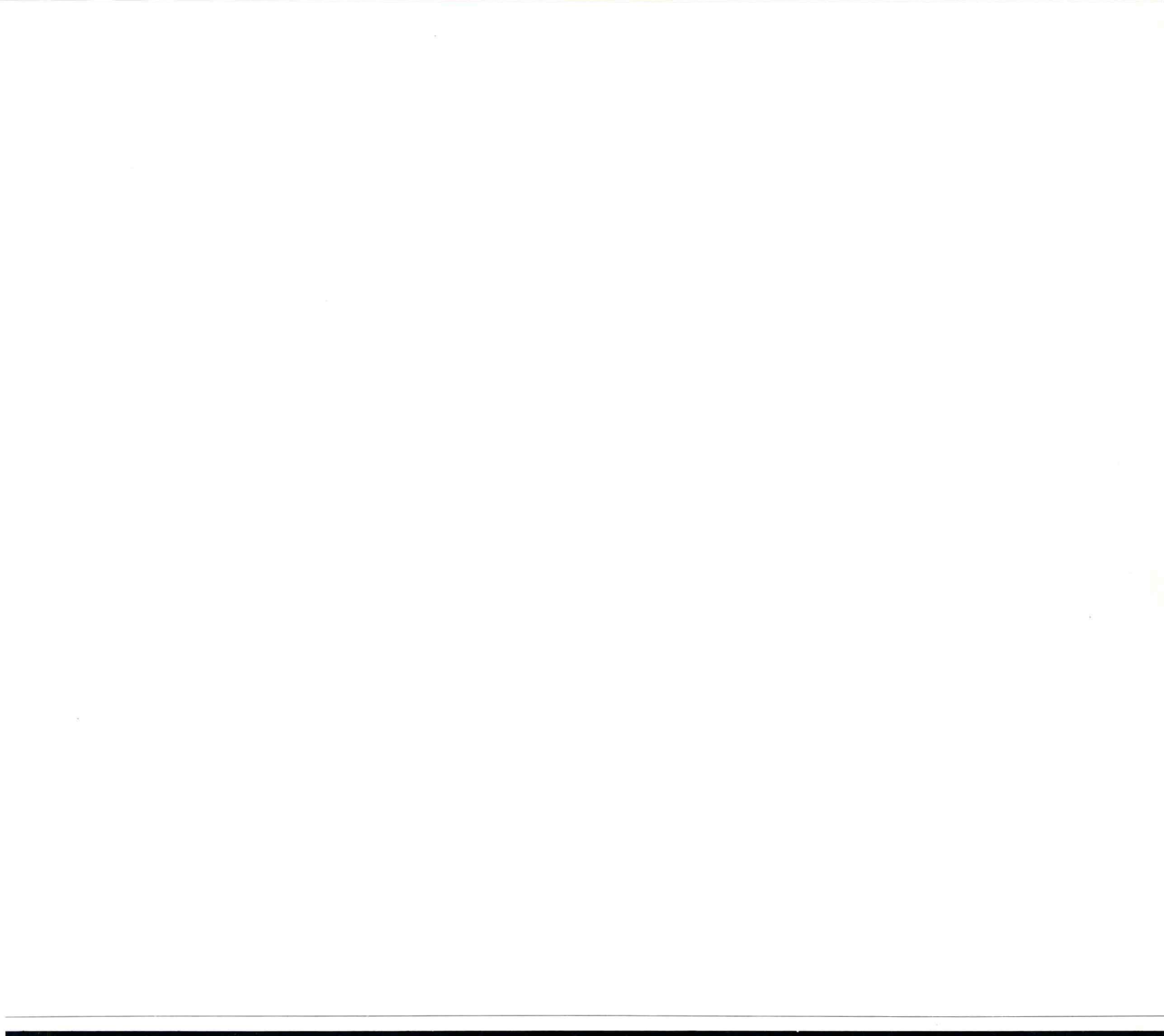
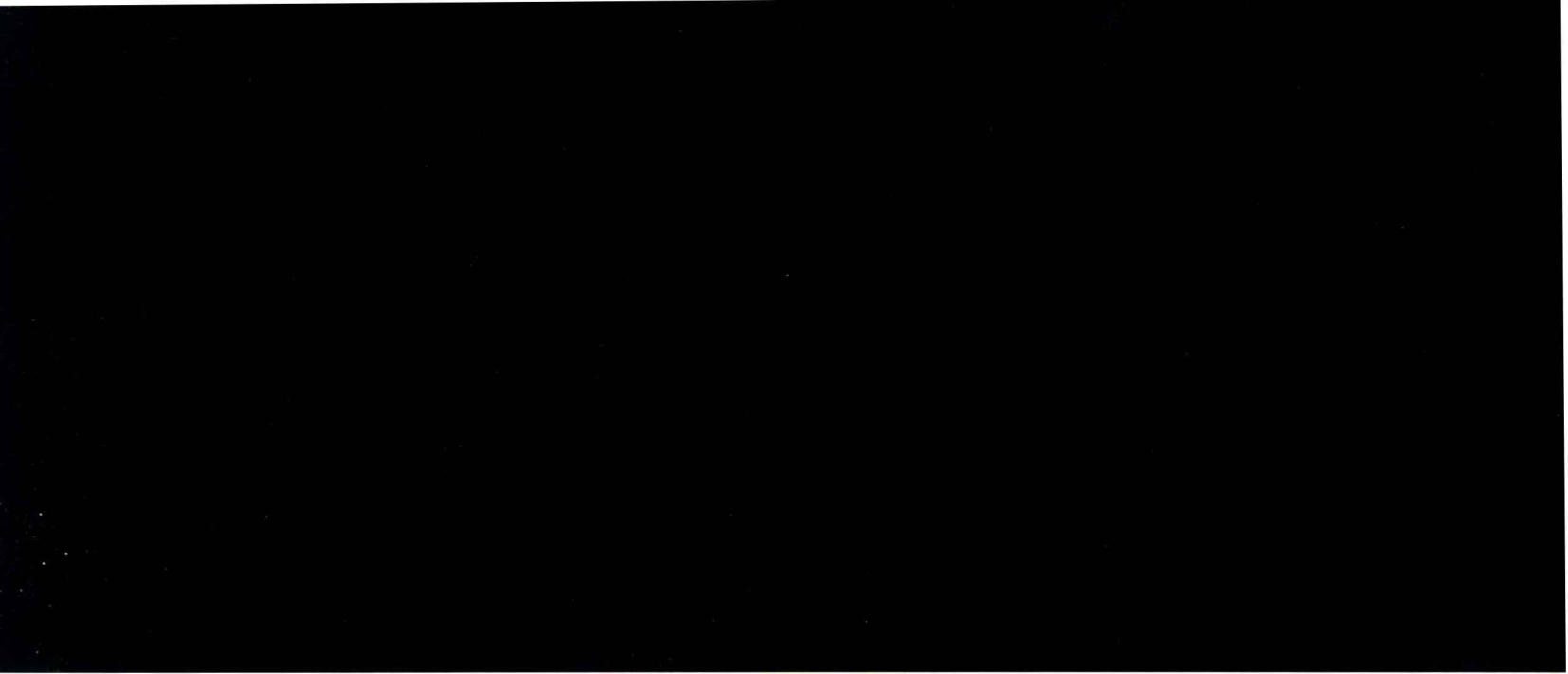
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Introduction

What we work on is going to be ridden in, sat upon, looked at, talked into, activated, operated, or in some way used by people. . . . If the point of contact between the product and the people becomes a point of friction, then the industrial designer has failed. If people are made safer, more comfortable, more eager to purchase, more efficient—or just plain happier—the designer has succeeded.

—HENRY DREYFUSS
Designing for People

In approaching the formidable task of gathering material, we sought independent endorsement to help validate products for publication. With such a wide array of forms and functions, personal taste alone could not be authoritative. To begin with, we gathered products that had been recognized by recent international design competitions; these included the *ID Annual Design Review*, the Braun Prize, the ICSID/CID Philips Awards, Britain's Design Council Citations, the Osaka International Design Competition, and the Industrial Design Excellence Awards sponsored by the Industrial Designers Society of America. We also reviewed products that were selected for exhibition by galleries or museums; finally, the editors of *ID*, who are able to screen many new products, worked with Akiko Busch to select additional pieces by consensus.

The question of merit, of course, is always difficult; even when a jury is involved, subjective influences—such as aesthetics, fashion, taste, and the reputation of the designer, manufacturer, or retailer—come into play. Criteria vary, even within categories. In some cases, a product represents such an advanced and wonderful design solution that to include it seems absolutely right. In other instances, product differentiation is subtle and the reasons for inclusion obscure. Such disparate conditions are inevitable in any large collection.

In her lively and studious chapter introductions, Busch sets the stage for each of the ten chapters with relevant examples and an analysis of product design trends. In a collection as large as this one, however, we found it impossible to embark on a case-study approach, and to report the constraints and rationale that apply to each design.

One does not usually find careerist ambitions encapsulated in, say, a tape deck, but a designer *can* identify himself in the work; though there is no signature, the memory of the process can remain forever rich. In this sense, at the core of this collection is a tribute to the design process. As we recognize the elegant design of man-made objects, we recognize individual or collective imagination, intelligence, skill and talent.

What Ettore Sottsass, Jr., the Italian designer, said about a book on his work can be applied to this collection:

"A book is not real life: the daily grind, the anxiety, the confusion, the excuses of a headache or the radio that would not let you work in peace, the thousands of cards covered with sketches that seemed so brilliant because you never risked finishing them, and all those other distractions . . . in a finished book these things are no longer apparent."

The contemporary designer is the centerpiece of this collection, even where the design is anonymous. Though there are inevitable omissions, woven through the ten chapters is something of a who's who in contemporary international design.

The history of design since World War II reflects the uneasy coexistence of two distinct visions of the future, explains Jeffrey Meikle, author of *Twentieth Century Limited*. Both visions are illustrated in this collection; one, self-consciously elitist, stresses the moral, even the spiritual obligation of the designer, the other, more democratic, concentrates on providing the public with what it seems to want. In spite of this tension, designers are frequently able to please the critics *and* the public.

Even in this age of perpetual novelty, the level of mass design has improved; at the same time, *haut* design coexists with the Bauhaus ideal that "good" design can help reform society. In the everyday world, it may still be Raymond Loewy's MAYA axiom that is the most practical guide: it suggests that a designer should offer an inherently conservative public the "most advanced yet acceptable" version of a product.

Still another tension exists. There is the financial urge, based on economy of scale, to make products for the global market and the creative urge to produce for idiosyncratic segments that may or may not cross national boundaries. In the last ten years, product design has branched in many directions, pulled to and fro by competing artistic, financial, and marketing philosophies; the seamless modern aesthetic that guided design from the forties to the early seventies has been challenged by a healthy new diversity.

Design excellence does make a tangible contribution to a nation's economic well-being, according to author and economist John Kenneth Galbraith, the Paul Welberg Professor of Economics Emeritus at Harvard University.

" . . . design depends not alone on the availability of artists, it invokes the whole depth and quality of the artistic tradition. It is on this that modern industrial success has come largely to depend. Proof is wonderfully evident. . . . One of the miracles of modern industrial development—of modern industrial achievement—has been modern Italy. Since World War II Italy has gone from one major public disaster to another with one of the highest rates of economic growth of any country in the Western industrial world. . . . Italy has been an economic success over the last 35 years because Italian design is better; because its products appeal more deeply to the artistic sense. An Italian design reflects . . . the superb commitment of Italy to artistic excellence extending over the centuries and continuing down to the present day."

There is also an evangelical side to *Product Design* in the sense that we want to help raise the level of design literacy. Though different from the way financial or marketing people think, the "designerly" way of thinking and communicating is vivid, and, in a world where old industrial patterns are fading, an approach to problem-solving that is increasingly relevant. Their combination of intuitive and logical thinking leads to true innovations, authentic product benefits, and elegant forms.

The traditional conflict between expedient marketing goals and design fidelity, has a powerful effect on the finished product. For example, a designer can be told, "Take out ten percent of the cost, but keep the perceived value." The compromise results in what is advertised as "style" and euphuistically called "cost-efficient design." In this common scenario, the designer tries to negotiate trade-offs in the consumer's favor, for it is the designer who is the custodian of the public's interest; in the vernacular, he represents the "end user."

The modern designer is expected to be familiar with aesthetics, engineering, ergonomics, fabrication, materials, marketing and sales. But in the practical world, success depends on team skills. When collaboration is sincere, it is exhilarating and leads to a high degree of design fidelity.

Yet design is never really anonymous, for refined products are made by companies that recognize aesthetic sensibilities, in short, the creativity of the individual. This is true whether the designer works for the corporation or is a member of an independent, consulting design firm. Because teamwork is inevitable, a culture of sensitive collaboration nourishes creativity.

Appliances Housewares and Tools

When industrial design first established itself as a field in the early days of this century, the products that emerged from the movement often resembled something else entirely. The consumer, in those days, may not have been entirely prepared for lamps, ice boxes, and radios that looked as though they did what they did. In fact, he or she generally preferred forms which, drawn from nature, were familiar. Witness, then, the streamlined iceboxes that appeared to be designed to travel at high speeds, lamps in the shape of dragonflies, and sewing machines gracefully lounging upon beds of ailanthus leaves.

All this, of course, changed with the Modern Movement, which measured the integrity of a form by the degree to which it expressed its function. For decades now, if any generalization could be made about home appliances, it is that their design had to clarify—beyond reasonable doubt—their function. Ailanthus leaves clearly obscured the issue of sewing. And, not only must an object look as though it does what it does, it should also simplify itself for the user. The uncluttered form found in most Braun classics perhaps best expresses this maxim.

While other areas of design may be staging minor revolutions that question these clean and classic lines of Modernism—most notably through a greater use of color and ornamentation—consumer appliances remain less playful. Form must continue to communicate function, not because its designers are unimaginative, but because the growing capabilities of consumer appliances make it all the more necessary for the shape of the object, the visibility of its graphics, and placement of controls all to contribute to

the simplicity of operation and to make use self-evident. That is, few appliances have been able to afford to be ornamental without sacrificing some degree of clarity.

Still, no sooner are these words spoken than exceptions appear, and it is these exceptions that are one mark of contemporary design. The instant one passes swift judgment upon the overall purity of consumer appliances, products such as the Cyclon vacuum cleaner confront the eye. Described in one instance as “a successful mixture of a RCA degree show, Memphis, *Star Wars*, Art Deco, *Alien*, and Centre Pompidou styling motifs,” it appears at first an anachronism. Indeed, ornamentalism is running rampant here. It shamelessly recollects the design by free association that marked the much earlier days of industrial design. The difference, though, is that the extravagant form of the machine celebrates, rather than conceals, its technical achievements. The purpose of the aianthus leaves decorating the sewing machine was to suggest nature and thus diminish its possibly intimidating mechanical supremacy: By making the machine appear more “natural,” they tried to make it more accessible, less intimidating. In the 1983 vacuum cleaner, the bizarre serves a different purpose: It glorifies the mechanism and flaunts technical innovation, which in this case is the application of centrifugal force to vacuum cleaner design.

It is this, then, that makes for much of the richness found in the design of many of these tools, appliances, and home products: While some quietly and eloquently express their function in simple, classical form, others, in their exuberance, are more likely to shout it.

But contemporary home appliances are distinguished by other features as well. In *A History of Industrial Design*, Edward Lucie Smith points out that the late nineteenth century kitchen could be regarded as a small factory that transformed raw materials into a finished product. While this was

certainly true then, it is also true now that the factory has become much smaller while the equipment intended for it has multiplied. In urban areas, especially, the kitchen is often no more than a narrow counter; meanwhile the array of its appliances and the special fixtures, features, and attachments intended for each are produced at a dizzying rate. So clearly, portability, miniaturization, and the ability of a product to file, fold, stack, stash, and perform any number of other reductive contortions to save space marks design excellence in the 1980s.

Or, given the fact that there still may not be enough space to store some of these items, their aesthetics must often be such that one does not mind seeing them even when they are not in use. An example is the prototype for a sculptural fire extinguisher. While its actual use is more likely to inspire terror, it remains a pleasure to look at.

It should perhaps be mentioned here that this and other prototypes have been presented here along with products that have been manufactured and marketed. The criteria used to judge this selection considered form and material more so than the test of the marketplace. While the latter is not insignificant and surely helps to ascertain the success of a product's design, its use as the single criterion for this selection would only exclude innovative and provocative design solutions that are yet in the conceptual or prototype stage.

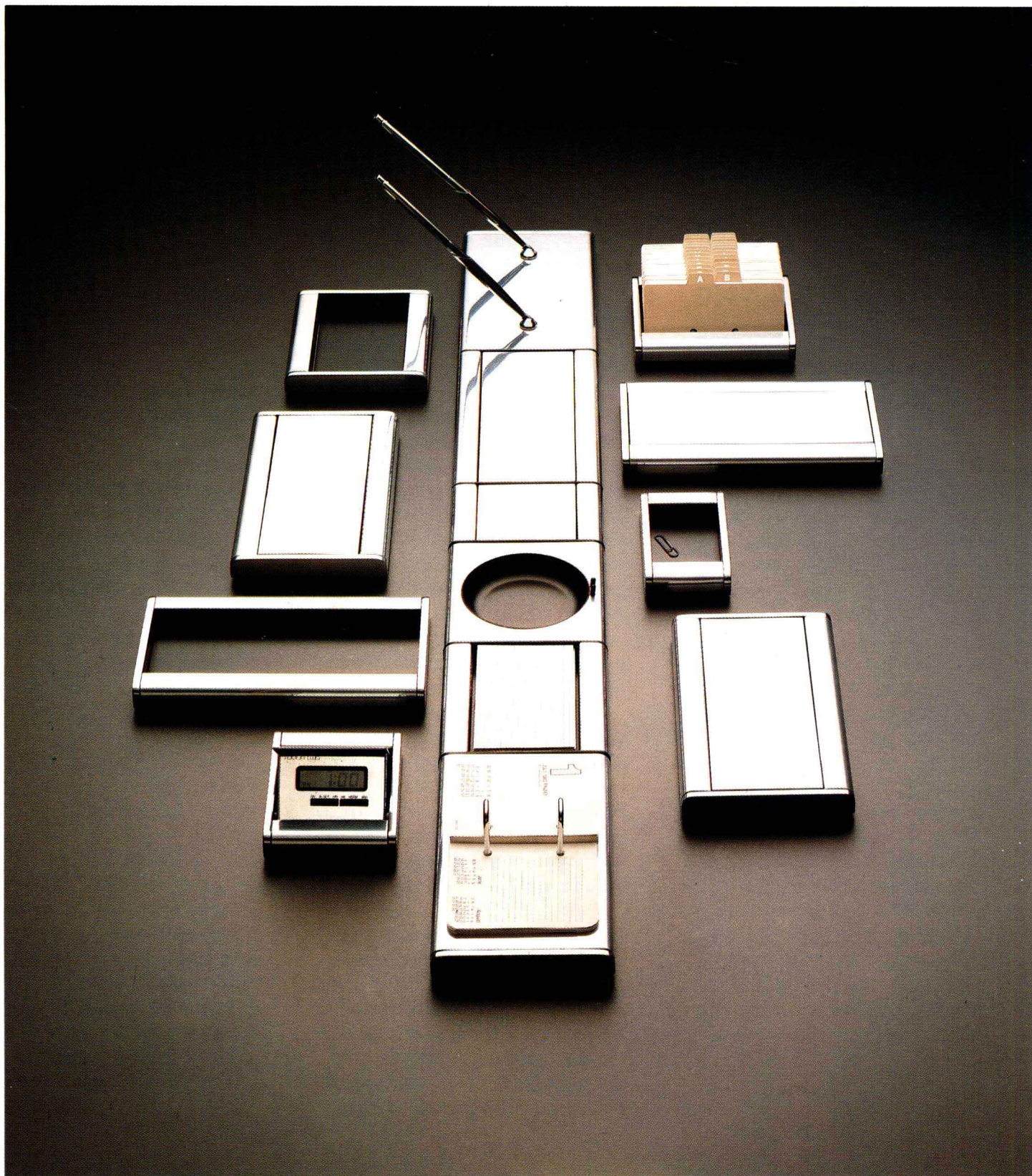
Recent product design is distinguished as well simply for the range of categories in which it appears. With due thanks to Braun, we now expect calculators and hairdryers to be attentive to design. But screwdrivers and irons we do not. Industries not previously familiar with design have begun to showcase it. This indicates, perhaps, that competitive design work in product development may decide sales and that design entering new territories is another signpost of the 1980s.

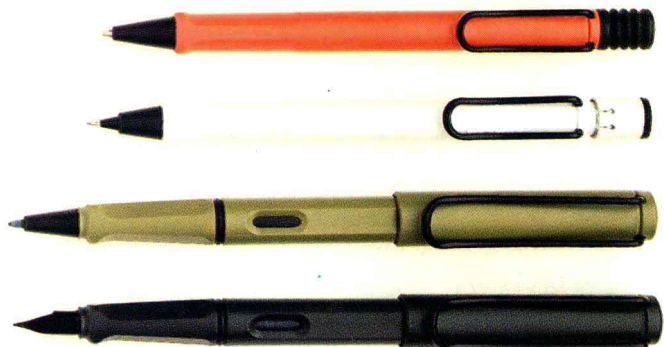
If design in untraditional areas is one signpost, a parallel one is that traditionally “designed” products are being designed more and more frequently by professionals working outside the strict boundaries of

“industrial design.” The silver teapots, for example, commissioned by Alessi, were designed by architects. Available for anywhere from \$10,000 to \$30,000, they are not exactly products to encourage serious consumer or manufacturer interest. Why, then, have they been included in a collection of product design? For the simple reason that invention can and often will come from without rather than within. Industrial designers can become so absorbed in the physics of material and process that they can bypass simple solutions. For this reason, it can be helpful to glance at the design solutions found elsewhere—solutions not of the economic use of material or process, for ones of pure form. There is a second reason as well: While these tea services may be prohibitively expensive, difficult to produce, and even more difficult to pour and drink from, they more successfully complete another part of their function. That is, they acknowledge and even celebrate the ritual of drinking tea. It is this less tangible function that can so easily be forgotten by the designer who designs housewares on a more regular and repetitive basis. What can designers of buildings say to designers of tableware? Can there be aesthetic cross references? While this selection does not necessarily try to answer these questions, asking that we consider them will surely only help to broaden our vision. And that it might promote a more collaborative spirit between the two professions justifies it all the more.

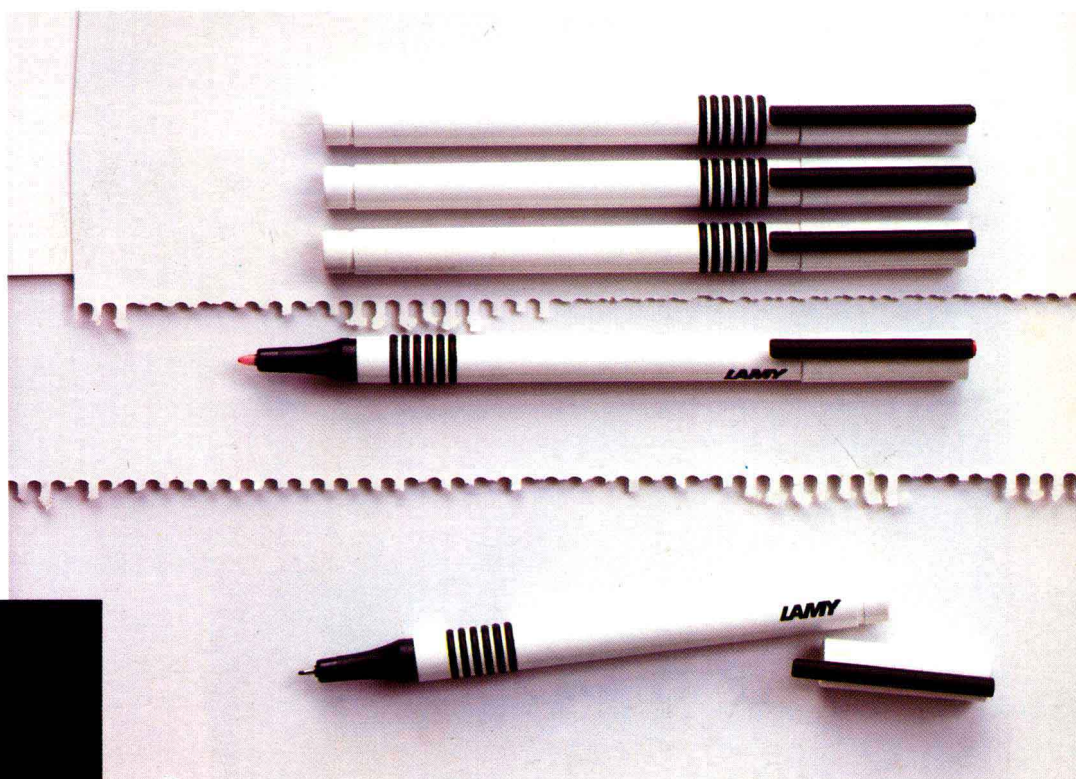
It also may be helpful to point out that there are absences in this broad category of products. Certainly, the items covered here have a wider range than those in any other category. Suitcases and wrenches, clocks and teapots are included. Still, freezers and dryers are not. It is not the aim here to represent the best of each appliance, but rather, by showing three well-designed vacuum cleaners, to show some of the ways in which it can be done, and by omitting freezers and dryers, to imply that they are areas that invite the designer's fine tuning.

Product: Radius Two Collection
Designer: William Sklaroff
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Design Firm: William Sklaroff Design Associates
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Client: Smith Metal Arts
Buffalo, New York
Awards: 1981 IBD Product Design honorable
mention
Materials: In mirror brass, antique brass, mirror
aluminum, mirror bronze, statuary
bronze, or mirror black





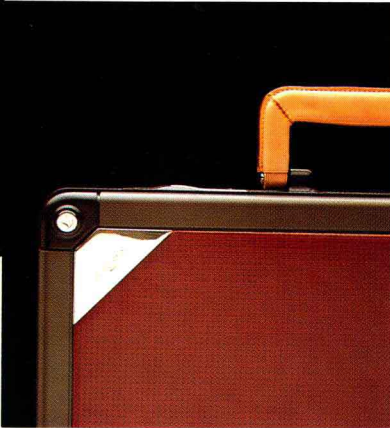
Product: Safari Pens: Ball Point Pen, Mechanical Pencil, Inkwriter, and Fountain Pen
 Designer: Wolfgang Fabian
 Heidelberg, West Germany
 Client: C. Josef Lamy GmbH
 Heidelberg, West Germany
 Materials: ABS plastic



Product: Lamy White Pens
 Designer: Wolfgang Fabian
 Heidelberg, West Germany
 Client: C. Josef Lamy GmbH
 Heidelberg, West Germany
 Awards: Stuttgart Design Center award
 Hanover Gute Industrie Firm
 Materials: White Makrolon casing, black polypropylene rings, black Delrin clip, and black Novodur cone



Product: Desk Accessories
 Designers: Toru Nishioka and Studio 80
 Tokyo, Japan
 Client: Courtesy Gallery 91
 New York, New York
 Materials: Aluminum



Product: Challenge Case and Briefcase
 Design Firm: Frogdesign
 Campbell, California
 Client: Louis Vuitton
 Paris, France
 Materials: Kevlar/polyurethane canvas; brass or
 chrome fittings, natural leather





Product: American Tourister Business Equipment
 Designer: Ed Lawing, Richardson/Smith
 Worthington, Ohio
 Design Firm: Richardson/Smith
 Worthington, Ohio
 Client: American Tourister
 Warren, Rhode Island
 Materials: Injection-molded Lexan frame
 with vacuum-formed shells
 wrapped in top-grain cowhide



Product: Swedish attache case
 Courtesy: Conran's
 New York, New York
 Materials: Pressed cardboard with black plastic
 hardware