

Michele De Lucchi :

The visibility of recycling in design

I believe that the theme of ecology and the proper use of materials has strongly affected the designers of my generation. I also believe that we are all eager to express our concern for the health of our world and its few remaining resources. Today it is a burning issue, prompting many designers to ask themselves what should be done in order to draw attention to our dwindling natural resources.

Design is much more than simply giving good form to objects and selecting materials that go well together: it is a system of communication, a means of expression, a commercial tool and above all a form of education. I like the idea that design can focus attention on the quality of an object; I like the idea of design enhancing the awareness that aesthetic and functional quality, and first and foremost potential re-use, are an integral part of every object. Farmers are familiar with a nice analogy for this concept: a fine, straight branch from a tall tree is first used as a sturdy stake to support a vine. When no longer needed for that purpose, it does duty as a post in a fence, after which it may prop up a broken-legged table, serve as a rung of a ladder or as the handle of a hammer before ending up as firewood, useful to the last. Seen in this light, design has much to give, there being no need to wait for new, unusual and beautiful recycled materials in order to design unusual and beautiful products: with simple details, with a few, well-made things and without squandering resources, it is possible to capture new attention and generate a new sensibility for the meaning of an object while bearing in mind the longevity of its materials.

Not all materials are important and necessary, though.

I would point out that the most beautiful material of all - the most special, precious, rare, ductile, flexible and recyclable - is not plastic, aluminum or any kind of metal or resin; nor is it any ultra-technological compound still to be invented. It is space, the air we breathe and through which we walk, which we buy and sell and model as if it were wax. As long as it's there we've nothing to worry about, but when it's gone we shall be in a sorry state, because it can't be produced in a factory.

There is another precious material which is inevitably slipping away and which we use very badly indeed. Sadly, it cannot be recycled (even though it is worth a fortune). I am speaking of time, the hours and the days we waste in making

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mistakes and acting dangerously. Not only days and hours frittered away, but days and hours spent wreaking damage.

Paradoxically, air and time are neither solid nor tangible materials, but we have been squandering them from the very beginning, as if they possessed material quality and were hence recuperable. Above all, they possess sensorial, spiritual qualities, if such things may still be spoken of.

Michele De Lucchi (Italy) belongs to the younger generation of internationally renowned Italian architects. He was a driving force with his group 'Cavart' in the years of Radical Design, and co-founder of 'Memphis'. Today his activities range from industrial design, furniture and interior design, to architecture. Among his clients are Arflex, Artemide, Kartell, Mandarina Duck, Pelikan, Deutsche Bank, Matsushita and Vitra. His most important architectural projects are built in Japan, Germany and Italy. As a permanent consultant for Olivetti, De Lucchi is responsible for the design of all Olivetti products. His international awards include the 'Design-Innovationen' 1992 (Germany) and Compasso d'Oro 1991 (Italy).