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Good Design is boring. Do you remember the Design Centre in London's Haymarket? Closed down years ago due to lack of interest—not because people don't care about good design, just that it's all in the local shopping mall so why make the trip?

Good design is no longer big news.

As a product designer, how can I afford to be so glib? Well, the game has moved on and those things that constitute good design: fitness for purpose, simplicity and practicality, manufacturability, refined proportions and detailing, user-friendliness... are all pretty much taken for granted. There was a time when the only decent-looking home electrical stuff came from Braun of Germany. Now the average Comet shed hosts an acre of not-bad kit. Not bad at all; and today's Braun is just another not-bad brand. So what do top product designers have to offer that's special, if indeed they do?

Well, first off, they have to do *excellent* design, design with charisma, design that makes you gulp (think Apple, Jaguar). And often it has to be excellent design *for a brand*. Brands have *values*, and smart product design is the ever-so-subtle business of translating those values into physical form and material.

Some of the media's favourite designers—Philippe Starck and Mark Newson for example—don't actually serve brands at all; they *are brands themselves*. Newson's car concept for Ford is actually a Newson, with a design signature that's strongly his and takes nothing from its maker. When Starck designs for a manufacturing client the product goes out with *his* brand name printed on it. Less star-struck designers work with and for brands. Ian Callum at Jaguar and Chris Bangle at BMW work with the "genes" of their brands as raw material. And look at the way Jonathan Ive at Apple has helped transform our expectations of how a computer should look; but the label is Apple, not Ive.

My studio was asked by Kodak to create the look and feel for the new family of cameras. Our problem was to design not just a dinky new camera—although that was important—but to design a dinky new *Kodak* camera. Kodak is an American brand and the biggest brand in photography, so its products should have a unique identity setting them apart from the Asian crowd. We looked at the brand's product heritage, from the days when a camera *was* a Kodak, and distilled that essence of Kodak-ness and American-ness. Our first Kodak camera—Advantix T700—was introduced last summer and is a big success.

I think we designed a good camera, but it was a good *Kodak* camera, and that's the point.

Interestingly, many of the top designers who work with and for brands turn out to be British. Charles Wilkins of marketing consultancy Deep Blue, believes this may be due to the national character: "Brits shun conformity; we've almost given up on mass production; we hate uniforms—never wear them well; reps don't want a Vauxhall fleet car—they'd rather have a low-end BMW or Audi for the same money. These days, brand managers seek individuality, even idiosyncrasy, for their brands. British designers understand this and have the imagination and courage to strike out against conformity." I think Wilkins is right. British design is no longer well represented by Burberry coats and Morgan roadsters—all flat caps and shooting sticks. BMW tried to recreate Rover as an English heritage brand and the world told them not to bother. The Brits' loathing of uniformity and discipline declares itself in a complete *absence* of a British style, which may be hell on the eye at the seaside but serves us well when it comes to product design and brands.

London—the prototype outward-looking, globally-minded, post-industrial city—has become the product design capital of the world, the ideal place for product creation. Ford is putting up a Richard Rogers-designed steel and glass *atelier* in Soho, wherein young product designers will weave brand magic. My London-based consulting firm has several international, big-brand clients. That's how it goes here.

So Good Design used to be good enough. Designing for brands was about establishing rules and standards—putting products in uniforms: the age of brand identity by conformity. Now we prefer brand identity by common values; products can express themselves so long as they remain true to the cause (Philips is a good

example). All his makes the product designer's job much more demanding; it's more challenging for brand owners; but it surely makes life more interesting for consumers.

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