

“A Design Education Manifesto”

by

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A Design Education Manifesto

A 'manifesto' is a written statement that publicly declares an individual's or a group's views and intentions regarding a specific topic.

This presentation is my manifesto regarding my own engagement with the world of design.



People have interests, likes, dislikes.

If you become famous, you will be hired because of these.

If you are not famous you will be hired in spite of these.

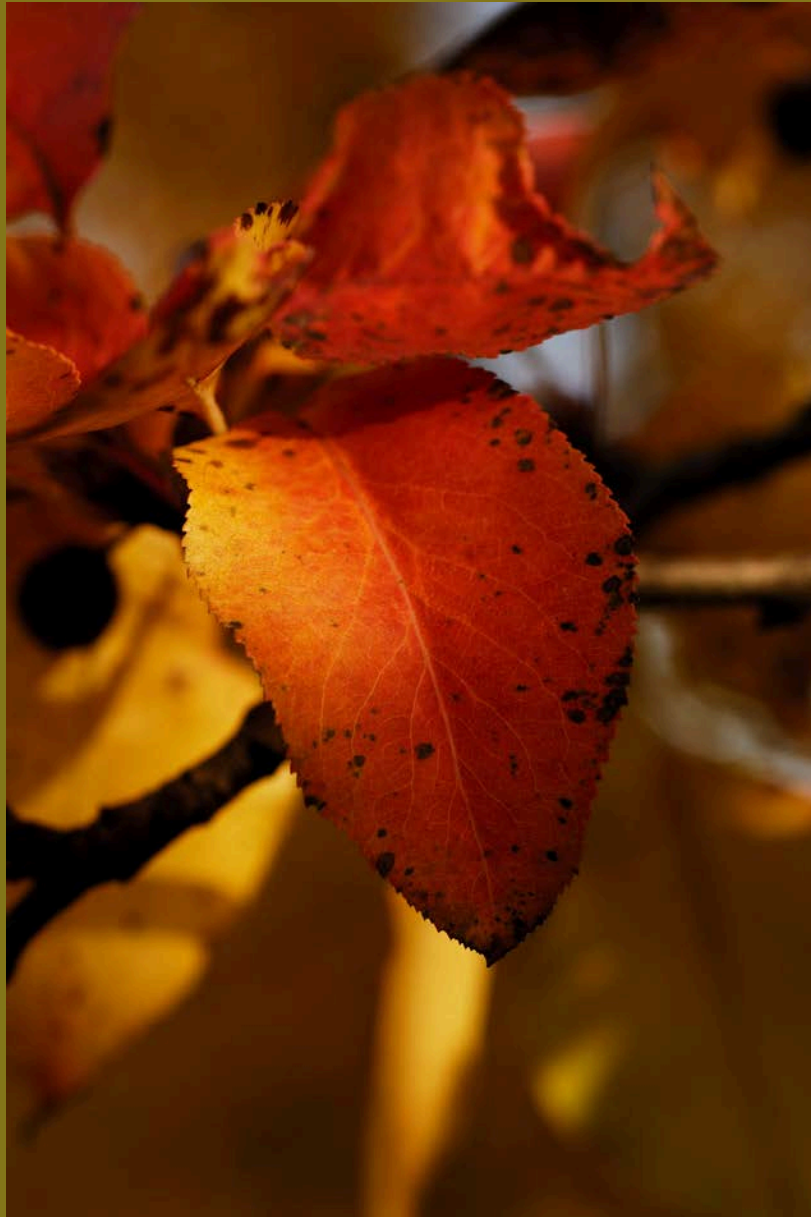
- People who are engaged in designing have interests, likes, dislikes, beliefs, knowledge bases, habits, eccentricities, obsessions, and loves that embrace the stuff of the world of designing.
- The stuff of this world is how we understand the physical, built, environment, and how we study its affects on us.
- Studying the stuff of the world can take you to varied disciplines, methodologies, and contents, but as designing people, the characteristic that is generally common to us all is an interest in the physical world, and an ability to propose useful, elegant, cost effective transformations to the world.
- This is what we call designing and design process.



Some of my interests

as a designing person:

- Art, music, the history of art, architecture, the history of architecture, graphics, typography, photography, cameras, guitars, materials, all sorts of materials and their possible uses, fountain pens, nice paper, getting lost in a city, tables, chairs, floor lamps, pendant light fixtures, table lamps, acoustic music, cars, pocket knives, wood, trees, leaves, acorns, pine cones, smooth stones, sea shells, sand, piles of sand, silly putty, play dough, bread dough, playing tennis, chunks of glass, slabs of steel plate, leather, carbon fiber, oriental rugs, radiometers, bottles of ink, pottery objects, shoes, window frames, door handles, newel posts, copper piping, chairs, tables, cutting blocks, slabs of stone, commercial kitchen appliances, table saws, glass prisms, pivot hinges, cast concrete, mohair upholstery, abalone shell, micarta knife handles, hammered copper sinks, ductwork,
- So, I think about these things all the time, and I wonder what I should do for a living? Imagine my surprise when I discovered that there are other people who think about these things too!

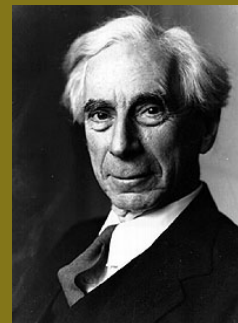
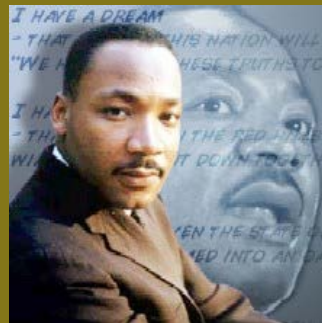


History

All that has gone before us



- A great deal has gone on before we arrived here! knowing some of this can help you understand your own life and work.





The Making of Stuff

The Built World

- There is the physical stuff, the wood, the stone, the plexiglas, et cetera, that makes up the built world, and this stuff is cool...
- And then there is the way that the physical stuff gets manipulated, altered, applied, which are the various technologies that humans have developed over time...
- And then there is the way we, the paid to be clever, creative, and useful, designers, go about figuring out what physical stuff, in what shapes sizes and formats will be brought to bear using what methods of constructing.
- This is the process of designing.



Design Process

Designing involves:

Expression

We all want to ‘say’ something through our work.

Expression is first about ‘me’, and expression by itself is not necessarily interesting to anyone else, useful, elegant, or cost effective. Being ‘expressive’ is not difficult to do, by itself. On the other hand, expressing complex things, like intricate functional relationships, political positions, or moral positions, can be difficult.

Communication

We generally do not build our products, as artists often do. We generally produce drawings, specifications, and models that are intended to communicate to a builder what it is that we are proposing to bring into existence.

Construction

Construction is about ‘it’. What is it going to be? Just exactly how is it to be?



We remember the past

'je me souviens'
(a Quebec slogan)

- History can be studied at many scales.
- Individuals and groups do not have the same needs, desires, or roles to play in society.
- Your personal history may not be important to many people, but is very important to you.
- The history of the state of virginia is important to many people, but may not be very important to you.
- Designed environments, and the work of designers, have to address the needs and desires of both groups and individuals, sometimes simultaneously.



You build your past

(and you look forward to, and plan for, the future)

- We are often told that we ‘build’ our future, that we work for the future.
- I think that we build our past, and that we work to ensure that we have a good past to reflect upon.
- Talk to your grandmother, or your great grandmother. have you ever noticed that she talks most about what happened in the past, sometimes far in the past? as we get older more and more of our lifetime resides in the past. a ninety-nine year old person has a tremendous past to reflect upon, and quite likely not too much future left to see.
- As designers we create a portfolio of work. your portfolio shows what you have done in the past. it shows the kinds of things you are good at, like to do, may wish to do in the future, but most of all, it shows what you have already done, in the past.
- If you do good work today, then tomorrow morning you can reflect upon that work, and draw inspiration, and confidence, from knowing that you have done good work in the past, and therefore, it is possible, or even likely, that you will do good work today.



Your past: your future

- You represent your past. your portfolio of work shows what you have done in the past, and it suggests that such work is what you will do in the future.
- A good life is one that has a rich present, and a rich past. no one truly knows what the future will bring, so we really work for the past.
- The sketch you do right now, the breath you take right now, is already gone; it is now in the past.

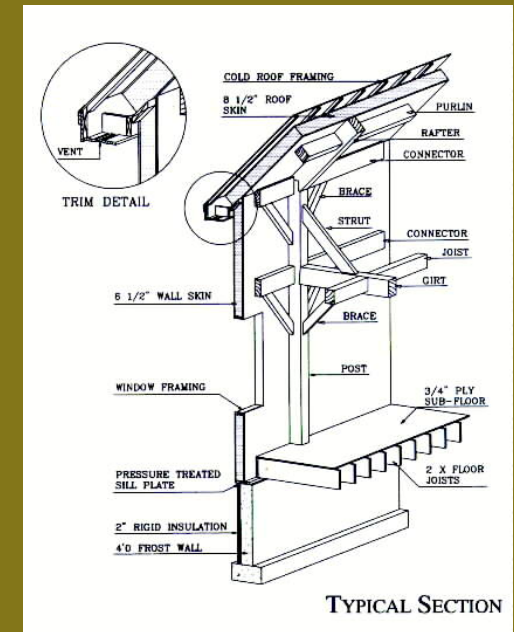
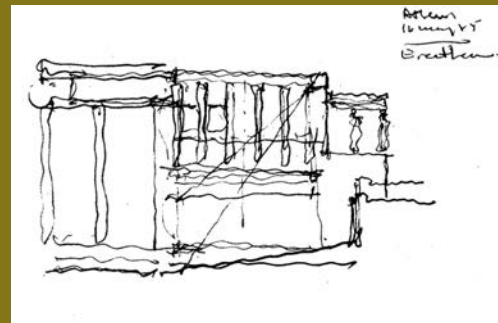
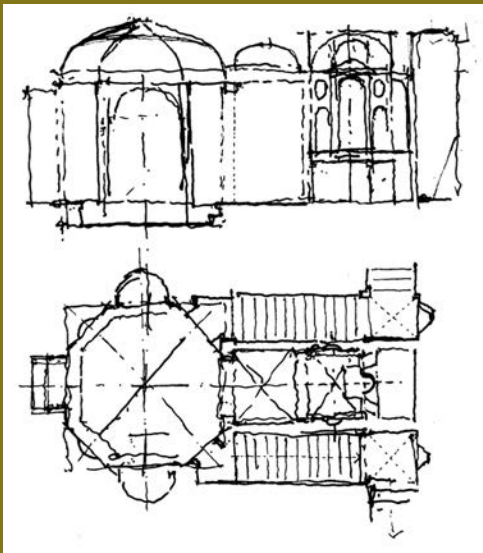




Designing



- Designing is purposeful, systematic, and creative.
- Designing is an activity.
- When you draw, think, build, and model, you are designing (something).





System

A set of independent but interrelated elements comprising a unified whole

- Systematic means that in our conception and development of the thing we are exploring we make use of sets of related elements.
- Sets of ideas, sets of physical parts, sets of rules, and sets of disciplines.
- To design a reception desk made of wood might be systematic in that you need to inter-relate the attributes of the wood with the abilities of the potential fabricator, with the functional requirements of the desk.



Designing can be powerful

- “We could say, in fact, that design conceives our future; it is the first signal of human intention and it sets in motion a whole range of effects that ripple through human communities and the natural world-today, tomorrow and in some cases, nearly forever.”

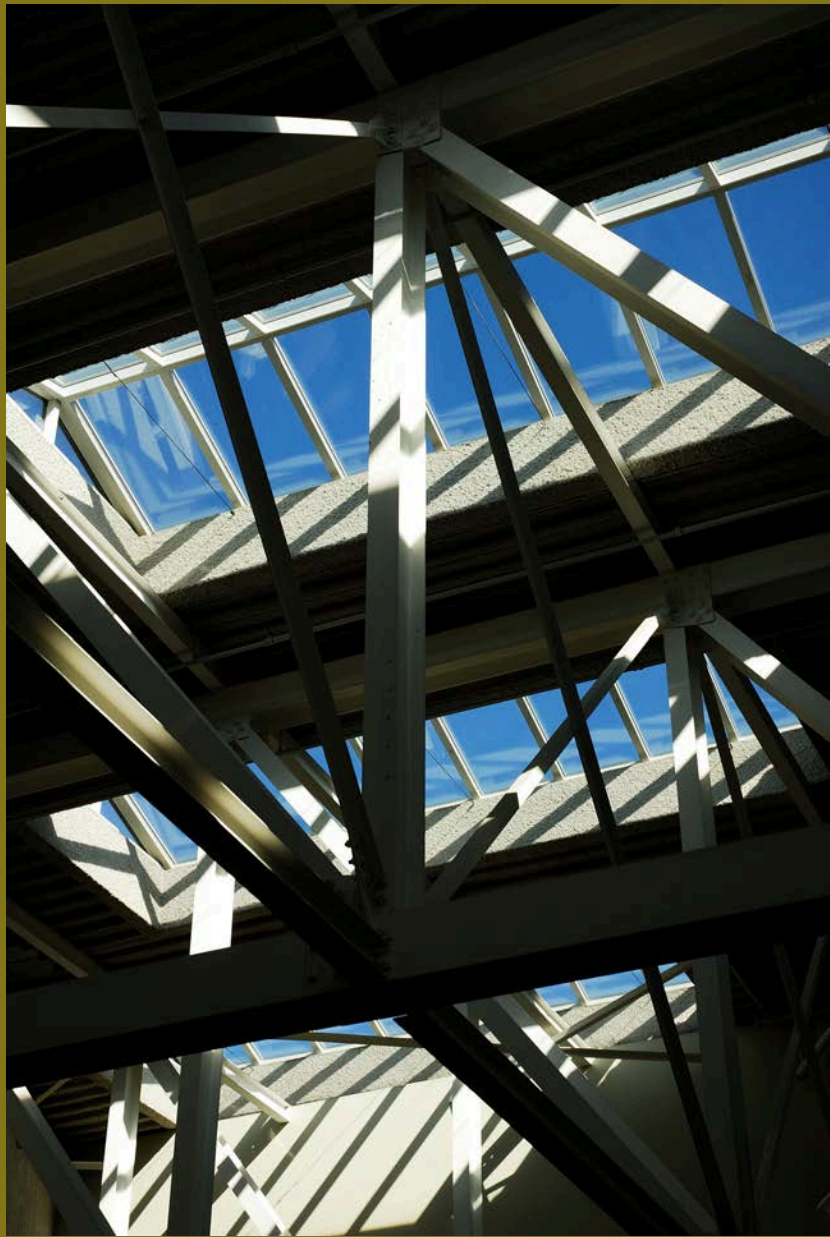
William McDonough & Michael Braungart, from
“Five Steps Towards Reinventing the World”



Everyone

should design, make things, & be creative
(but they don' t)

- Designing is something that almost all people engage in sometime, but not all of the time, and often only in an intuitive, or informal way. arranging the silverware in a drawer is an act of design.
- You and I spend more time engaged with ‘designing’ than most people. this commitment may lead to having people pay you good money to do it!
- Designing is making decisions. you must make selections, of all kinds of stuff. the sooner you make decisions the sooner you will be able to see, to understand, what it is that you are proposing through your work, your images.



Designing

can reasonably be described as
reflection, transformation & evaluation

- At the core of creating built environments or physical objects, is the activity of designing.
- Designing is also fundamentally a matter of making transformations.
- Transformations of many different kinds.
- Transformations of ‘words’ into visual images.
- Transformations of visual images into physical objects and spaces.
- When you sit at your desk and engage in designing you are typically:
 - thinking about what to do: reflecting
 - trying to give visual form to a written request: ‘design a desk’ :transforming
 - trying to decide if what you have done is any good: evaluation
- A great deal of what is done while designing can reasonably be described as either reflection, transformation, or evaluation.



Generating new ideas and images requires a temporary suspension of critical evaluation

- When you are trying to be ‘creative’ do not handcuff yourself by also, simultaneously, being critical, or evaluative.
- To be creative, to be in a mode of generating images, ideas, and proposals, you have to cut yourself some slack, you have to just produce, with abandon.
- Only after you have generated a substantial number, of images, or ideas, can you then look at them critically to see which, if any, are good, useful, or interesting.



Design School: a great learning environment

- Design school is a place to learn *how to design*.
- The way you learn how to design is by doing design projects.
- To do a design project so you truly learn how designing works, and is done, you must take charge of your project and produce something excellent. in the pursuit of producing something excellent you cannot let your teacher's requirements or the project statements or any vagueness or ambiguity keep you from moving forward, producing images, ideas, and a strong proposal.
- Recognize, always, that no design project statement can every, ever, be a complete description of what you have to do in the designing of the project. only the actual built, completed, finished, project, whatever it is, can be a 100% complete statement of what is to be designed, and even then, built projects are renovated, altered, and even demolished.



Design school is a place to learn *how to design.*

- Every project that you do, ever, in school, or in practice, demands that you make decisions, make selections, take a position, and then explore that position through drawings, models, writing, and any other media and methods that help to refine and communicate your position, idea, and proposal.
- Designing is about you making decisions, and then making sure that the decisions you have made will work, be interesting, be elegant, be cost effective
- Design school is also a place to develop your own *persona* as a designing person. Through your own individual study, exploration, struggles, successes, achievements, and overall engagement with designing you become a capable, knowledgeable, and professional person. This is very important because you will not be given much time or opportunity to do this once you start working in an office. There, they assume you know how to design, and that you have a developed point of view, a *persona*.



Reality:

(there are many 'realities' out there: whose reality are you interested in?)
intellectual, legal, educational, professional

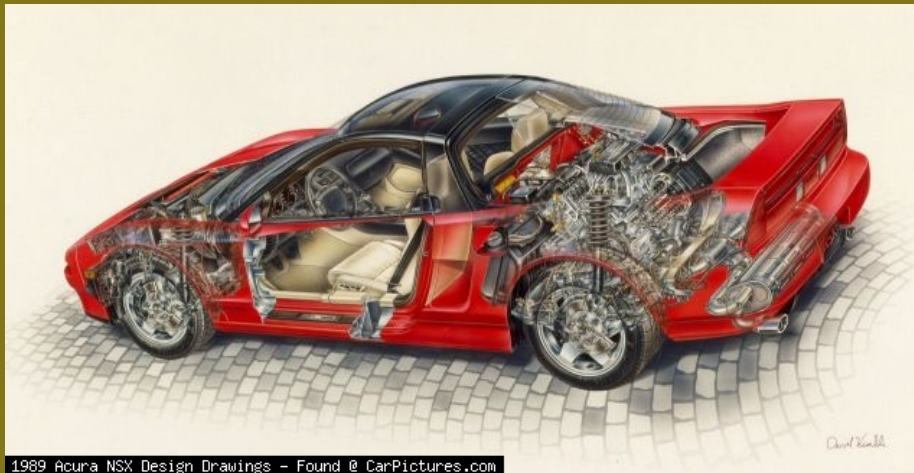
- Broadly speaking we have come to describe the domain of our designing activities through domain designations: 'interior design', 'architecture', 'decorating', 'product design', 'furniture design' are substantially a response to economic and legal requirements.
- These descriptors have become loaded with meaning related to educational, economic, and legal consequences.
- Legal and professional constraints, boundaries, and requirements are very different from the intellectual meaning and value of the designing activities we engage.
- What is most important is that we make things. what we make can improve the lives of people who engage with the physical, built, designed, world.



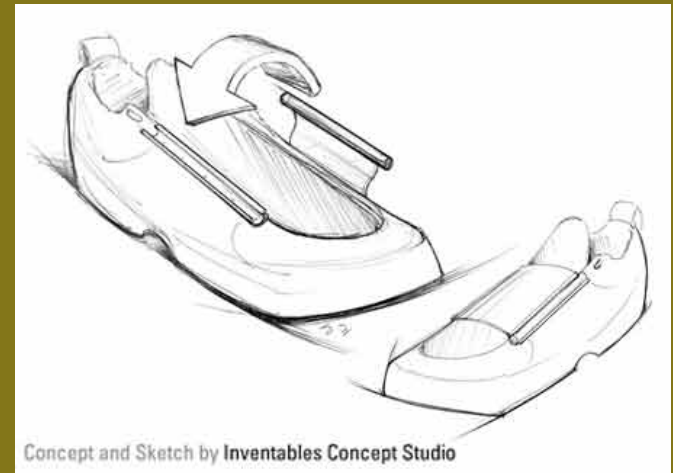


Designing

- My own interpretation of the great world of design is that the design of all physical and spatial things is 'architecture'.
- The scale, the function, the form, the materials, and the technologies used to 'make' a physical entity, are the 'architecture' of that object.
- Of course different content areas require specific knowledge and skills; knowing how and when to use a welding torch is different from knowing how and when to use a biscuit cutter, is different from knowing what an arbor vitae tree needs as fertilizer.



1989 Acura NSX Design Drawings - Found @ CarPictures.com

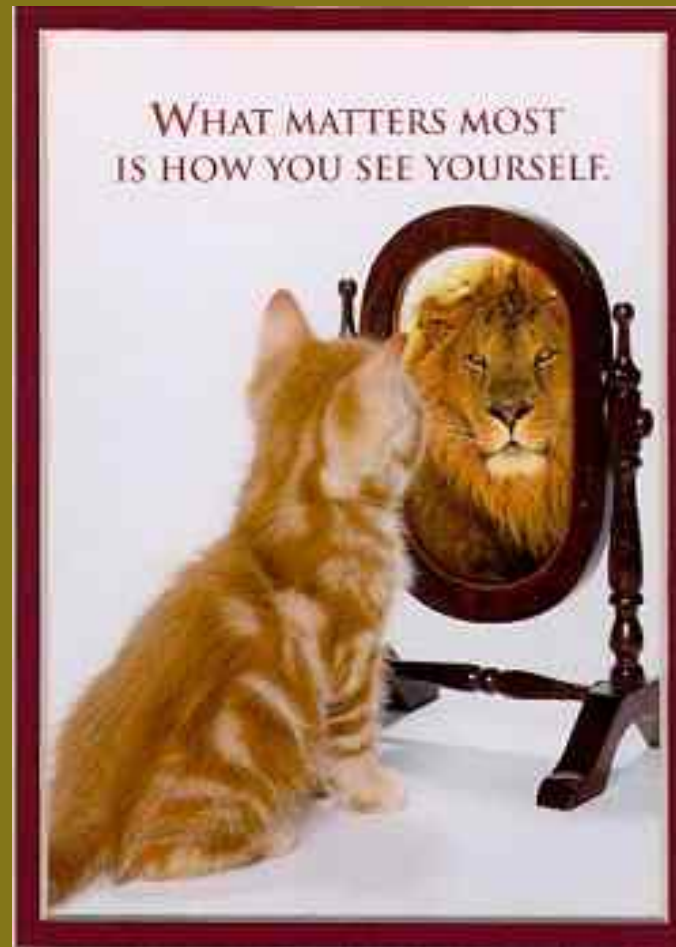


Concept and Sketch by Inventables Concept Studio





Imaginative Perception





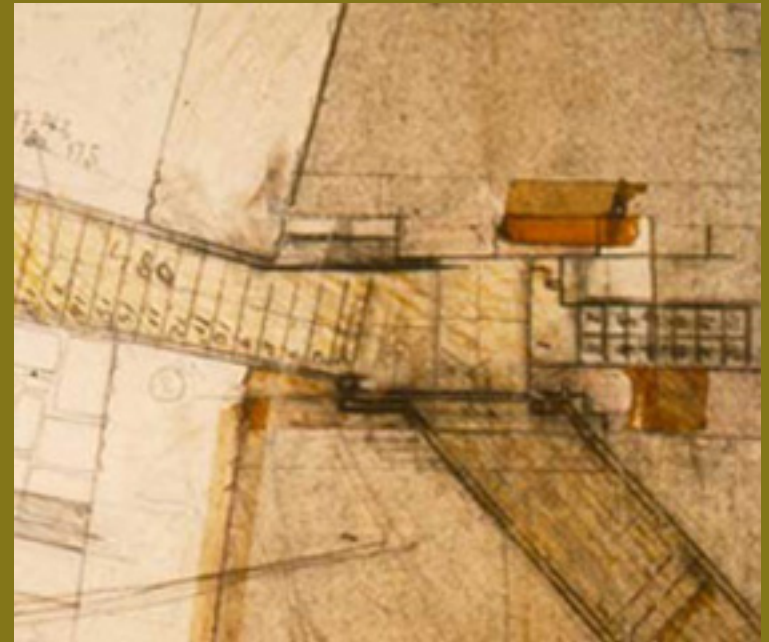
Imagination & Perception

- To be able to envision new and improved versions of those things that already exist.
- An ability to see the world around us and imaginatively transform the substance and meaning of what is there into new works.
- Perception of this character can be developed through practice and training.
- The training required to develop the ability to see what is really there is called education.
- The practice required to develop this ability is the course work you undertake in your design school curriculum.



Some Influences Carlo Scarpa

Work of poetic and romantic character



Paul Klee

a visionary genius who created a dream world through color and line



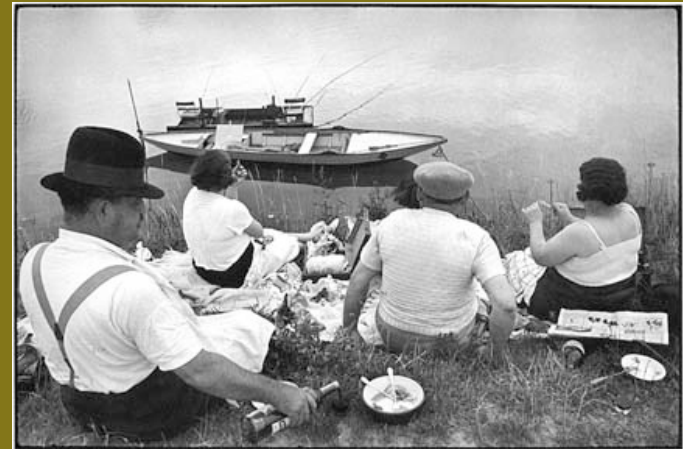
Charles & Ray Eames

a real 'team' : no pretention: a sense of humor: a great desire to 'see'



Henri Cartier Bresson

“for me the camera is a sketch book, an instrument of intuition and spontaneity, the master of the instant which, in visual terms, questions and decides simultaneously.”



Olivio Ferrari

A dedicated teacher at virginia tech, college of architecture and urban studies, 1965-1994.
He changed the lives of many people.

His tools were enthusiasm, energy, and a boundless belief in the virtues of good design.





Attention Grabbing Products

are all around us

- As a designer, an architect, a person aware of and interested in the physical world, products catch my attention.

The Vacuum Cleaner

Dust never sleeps. It accumulates silently and relentlessly. A thousand grains of rice spill on the kitchen floor and the vacuum swoops down, like a hawk on a mouse, and whoosh, they are gone!



Furniture

The world of design in micro



The Swiss Army Knife

A high level of craft, material expression, and a useful tool in a pocket sized object.

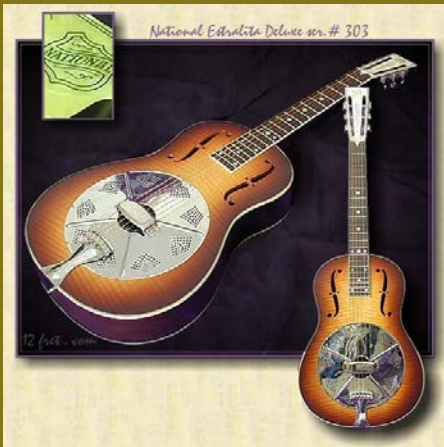


Guitars

(my collection)

Beautiful but difficult to learn.

Guitars are made in various forms, with varying structures, and of diverse materials.



Watches

Many visual formats for conveying to us what time it is, how much time has passed, when we need to leave.



Clocks

The things we all do take time. time management, how we use time, is a good skill to develop. A clock is a good tool to help us keep track of how much time we spend doing things. Clocks used to be more important, more needed, than they are today.



Fountain Pens

To use them requires that you to take part in a ritual, of filling with ink, cleaning, opening, closing, storing. They demand, like pets, attention.

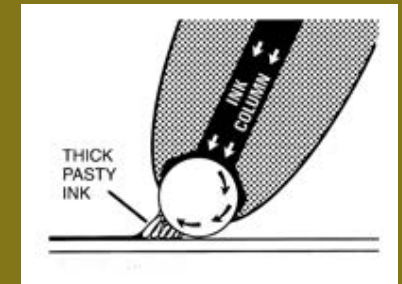
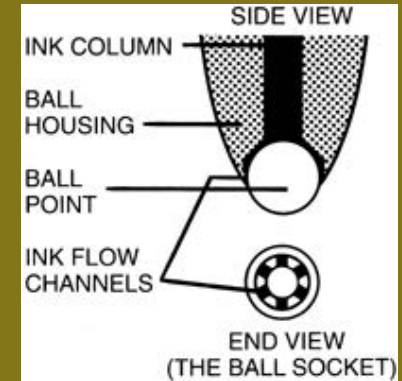
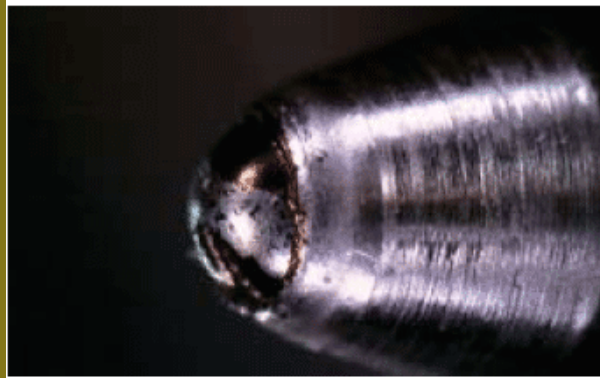


Why Fountain Pens?

- Fountain pens employ gravity, capillary action, surface tension.
- Liquid ink flows from a reservoir through a conduit to a nib onto the surface and then is absorbed into the body of the paper.
- This writing instrument demands that we attend to it, not take it for granted.
- Such rituals should be looked at as celebrations, not inconveniences.
- What is life about if not to enjoy the things we do?

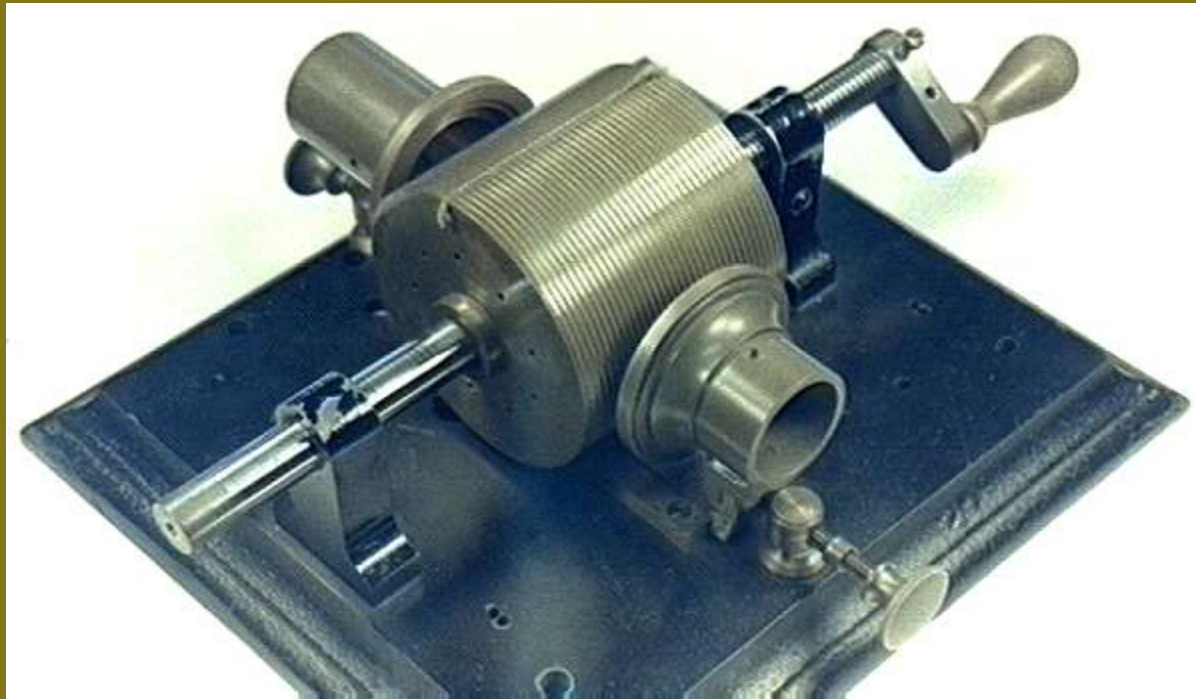
The Ball Point Pen

It has its place, is suppose. But it is not alongside a fountain pen. The essence of this writing implement is a greasy, slimy, viscous gunk that is at best a distant relative of real ink. For a visual person, a designer, an artist, a ball point must be avoided at all costs.

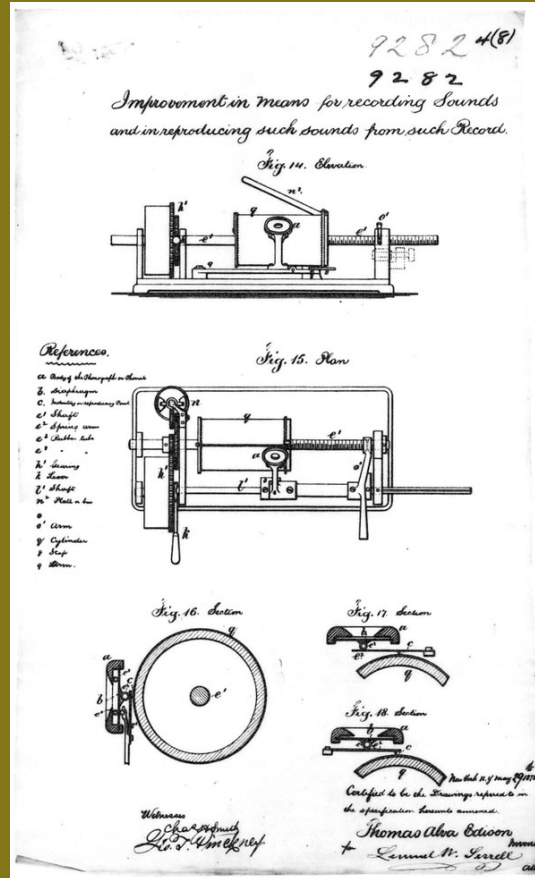


The First Phonograph

Prior to Mr. Edison's invention, music had to be performed, by musicians, right there in front of you, to be heard! No ipods, no car stereo, no AC/DC in the middle of the night coming from next door!



Mr. Edison's drawings of the first phonograph



Cameras

Hasselblad 501CM, NikonFM2, Nikkormat, Nikon d200, Argus 75 (my first camera)
A camera invites you to look closely at the world around you.





Anything Won't Do

- Designers have to be selective about the implements they use.
- Use beautiful things every day!
- Let your tools, your implements, have as much meaning and value to you as possible, not as little as possible.
- Do not settle for 'generic' qualities in the things you use.
- If we do not celebrate what we do, who else will?



‘Appreciation’ versus ‘liking’

- ‘Liking’ or ‘not liking’ can be a preemptive act, that severely limits the richness of your experience, your interaction, with a work of visual art or design.
- I find it is often more fulfilling to wait, not to ‘like’ or ‘not like’ something right away. let it reveal itself to you as you use it, interact with it, live with it.
- Appreciation is developed over time, with regular study, or interaction, with something or someone. Appreciation requires a high level of engagement.
- You come to ‘appreciate’ your swiss army pocket knife as it surprises you with its ability to meet the varied demands you present to it.
- You come to appreciate domus magazine because of its ability to inspire and inform you.

We have fouled up the concept of 'fun'

The concept of 'fun'

- People say 'let's go have fun.'
- I do not believe 'fun' is out there to be had, by itself.
- I think 'fun' is a result, not an activity.
- Doing something, like playing frisbee, or going shopping, or making a paper model, engages you, gives you something to do, to think about, and in doing so, is 'fun'.
- You have 'fun' as a result of doing something, presumably something of some merit.
- 'Fun' by itself does not exist, and should not exist, because if it did, then it would be like a drug, that simply poses as a reality.

Fabulous design work

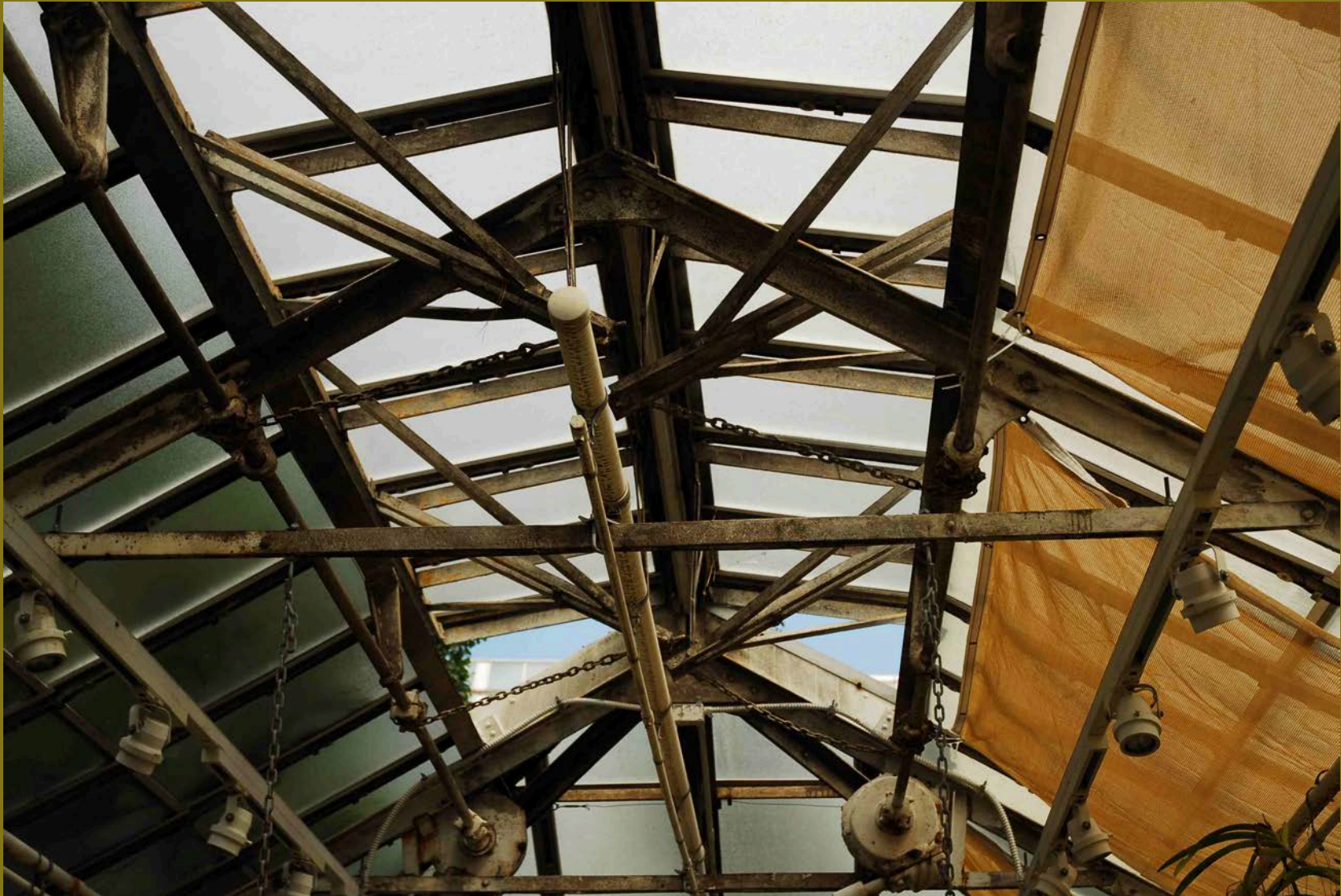
that cannot be ignored

Santiago Calatrava



Santiago Calatrava has created fascinating visual work at large, urban scales, as well as at intimate human scales





Revelation (as a human experience)

Through an *unreasonable* effort the world reveals itself to us

- I have been transformed by the activities and accompanying philosophies that I have engaged throughout my life.
- I have discovered that with a total, unswerving, commitment to an activity comes
- revelation!
- Revelation is an experience that makes the world understandable. It relieves anxiety, fear, arrogance, and cosmic doubt.
- Revelation makes possible confidence, enjoyment, productivity, humility, and respect.
- You can only truly respect someone when you understand what it is they do, and how hard it is to do what they do.
- My first twelve years in the world of designing were dedicated to design practice.
- My last thirty years have been dedicated to design education.
- I have been transformed from a design practitioner to a design educator. There is a big difference between the two.

- Both domains offer rich, life enhancing experiences. both domains are very real.
- Both domains demand a commitment, a level of energy, self motivation, imagination, a strong concept of quality, a substantial amount of knowledge, a range of skills, and a desire to celebrate everything we encounter through the transformational process of designing.
- If we do not celebrate what we do, who else will?

Never make anything that is 'fake'

- Making something that is 'fake' devalues what we do. Instead of making a fake thing, make something that is real, that does what it purports to do, that looks, expresses, and fulfills what it appears to do, in an elegant, vibrant, exciting, and good way.
- Ornament, and decoration can be wonderful components in an environment.
- A 'fake' column, a 'fake' door, a fake window, each degrade the possibility of finding meaning and value in a work of design.
- When you explore an idea, a thought, a possible form for something that you are working on, part of what you are doing is de-mystifying the existence of this thing. If you draw it in plan, section, elevation, axonometric, perspective, you can then see, really, how it could work, and what makes it good, interesting, and worth building.

- I discovered designing in blacksburg, virginia, when i was twenty-three years old. I spent four intense years working to find the meaning and the system of it all.
- Discovering designing changed my life because it validated many things that i had intuitively believed to be important and interesting.
- It was a turning point in my life, and it came about because of the intense commitment that i made to the undertaking, to designing, to the greater world of 'architecture' .
- I was a maniac, a zealot, and a true believer. I threw myself into it without concern for my mental balance because i believed in it.
- [Get my friend Camden to tell you about the 'One Hundred Trees' series he created; it is a powerful and beautiful set of personal, creative, elegant, and 'romantic' drawings.]

I have had several similar, but less life dominating, experiences, passions, in my life, and with each of them it has been the intensity of my commitment that made the pursuit and eventual attainment of competence, of understanding, of revelation, possible.

- For me, these have been (in my life' s chronology)
- Tennis: the salvation of my teenage years, and a really fine activity (it kept me from being a total dork in high school.)
- Architecture: the dynamo in my life (with a little 'a' that is, no state registration, no grey suit and tie required; just a fascination with the physical nature of the world)
- Cycling: a realm in which to discover dignity and nobility that you never knew existed
- Squash: a truly wonderful game that contains subtleties that are indescribable to a non-participant
- Acoustic guitar: a complex, mysterious, difficult, but beautiful thing
- each of these activities is a passageway into an entire world that is unknown to those who have not explored it.

- Each of these activities have presented themselves to me like oysters that keep a secret pearl.
- The initial struggle to achieve minimal capability yields no pearl at all.
- During the initial stages of exploration people say things like “tennis is no exercise”, “the guitar hurts my fingers too much”, “bike riding is boring”
- These are the remarks of someone who has not seen.
- What is waiting to be found is fantastic, but invisible until you rid yourself of the handicaps of being silly, petty, petulant, ignorant, unskilled, and insensitive.
- Slowly, slowly, if you proceed with a fierce dedication that ignores frustration, discomfort, and the bothersome sense that you are not any good at this stuff, at a moment when you least expect it, out of the rough hewn chunks of clumsy effort, a pearl is revealed, given to you; clear, concise, elevating. a tiny apotheosis.
- Suddenly things make sense, suddenly you understand, suddenly you feel like you know something that other people do not know.

- This feeling will not last long, so enjoy it, savor it, and then be prepared to go back to slogging along in pursuit of the next pearl.
- You will, however, be slogging along at a slightly higher level than you were before your moment of revelation.
- Complex, difficult activities do not reveal their secrets easily, or quickly; they only offer their pearls to those who make an unreasonably strong commitment.

- To become really good at a complex activity takes *an unreasonable amount of effort*, but once you are really, truly, good at it, so good that most people do not understand what you are doing, or how you can do it, no one can take it away from you.
- Once you are this good at something, you can offer it to others, and you can watch them move through the same process that you went through.
- You can then be a good teacher.
- Over time these experiences can be counted upon. You never do know when they are coming, but if you dedicate yourself to the activity, a pearl will be revealed. To become very good at something complex you need to accumulate several, if not many, pearls.

Celebrate what we do!

- Think, act, change the world!
- Make all kinds of things all the time.
- Discover how exciting you can be simply by being real; by being yourself.
- You can make the world a better place.
- Thank you very much for allowing me to share my thoughts with you.
- I encourage you to develop your own point of view, and to share it with others.

