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The quarterly publication of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), *Innovation* provides in-depth coverage of design issues and long-term trends while communicating the value of design to business and society at large.

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Cover photo: Cat in the Hat at Universal Studios Orlando by Tucker Viemeister, FIDSA

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BIG. STICKY. WICKED PROBLEMS

Bodum

For the past 10 years, I have been teaching a class on design at Northwestern as part of the Master of Product Design and Development program. For the last six years, I have been using the text *A Whole New Mind* by Daniel Pink. In it Pink foretells the coming of the conceptual age, an age when right-brainers (read: creative types) will rule the world. When published in 2006, it was pretty provocative stuff. Interestingly, it's now become time to retire the text. I am finding classes are not so impressed with the newness of this argument anymore. For the last 10 years, design has been cropping up in so many unexpected places.

Design is familiar now. From "Project Runway" to the "Apprentice," the act of designing is emerging into the mainstream once again. Yes, once again. In the 1930s, in the midcentury and now today, design has enjoyed golden ages in which its popularity rises, and it is discovered anew.

The great part about this phenomenon is that with each rebirth design's reach and influence expands. Entire companies based on design as a strategy emerge; Method, Herman Miller, OXO, Bodum and Nikon were born this way. They are all excellent examples of companies who use design as a business strategy. Additionally, design can be used to change the game; think the Whirlpool Duet, the Oral B toothbrush, every Dyson product or the Wii Fit—all set the bar at a new standard. And at times, the whole of the experience and brand of an offering is enabled through design: Virgin, Nike, Nespresso.

These examples give credence to the argument that design is not exclusively about the artifact; in fact, it never has been. Objects support experiences. As Jim Couch, IDSA, this issue's guest editor eloquently points out, "Design is so much more than materials, aesthetics, form, shape, function, typefaces, processes, color, texture, branding, ergonomics and everything else that goes into the realization and creation of a product. Design is about com-

Virgin Atlantic

municating meaning and affording desired experience."

I remember RichardsonSmith; Years ago it was the biggest thing going in design consulting, the company everybody wanted to work for. Before there ever was an IDEO or fuseproject, there was RichardsonSmith, and at RichardsonSmith there was this star designer. Impossibly talented and really great at giving form to objects, Jim Couch was a rock star. Jim grew as design grew, and in the last two decades, both have expanded their reach. It is our privilege to celebrate this thinking in this issue, which in turn celebrates alternative thinking: design in places where you don't expect it to be and design used in ways that aren't obvious.

Herman Miller's Hub Space by David Allan Pesso and Eric Chan

Earlier this month the design world lost a great designer, educator and friend, Shaun Jackson, IDSA. He died from injuries received in a small-plane crash. Losing Shaun is a huge loss for us, his family and everyone he influenced so meaningfully throughout his career. He was one of the very best at finding design where you don't expect it, the classic example of a design mind not defined by narrow boundaries. He designed products, designed businesses, designed conferences and, through a dedication to education, designed designers themselves. As this issue celebrates the multidisciplinary reach of design, it celebrates Shaun and all designers like him.

Designers and design thinkers are not defined by boundaries, and as Jim Couch suggests, the designers profiled in this issue are "individuals who are thinking beyond the artifact. Those who see design's potential as limitless. Those who are taking design thinking and applying it to big sticky wicked problems." These are the best of all of us, change agents who are fearless in accepting challenges and boldly imaginative enough to think and believe in the impossible truth: that design can and does change and shape the world and always for the better. It is not our what or how, it's our why and its limits are endless.

—Mark Dziersk, FIDSA, Innovation *executive editor*
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HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

As a child I often saw faces and images hidden in various inanimate objects: wood floors, bubble baths, shower tiles, Oriental rugs, baseball gloves, lamp shades, car seats, boulders, cracked asphalt, coffee beans, stones, bricks, clouds, tree bark. I'd see Vikings with horned helmets, Roman gladiators, smiley faces, ghostly faces, birthday candles, presidential caricatures, princesses, airplanes, tanks, big-headed aliens, demented squirrels with dilated eyes, oversized teeth and top hats driving racing boats and other comical, nonsensical things. Things that clearly weren't there. At least not by design or by intent.

When I'd try to point them out, my parents, siblings and friends would strain their faces, squint their eyes, slant their heads and, after a few seconds, proclaim, "You're nuts. I don't see anything." Initially I didn't care; I couldn't be held responsible for their lack of imagination. As I aged, I continued to share my interpretive skills, but 99 times out of 100 it was to no avail. People became increasingly annoyed and occasionally displeased with my invocations. If we went to my cousins' or grandparents' houses, before we got out of the car I was reminded to "behave," code word for keep your imagination to yourself. Upon hearing my bizarre interpretations, my friends would say, "You're weird." I took these reactions as an acknowledgment of my uniqueness, with a dose of self-consciousness. Eventually, though, I stopped sharing my visions. What was the use?

In college, I was delighted to discover others with similar interpretive talents. We were all a bunch of proud weirdos—definitely not part of the mainstream. Midway through a freshman foundation photography class, we got an assignment to discover and capture images hidden in inanimate objects. After hearing the assignment, you could see numerous heads snap up and look around with furrowed brows of confusion. But for the weirdos, we knew exactly what was being asked. I was ecstatic. Finally I had confirmation. I wasn't insane after all.

When I graduated, I landed my dream job with one of the most progressive design consultancies at the time: RichardsonSmith, based in Columbus, OH. We were doing some really amazing, uncommon things at the time: adding cognitive psychologists, industrial systems engineers, anthropologists, information designers and mechanical and electrical engineers; experimenting and developing design vocabulary languages for NCR, Xerox and Kodak; and generally talking about affordances, semantics and communications theory. It was the early '80s, and it felt like the age of enlightenment. During that experience, I came to realize that design is not exclusively about the artifact. The artifact exists only to support the experience. Design is so much more than materials, aesthetics, form, shape, function, typefaces, processes, color, texture, branding, ergonomics and everything else that goes into the realization and creation of a product. Design is about communicating meaning and affording desired experiences. How the artifact makes people feel is as important (if not more) than what the product actually is. This was pure heresy for an industrial designer, yet at the same time it was impossible

By Jim Couch, IDSA
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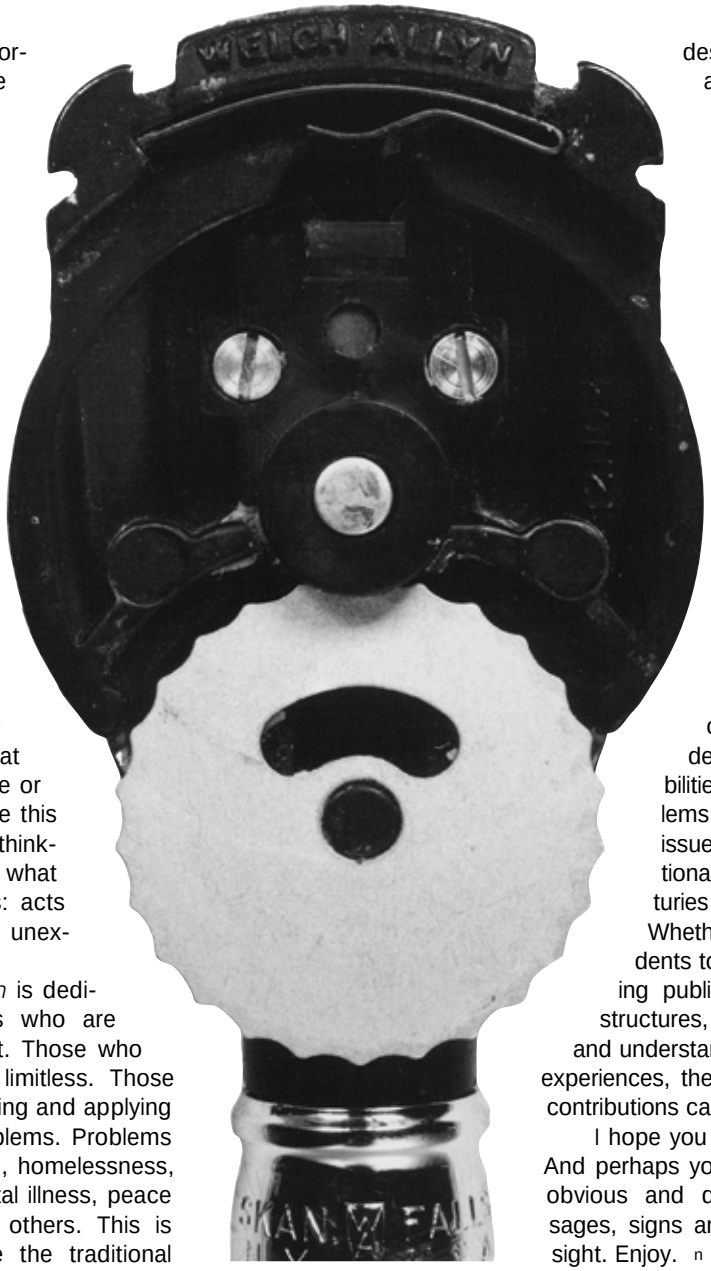
Jim Couch is vice president of client services at Lextant, an ideal experience firm that helps clients understand their customers' desired experiences and bring those insights to life to help inform and inspire great design. Before Lextant, he held numerous positions for various design consultancies and a medical-device startup firm. He is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati.

to argue against it. I was fortunate and grateful to have had that experience working at RichardsonSmith. It opened my eyes to the broad interpretative potential of design.

Fast-forward 30 years. It's shocking how slowly new ideas migrate, especially radical concepts that challenge the status quo. Nonetheless, a new era is blooming, not only in the design community, but also in business, society, education and government. People are fed up with inefficiencies and the lack of creativity, and businesses and governments are at their wits' end. The options? Continue with the same rational processes that got us here in the first place or try a new approach—maybe this new thing called "design thinking." And that is exactly what we're beginning to witness: acts of design cropping up in unexpected places.

This issue of *Innovation* is dedicated to those individuals who are thinking beyond the artifact. Those who see design's potential as limitless. Those who are taking design thinking and applying it to big sticky wicked problems. Problems such as water conservation, homelessness, pollution, child abuse, mental illness, peace and public policy, among others. This is not to judge or denigrate the traditional designers who are passionate, driven and committed to making incredible commercial products and systems for everyday consumption. On the contrary, I applaud you and encourage you to keep up the good fight. Your courage and perseverance is needed to help advance business and industry and to make society a more enjoyable and beautiful place.



Francois & Jean ROBERT photography

However, I'm excited about celebrating this emerging camp of designers—the restless, inquisitive, won't-take-no-for-an-answer and no-problem-is-too-big provocateurs. The ones who are applying their design knowledge and sensibilities to look at the root problems plaguing society, identifying issues that have become institutionalized over decades or centuries of rational-oriented thinking. Whether it's teaching medical students to think like designers, rewriting public policy, devising new tax structures, enhancing communication and understanding, or creating new value experiences, there is no place a designer's contributions can't be realized.

I hope you find these articles inspiring. And perhaps you, too, will see beyond the obvious and discover unexpected messages, signs and patterns hidden in plain sight. Enjoy. n

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