

## simplicity {1/2}

Simple and easy to use objects such as the paper clip, a button or a pencil, that manage to seamlessly weave themselves in to daily life, to the point that they become unnoticeable as designed objects. Designers face the tough challenge and perhaps the complex process to create something that has the potential to become essential and familiar in everyday routines. {March 2012}

One of designer Dieter Rams' ten principles of good design expressed in the 1980s, states that effective design is 'as little design as possible'. And looking at the clocks and radios designed by Ram for Braun, his theory suggests a focus on the essential parts and functions of a product in a simple way. Simplicity in design has grown in popularity because of companies such as, Japanese retailer, Muji whose products are based around a concept of minimalism where 'less is more' and only the necessary parts of an object are kept in their designs. Art Director of Muji, Kenya Hara, believes that visual emptiness, commonly referred to as 'Zen Aesthetics' can create simple design that is also memorable. In David Pogue's 'Simplicity Sells' talk for TED in 2006, he identified that the success of a user's interaction experience can be determined by what is left out of a design, meaning that people react better to simple objects and interfaces.

In 2007, in a talk titled 'The Simple Life', designer and author of *The Laws of Simplicity*, John Madea highlighted business models that relied on making things simple for users, such as the book titles 'For Dummies' and 'The Complete Idiots Guides' as well as the 2006 Gap advertising campaign, 'Keep it Simple'. Another more recent example is mobile phone network O2's 'Simplicity Tariff' that suggests a 'no strings attached' short-term mobile phone contract. The ongoing use of simplicity in design practice is evidence that it is a successful way to appeal to an audience; it has an inclusive quality about it.

Apple founder Steve Jobs also identified the importance of simplicity in design. He translated this into designs which made Apple products as easy to use as possible. Using familiar physical gestures and visual metaphors, now more commonly referred to as 'skeuomorphic user interfaces', users can pick up a product and intuitively understand how to use it. However, it seems that sometimes a design can be too sleek and simple and it can then be intimidating to interact with it. Also, if

something goes wrong with the product, there is little there physically, for the user to attempt to repair the object.

There has been a string of exhibitions and shows that celebrate simple products that are essential to daily life but have perhaps become the least noticeable and forgettable. At the Milan Triennale in 2007, Jasper Morrison and Naoto Fukasawa curated a show titled, 'Super Normal', featuring Enzo Mari's inclined plastic waste paper basket and stools by Naoto Fukasawa. In the summer of 2010, Brompton Design District hosted, 'New Simplicity', a focus on simple minimalistic objects that exploit new forms of technology such as, rapid prototyping, work that was featured included 'Folding Plug' [2009] by Min-Kyu Choi and the 'Glo-ball Light' [1999] designed by Jasper Morrison for Flos. Most recently and following the same concept of simple objects in everyday life, is the touring exhibition 'Hidden Heroes' by Vitra Design Museum. The objects featured in exhibitions like these are simple for various reasons, such as, their function, how they have been made, their understated form or the clarity in how they work.

It seems that when familiarity and simplicity are part of new and innovative designs, it is easier for the product to be welcomed and appreciated by consumers. Examples of this include, the 'Plumen' [2010] light bulb designed by Samuel Wilkinson for HULGAR, it is an elegant and stylish alternative to other energy saving light bulbs. Also, the collaboration between Lego and Muji that resulted in 'Bricks and Paper' [2009], a playful pairing of a toy, Lego, with a familiar piece of stationery, a whole puncher needed little explanation on how it works. Both designs are inclusive and user friendly because of the sense of familiarity, playfulness, and simplicity that they possess. In 2008, in an interview with Will Wiles in *Icon Magazine*, Will Wright, creator of architecture games 'Sim City' and 'The Sims', suggested that when provided with a platform and simple

**Familiar**  
**Found**  
**Non-Design**  
**Appreciate**  
**Recognise**  
**Modify**  
**Repair**  
**DIY**  
**Assemble**  
**Process**  
**Skeuomorph**  
**Doorknob**  
**Brushes**  
**Creative**  
**Mess**  
**Put-off**  
**Rubbish**  
**Desktop**  
**Anti-Aesthetic**  
**Amateur**  
**Waste**  
**Mistakes**  
**Boring**  
**Unoriginal**  
**Reuse**  
**Reinvent**  
**Less**  
**Recreate**  
**Upcycle**  
**Compose**  
**Toy**  
**Personal**  
**Unique**  
**Rebel**  
**Useless**  
**Pointless**  
**Alienate**  
**Skill**  
**Effortless**  
**Attention**

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simplicity {see also familiar, process}

instructions, consumers enjoy designing environments for human interaction, 'At the end of the day, design is serving human interaction. That's the point of pure design.' The realm of gaming is not the only place where parameters set by trained designers allow consumers to act as designers. Swedish designer, Pål Rodenius, created a kit in his 2010 project 'Saw, Assemble' where consumers can buy a piece of plywood marked with guidelines for various pieces of furniture, they choose what they want to make and then cut the plywood and build it themselves. The simple visuals and process of this design allow the form to be created by someone who is not a designer.

At the London Design Festival 2011, communication agency, gallery and bookshop, the KK Outlet, explored the concept of simplicity in design. In a project titled, 'Object Abuse', they used simplicity as a process. Giving a group of artists and designers the challenge to take an everyday object and create a new product from it, they used as few additional materials as possible. One of the fun and affective outcomes from the project were coat hooks by designer, Dominic Wilcox, made from paintbrushes that hadn't been cleaned and therefore held the form brushes take when left in a pot of glue or paint. The familiarity of a paintbrush as an object and the addition of little material and effort to create this new product suggest that this creation is simple design that anybody could replicate.

The idea that so little effort is needed to design something simple and that anybody could make it, is an area that designer Michael Marriot explores in his work. He 'designs without actually designing', using simple tools and processes to bring together found objects to create something new, like in his 2007 piece, 'Ten coat hooks', Marriot used various objects; fixtures and parts of objects that would otherwise be regarded as waste and attaches them to a wooden panel to create a coat hook rack. The aesthetic of objects like the completed

coat hook rack have a DIY, unfinished and perhaps amateur aesthetic about them but also have a sense of familiarity and simplicity.

The rate of consumption, the rate at which new products are made available and the rate that technology advances means that often too much is on offer too fast; and although companies may assure consumers that their latest product or gadget will 'make our lives simpler', they can often make them more complicated. *Living with Complexity* [2011] author, Donald Norman suggests that, 'The design challenge is to manage complexity so that it isn't complicated.' To achieve simplicity in design, a designer needs to be sensitive and considerate to his/her audience and make an object that might be complex in what it offers as easy to use.

Recycle

**Sustainability**

Educate

Principles

Rules

Unconventional

Ugly

Unforgettable

Passable

Italian

Celebrity