The New York Times | http://nyti.ms/11Kb4Wc

ART & DESIGN

Pleasurable Design

MAY 17, 2013

Design

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LONDON — One of the most entertaining accounts of a designer's career is "Industrial Design," the memoirs of Raymond Loewy, who arrived in the United States as a French army veteran with $50 in 1919 and became the first industrial designer to appear on the cover of Time magazine. In the book, he identifies the purpose of design as being to keep "the customer happy, his clients in the black and the designer busy."

Times change. Not that there is anything wrong with designers being busy or helping their clients to turn a profit, but what about their social and environmental responsibilities? Or design's importance in interpreting advances in science and technology to our advantage? Nor is it acceptable to assume, as Loewy clearly did, that a designer's clients will be "his," when they are equally likely to be "her's."

But Loewy's first assertion still rings true: design's role in making us "happy." He meant it in the old-fashioned sense of designing things that give

people pleasure, by being appealing to look at, or fun to use, but the word is versatile enough to encompass other interpretations too. How can design make anyone happy if it damages the environment, or translates a thrilling scientific breakthrough into something destructive? Here are some of my favorite examples of recent design projects that achieve Loewy's goal by making us happy both in the old sense, and the new.

Pleasing us Let's start with a couple of familiar objects whose design is pleasurable in a traditional way. First, the book of drawings by the French brothers Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, which accompanies the retrospective of their work in product design running through Sept. 1 at Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.

Both Bouroullecs draw compulsively, filling sketchbooks with everything from playful scribbles to detailed studies of specific products. They gave the Swiss graphic designer Cornel Windlin carte blanche to turn them into a book. The result looks and feels delightful, from the aplomb with which each drawing is positioned on its respective page, to the sequencing of the images and the silky texture of the paper.

The same can be said of the wooden and leather armchair developed by the Dutch designer Dick Van Hoff for Thomas Eyck, which was introduced at the Milan Furniture Fair last month. At first glance, it appears clumsy, almost ugly, but the longer you look, the subtler and more refined it seems. Critically, the chair is so comfortable to sit on, you feel calm and contemplative. "When we're under pressure, our natural reaction is to speed up, but sometimes it's better to slow down," Mr. Van Hoff said. "We all need moments to reflect, and that's what this is for."

Entertaining us Now for a new area of design: data visualization, which helps us to make sense of huge quantities of complex information by distilling it into clear, compelling digital images. Typically visualizations are used to explain portentous economic or political changes, but they can also entertain

us. A great example is "Where have all the wildings gone?" — a Web site devoted to the deliciously silly television series "Game of Thrones." Devised by the graphic designer Nigel Evan Dennis as a personal tribute to the show, the site uses color coding and symbolism to trace the complex allegiances between the characters so ingeniously, that deciphering it is nearly as much fun as watching the Starks and their wolves battle their foes on the screen.

Surprising us A time honored way for design to make us happy is by reinterpreting things in unexpectedly pleasing forms. Take the seed packets designed by Masaki Miwa and Abäke for an East London community group, the Friends of Arnold Circus. Sold to raise money to maintain the Arnold Circus garden, the packets contain seeds gathered from the hollyhocks that grow there. The first surprise is their octagonal shape, and the second that it is made by using an origami technique to fold a large piece of paper, bearing a print of the seeds made for the Friends by a local artist, Rachel Whiteread. The third surprise is that the packets are models of design locavorism. Not only are the designers and artist local, so are the volunteers who folded the paper, many of them children from a nearby school, and the printer.

Another pleasant surprise is Phases, a series of vases produced by the Dutch designer Jeroen Wand as part of his research into the possibilities of making objects from plaster. They are made by casting plaster in a mould and allowing it to dry into a solid form before immersing it in liquid plaster, which forms a rugged, irregular surface, the precise nature of which is always a something of a surprise. "There's always a mixture of being in control and letting the material act freely," Mr. Wand said. "You never really know what the end result might be."

Astonishing us Occasionally design achieves something so unusual that it astonishes, rather than surprises. A promising source of such innovation is the new genre of digital production technologies, like 3D printing, which manufactures objects so speedily and accurately that each one can be made individually, and even customized, on a nearby 3D printer rather than in a

factory. Not that the outcome is always positive, as illustrated by the recent storm over the gun made on an $8,000 3D printer in Texas.

A more appealing example of 3D printing is Collagene, a bespoke mask developed by Do the Mutation, an Italian design group founded by Filippo Nassetti and Alessandro Zomparelli. After scanning your face using the sensors of a Microsoft Kinect games device, you produce the mask on a 3D printer using a black polyamide-based material made by the CRP Group in Italy. The result resembles an intricate tangle of twigs that fits your face perfectly, making you feel very strange, but happily so.

A version of this article appears in print on May 20, 2013, in The International Herald Tribune.