

House Design by Kurt Faust

Our Modern notion of what design is began around the turn of the last century. The Bauhaus movement began disseminating the idea that architecture and consumer goods should be designed to be functional, cheap, and facilitate mass production and to argue for the elimination of surface ornamentation. The notable quote of the day was “form follows function”.

At the time design was considered to be a practical, logical, problem solving process. It was something done to products such as cars, furniture buildings, etc. It was an ingredient in the thing which made it better. Design was, in this elitist world view, distinguished from style or fashion which were thought to be equal to surface decoration.

Through all the Middle Ages surface embellishment was the normal expression and the Modernist movement rejected this tradition. This was expressed by such artists as the Impressionists, Picasso, and Matisse. These artists were some of the pioneers developing our modern forms of painting, drawing, and sculpture.

Instead of having the goal to making paintings look real, the artists began working more two dimensionally employing the elements of design. These elements such as shape, line, value, color, and movement, etc. were used more literally. The conservative critics of the time wrote scathing reviews of the work and called them derogatory names such as “wild beasts”. Modernist critics began to assert themselves and gradually established themselves as the arbiters of what is good design and what is good art.

Art and design have been vigorously held as separate and distinct disciplines. Art is for galleries and museums and is held in noble esteem. It is placed on pedestals and on pristine white walls with guards all around. Design has been for the “lesser” goals of manufacturing or for advertising, yet design still has its elitist award winners and arbiters. It has been performed by experts and, until recently, controlled by these experts promoting the idea that the design object contains internal qualities which make it "different" from ordinary things.

A recent trend is that of the “designer label”. Individual designers have risen to the star status once reserved for artists. Names such as Tom Ford and Ralph Lauren come to mind. These designer labels broke the once held boundary between design and style and fashion. It solidified for the masses the value of a subjective experience of good design. It shows us that design also is the emotional content and the deeper meaning of the objects, even if the meaning is merely the status conferred by the object. The designer label syndrome has pushed so far into daily life that it is now ubiquitous like the “Designer Phone with caller ID” or the “Pet Select Designer Adjustable Collar” seen recently at the big-box store.

Design has broken out of the functional constraints of the past and now encompasses the whole spectrum of creativity. As we move into the global economy creativity becomes the priceless

resource to cultivate. It still holds true that design will focus on the needs, wants and limitations of the end user as well as the aesthetic appearance of the form, but the newest frontier for designers will be to add meaning and emotional connection to the things in our lives. Each of these components represents a little piece of information. The challenge for the 21st century designer is to be the one who can add the most quality information to their designs.

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