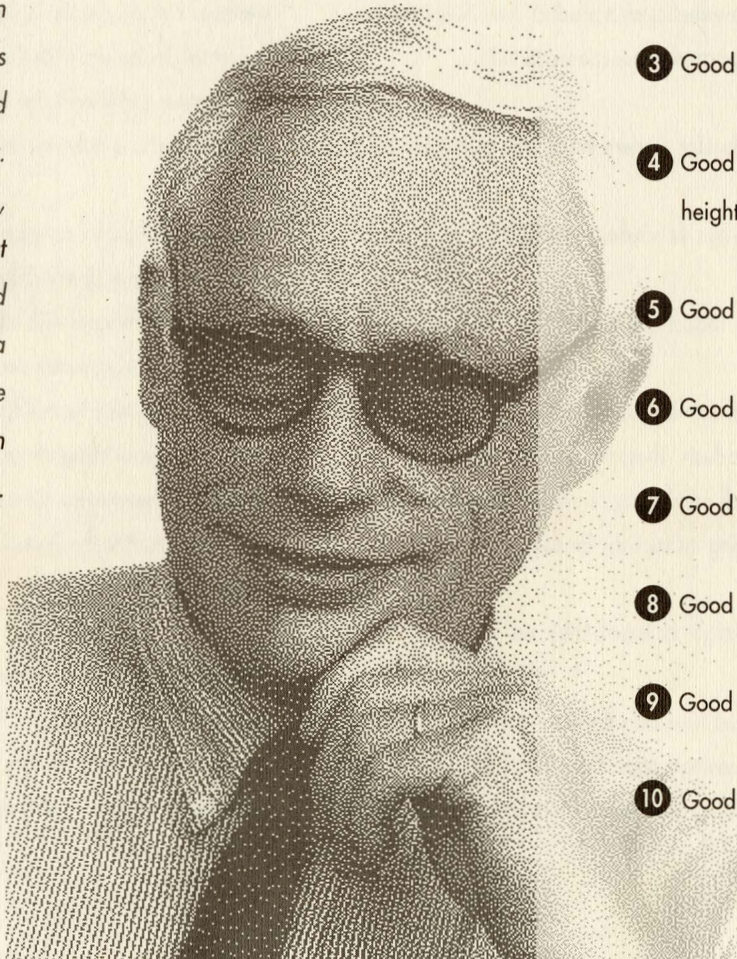


THE BRAUN DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

Dieter Rams

Braun of Germany, leaders in the design and manufacture of kitchen, shaving, oral and hair care appliances, is to take an aggressive new marketing approach in Southern Africa, and has appointed Gillette SA Ltd as their distributor. Professor Dr Dieter Rams, head of Braun Product Design, recently visited South Africa to attend a launch function where he outlined the Braun design philosophy.



The following basic hypotheses act as a means of orientation for my colleagues, my students and myself :

- 1 Good design is innovative
- 2 Good design enhances the usefulness of a product
- 3 Good design is aesthetic
- 4 Good design makes a product understandable and heightens the quality of self-explanation
- 5 Good design is unobtrusive
- 6 Good design is honest
- 7 Good design is enduring
- 8 Good design is consistent to the last detail
- 9 Good design is environmentally friendly
- 10 Good design is as little design as possible

According to these principles 'Design' is a product advantage which plays a decisive role in certain profitable and long-lasting marketing successes and facilitates entry into new markets. Worldwide we still have only few examples of this.

With obviously bad design which is primarily directed at the cynical exploitation of human weaknesses, which is superficial, arbitrary and only for show, one is not likely to achieve enduring success.

Good design is innovative

Innovation is a catchword nowadays, which is often used to mean spectacular novelties, which can be limited to exterior changes to the façade. Innovation thus becomes an end in itself. Most of the products I am and have been responsible for, have practically become prototypes because they are in their totality longlasting, and from both a technical and a design cost-benefit point of view, innovative.

Design must be seen here to be the coordinating factor, as it is important that all the factors remain in balance throughout the long development process through which a product has to go. This does not mean that in the future all

products must look the same as they do these days. Without sacrificing the design rules (but possibly by modifying them) the design of a product will reflect the present state-of-the-art with regard to technology, manufacturing and the necessity of using new materials.

Good design enhances the usefulness of a product

In my opinion an appliance is well designed when it is of optimal use. Design according to the function of an appliance is a result of an intensive and comprehensive interaction with the reality of use, life, needs, wishes and feelings of humans. Design may not reduce people to machines. For instance, a chair certainly has many other functions within a home than only to be sat upon. This means, then, that the design of consumer goods should fulfil more functions than the primary one, for example psychological functions, or that of fitting in with the rest of the individual environment of the user.

However, one can easily get lost in the search for complementary functions, and functions can become so extended that they cover the whole spectrum of every possible lifestyle. In design theory this can be enacted in all its varying components. But in design practice the designer has to decide anew with every product which functions he wants to take into consideration. There are no instant recipes for this. We must endeavour to sift out the relevant aspects by discussion with marketing, development and production teams, to reach a form

which successfully integrates complementary with primary functions.

The important things in this process, result from the picture we have of the people for whom we are designing this particular appliance. Products designed according to this principle differ from products which are designed according to other principles for the same consumers.

Good design is aesthetic

Because the aesthetics of a product, and its fascination, are intrinsic parts of its function and utility.

All this spectacular modern kitsch gets on my nerves!

Good design is understandable

It shows the product in a logical way.

The quality of self-explanation is practically non-existent in a lot of products. They are more or less 'design puzzles' which can hardly be solved without studying often frustrating instructions for use.

Good design is unobtrusive

During the last few years the meaning of design has become increasingly important. This is illustrated by the multitude of discussions on and around the subject. It also

shows that industry has far greater difficulty attaining clear, important product advantages by means of the classical areas such as reasonable prices, special technological performance or high quality.

In spite of its doubtless increase in importance, design has remained in the background until now. One reason for this outsider role is its problematic self-image. The central question is: is design art, applied art, or is it technology? With an eye to the future, there is only one answer in my opinion: industrial design is technology. A designer can only really design products after studying industrial design and with the necessary experience, competence and knowledge of the working methods. Everything else is only cosmetic.

Technological performance is increasingly demanded from the designer. Every design must be thought through and clarified in depth with all its construction, material and manufacturing requirements. 'Technology design' - conceptionally well-founded, comprehensive, consistent and professional design from start to finish of products - is becoming ever more necessary, more valuable and more important in the light of the above-mentioned questions.

And, in my opinion, consumer appliances are not least tools and should remain so. They should be able to recede, leaving people room for an individual, living environment. They are neither works of art nor cult

objects, neither status symbols nor window-dressing.

Good design is honest

People often complain that design too often attempts to cheat, i.e. to blind people to the real characteristics of a product, or at least to encourage the customer and user to self-deceit. In my opinion, designers have an educational task because they participate in social and cultural development and cannot deny this responsibility.

Good design is environmentally friendly, enduring and consistent

These aspects are about the responsibility which design has in the creation of a human environment. Good design watches out for durability, precision and takes the environment into consideration with regard to the material used and the maintenance required for a product. This idea of design is naturally in contrast with for example, those who see a SWATCH - the synthesis of watch and non-watch - as a liberation, namely the freedom to interchange or to throw away. However, I do not believe in self-fulfilment through consuming and throwing away. Soon this will be an academic discussion anyway, as the protection of the environment forces us to look for longlasting solutions.

The increasing importance of the protection of the environment, such as the effect of materials used or the considered use of energy and raw materials, is not without

influence on design. But I also refer to visual pollution. It has been my experience that this may result in a disturbance and impairment of our environment, as does pollution of the air, the soil or the water.

Good design is as little design as possible

Our only real chance is to return to simplicity. In my eyes, the most important design principle is to leave out everything which is unimportant and to thus highlight the important things. Simplicity in every respect. It is an important task - perhaps the most important one in a social sense - for the designer to help to reduce the chaos in which we are forced to live.

The biggest design deficit is in my opinion in the basics. The freedom to reflect how we can make use of technical advances. Of course, there isn't a simple answer to this, but here the attempt is made to question the real use of the achievements of this highly technical work. Especially, with a view to everyday products, this means questioning whether a new product is really necessary. Is the old product which has proved itself, still effective, or is an improvement reasonable?

Final comments

We have grown used to the idea that a world is approaching in which technology will do everything for us and make it possible for humans to make mistakes

without suffering the penalty. What we need is a much better understanding of technology. As this belief is most common in those people who confuse language with culture, we must consider where the lack of culture actually lies. True culture is not arrogant but modest and honest. But modesty is very difficult to find!

It has always been easier for us humans to imagine the negative rather than the positive. If you know Dante's *Divine Comedy* you will agree with me when I say that the sections about Hell are much better than those about Heaven.

The sum of unforced errors is indeed great, and so many are avoidable. This is a field which we can immediately cultivate and which could produce a good harvest, if we really want it to. The question is how badly do we want it to?

If we didn't pay so much attention to prefabricated opinions, prejudices, irrelevancies and gloomy fears which seem rational, but are irrational when we contemplate decisions requiring reasoning and facts, things could be a great deal better. It is difficult to improve morals. But we would have taken a huge step forward if thinking could be improved, and design is pre-eminently a thinking process.