100 Great Designs of Modern Times

Revisiting IIT Institute of Design’s 1959 Research Study in 2019

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We think Jay Doblin* would be happy.

*Jay Doblin was the director of IIT Institute of Design (ID) in 1959 and conducted the research for the original survey, “The 100 ‘Best-Designed’ Products.”
We think Jay Doblin* would be happy.

Design has grown significantly with respect to its impact in the world at large and its importance to organizations and industries.

*Jay Doblin was the director of IIT Institute of Design (ID) in 1959 and conducted the research for the original survey, “The 100 ‘Best-Designed’ Products.”
Part I

ID’s POV
POV // Good Design

1. ADAPTABLE
   ADAPTS to the needs of users.

2. EQUITABLE
   ADDRESSES environmental and societal issues.

3. USABLE
   PERFORMS well and brings delight.

4. IMPACTFUL
   DEMONSTRATES impact through adoption, scale, or growth.

5. TRANSFORMATIONAL
   CHANGES the known.
1. Design has graduated from “value-adding” to “value-driving.”

1959
In the mid-century era, design was as an afterthought, the cherry on top.

2019
Today, we’ve witnessed design emerge as core to the value prop.
2. The 1959 and 2019 lists look at design from two opposing historic vantage points: the peak of planned obsolescence and the peak of the disruption economy.

1959

*In Doblin’s day, design was nearly synonymous with style.* Post-war consumption and the growth of the American middle class fueled the notion that design stimulated repeat consumption.

2019

*Today, design accompanies disruption.* In the wake of the digital revolution, design's been thrust into the role of disruptor, forcing and helping monolithic industries (news media, automotive, healthcare, etc.) adapt.
3. The definition of design has expanded, from emphasizing design as a **noun** to design as a **verb**.

1959
*n.* “the arrangement of elements or details in a product” (i.e. Design Department)

2019
*v.* “to devise for a specific purpose, function, or end” (i.e. Design Consultancy)
Design for the **few** (e.g., White Affluent American Middle Class)

Design for the **many** (e.g., International Audience)
In sum, we’re evaluating design differently:

From designing for **delight** to designing for **efficacy**.

From designing “**how it looks**” to designing “**how it works**.”

From **designing artifacts** to **designing experiences**.
1. **Brands** retain their status as public-facing purveyors of “good” design.

2. Design remains intertwined with *industrialized economies*.

3. Although challenged, the bias toward **physical artifacts** remains.

4. Design leadership, regretfully, remains mostly **white, male-dominated** and *Euro-centric*.

5. The **“form factor”** remains an essential ingredient.
Part II

Survey Respondents
Survey // Respondents

1/3 Women

2/3 Men
Survey // Respondents

86% Individuals

14% Teams
Survey // Respondents

- Practitioners: 54%
- Influencers: 23%
- Educators: 23%
Part III

Comparative Analysis
Countries (1959)

North America - 72
South America - 1
Europe - 21
Nordic - 6
Countries (1959 + 2019)

1959
- North America: 72
- Europe: 21
- Nordic: 6
- South America: 1

2019
- North America: 57
- Europe: 16
- Nordic: 13
- East Asia: 12
- Africa: 1

Legend:
- White: North America
- Green: South America
- Purple: Europe
- Blue: Nordic
- Orange: East Asia
- Yellow: Africa
Both lists remain US-centric and Euro-centric //
The US remains dominant, but its share has declined.

2019 exhibits greater geographic representation //
16 countries are represented in 2019, compared to 11 in 1959.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1959</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
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Both lists exhibit a bias toward the contemporary // 62% of 1959’s “best designs” were developed in the 15 years prior to the list’s publication, compared to 34% of 2019’s “best designs.”

We reflect less positively on the post-war boom // Doblin’s list comprised 62 designs developed between 1945–1960. Today, just 15 designs from the same period are represented.
Design was nearly synonymous with product design in 1959. Doblin’s list consists almost entirely of products, with the exception of just two designs.

An expanding definition of design in 2019. Our notion of design has broadened to include services (29%), interfaces (2%), graphics (4%), ecological interventions (1%), and architecture (1%).
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>Raymond Loewy Assoc.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Henry Dreyfuss, IKEA, Alvar + Aino Aalto, Ferdinand Porsche, Massimo + Lella Vignelli</td>
<td>Paul McCobb, Marcello Nizzoli, George Nelson, General Motors</td>
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<td>Jon W. Hauser, Henry Dreyfuss, Eero Saarinen, Charles Eames, Carl Otto, Alvar Aalto</td>
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Apple has replaced Raymond Loewy and Associates // Apple is today’s most influential design-led company.

Alvar Aalto and Henry Dreyfuss // Aalto and Dreyfuss are the only designers that contributed two designs in both 1959 and 2019.

## Comparable Designs

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* Indicates identical design was featured on both lists.
Industry // NASDAQ

1959

2019
Industry // NASDAQ

2019

Internet Services 14
Consumer Good 10
Housewares 6
Toy 3
Transport 3
Photography 2
Publishing 2
Logistics 2

Consumer Electronics 7
Furniture 8
Automotive 4
Clothing 4
Feminine Hygiene 2
Info. Tech 2
Lighting 2

Computer 7
Healthcare - 2
Aerospace - 2

Service System 3
Software 1
Biotech 1
Fin tech 1
Office Good 3

Electronic Gaming
Pharmaceuticals
Posthetics
Appliance

1959

Automotive 18
Consumer Good 14
Housewares 7
Information Technology

Furniture 18
Appliance 12

Photography 4
Writing Electronic - 4
Lighting - 4
Weapons 2

Transportation - 2
Graphic Design - 1
Office Good - 1

Aerospace - 2
Architecture 1
Toy 1
The internet changed everything // “Internet-based Services” emerged as the top category in 2019 while “Consumer Goods” held on in second place.

Less interest in cars, appliances, and furniture // Three of the dominant categories in 1959 suffered significant shortfalls in 2019.

Greater industry variety // The 2019 list represents 33 different industries compared to just 19 in 1959.

Incremental gains in gender and diversity representation // Female designers went from 1 to 5, and “Feminine Products” emerged as an industry. Charles Harrison was the only black designer on either list. (Today, black designers make up less than 3% of the design industry.)
Part IV

Top 25 Designs
“No other design object has changed the world in recent history—or, one could argue, the last 100 years—more than the iPhone. From a longevity and cradle-to-cradle standpoint, I obviously have major issues with it, but the fact remains, the iPhone is the highest-impact device of our times and has transformed not just how we communicate, but how we live.”

_iPhone_

Apple (Jonathan Ive), 2007

Spencer Bailey, Phaidon + The Slowdown
“This product changed the way we understand and use computers. The Macintosh was not the first personal computer, nor was it the first one with a graphical user interface, but it was the first complete product that took all these ideas and more into a complete package. It became a computer one could understand and use using both language and vision, typing and drawing. It changed the way we relate to a computer.”

Johan Redstrom, Umeå University
Google Search Engine

Google (Larry Page, Sergey Brin, + Scott Hassan), 1997

“Google put a minimalist, insanely powerful interface on the entire internet, empowering all of us to find anything and everything within the vast Web universe. This force-magnifying access to such a broad and deep collection of information has created a step change in human evolution.”

Jason Ring, Uber

“Just type in where you want to go or what you want to know in one simple box.”

David Kelley, IDEO
Eames DAR Chair

Herman Miller (Ray + Charles Eames), 1948 - 1950

“Launched to the market in 1950, the Eames plastic armchair and plastic side chair created a new, highly customizable typology that has become widespread in the six decades since. Not only are the chairs long-lasting; they’re also beautiful. I rarely use the word “timeless” when talking about design, but with the Eames chair, it’s an apt description.”

Spencer Bailey, Phaidon + The Slowdown

“Free-flowing, ergonomic.”

Jamshyd Godrej, Godrej
Sony Walkman TPS-L2
Sony (Norio Ohga), 1979

“Sony’s portable cassette player changed listening habits by enabling people to listen to music on the move, adding a personal soundtrack to your everyday life.”

Bas van de Poel, Space 10

“Changed the concept of listening to music.”

Anthony Dalby, Lego
**O XO Good Grip Peeler**

**O XO (Sam Farber + Smart Design), 1990**

“Perhaps the best example of inclusive design, this peeler and the Good Grips line of innovations shows that design made more accessible to all is also better design for everyone.”

Brandon Schauer, Capital One

“Showed that there is a place for good ergonomics and aesthetic design in the otherwise utilitarian kitchen tools world.”

Carole Bilson, Design Management Institute
Uber RideShare

Uber, 2009

“Simplicity, convenience, and a seamless experience. By truly identifying the ‘pain points’ of taxi travel, and designing a great experience, they disrupted an industry and evolved how we move today.”

Mark Buchalter, Phillips

“Uber brought the gig economy to a global scale and created a new paradigm for seamless service design.”

Logitech Design Team, Logitech
“Netflix transitioned the world into a new era of video streaming and redefined how video content is created and distributed.”

Logitech Design Team, Logitech

“The rise of Netflix has given television a run for its money, encouraged Millennials to do away with cable, and threatened major networks NBC and FOX to the effect that the networks built their own platform, HULU, to provide streaming of their library of content.”

Frog Design Team, Frog Design
Lego Building Blocks

Lego (Hillary Fisher Page), 1939

“Lego would be first on my list in terms of the power of a few simple forms to unlock the imagination of so many generations. I can’t imagine a single other product that comes close to the impact that Lego has had over the last 100 years.”

Robert Fabricant, Dalberg Design

“Building Blocks to make your imagination and fantasies come to life. Super for development of kids and a different means to express your “design’ than text or drawing. I spend hours with it when young.”

Ena Voûte, TU Delft
iPod

Apple (Jonathan Ive), 2007

“It revolutionized a category with a closed system, and propelled the music industry forward.”

José Manuel dos Santos, Signify

“Revolutionized the way media is accessed and consumed.”

Hitachi Team, Hitachi
Google Maps

Google (Where 2 Technologies), 2005

“Where other digital products have transformed communication and commerce, Google Maps has fundamentally altered our relationship with the physical world. Navigating the environment has been critical to human progress for millennia, and Google Maps provides the most powerful, flexible and adaptive navigation product the world has ever known. You know a product is great when even Apple sings your praises.”

Jason Gaikowski, VMLY&R
Apollo 11 Spacecraft

NASA, 1969

“On July 20, 1969, the first steps by human beings were taken on another planetary body. The Apollo 11 spacecraft was an integral part of the Lunar Landing Mission, driving monumental achievements in science, technology, engineering, and math. The landing arguably became one of the most important moments in human history, as NASA showed what we are capable of if we put our minds and resources together.”

Tanner Woodford, Design Museum of Chicago
“There are few designs as simple and omnipresent as Noguchi’s Akari paper lamps, which have been copied to death by this point—most prolifically by Ikea. One could argue that the Akari lamps, which Noguchi presented at the 1986 Venice Art Biennale, are indeed artworks, making them among the most widely disseminated art objects in the world. With the lamps, Noguchi brought together a centuries-old traditional Japanese technique with modern technology, and did so in the most beautiful of ways.”

Spencer Bailey, Phaidon + The Slowdown
MacBook Pro
Apple (Jonathan Ive), 2006

“It simply changed every part of our lives.”

Yongqi Lou, Tongji University
Post-Its
3M (Spencer Silver and Arthur Fry), 1977

“Extremely versatile, cheap, and useful tool. Design thinking sessions couldn’t happen without them.”

Carole Bilson, Design Management Institute

“Still very much used by me being a visual person that recollects what needs doing by making it visible.”

Ena Voûte, TU Delft
747 “Jumbo Jet” Airliner

Boeing (Joe Sutter), 1970

“The first commercial airliner made travel to faraway places possible and relatively painless. My personal favorite is the Boeing 747, liked by most people when they first saw it, and part of my work history.”

David Kelley, IDEO

“Making travel easier and bringing the world together while setting the table for Space Exploration.”

Nathan Van Hook, Nike
SX-70 Polaroid Camera
Kodak (James Gilber Baker and Edwin Herbert Land), 1972

“While Kodak promised ‘You press the button, we do the rest,’ with its first-ever consumer camera, this product put the entire factory into the palm of your hand, recasting photography as a complete end-to-end experience.”

Brandon Schauer, Capital One

“It was so easy to use and came with tips that could make anyone be or feel like an expert photographer.”

Barbara Barry, Mayo Clinic
Model S

Tesla (Franz von Holzhausen), 2012

“Range, beauty of design, drives multiple innovations over existing automobiles.”

Nik Rokop, IIT Stuart School of Business

“It transformed the retail automobile into an exponentially more intelligent and efficient high-performance machine while reducing its environmental impact—potentially at enormous scale.”

Jason Ring, Uber
Model 3210
Nokia (Alastair Curtis), 1999

“Freed the world from location based communication allowing people to take and answer calls from wherever they liked. It set the bar for size, battery life and robustness (people still use it today). It was also awarded the product of the Millennium and was the first phone to sell past the 100 million mark.”

Anthony Dalby, Lego

“The best-selling mobile phone that appeared for the communication of the modern people before the release of the iPhone.”

Jooyun Kim, Hongik University
**Savoy Vase**  
*Iittala (Alvar and Aino Aalto), 1937*

“Holds flowers similar to what a human hand would do. Beautiful full or empty.”

*Renée Cheng, University of Washington*

“The Alvar Aalto Vase is one of the world’s most famous glass objects. Each and every vase in the Alvar Aalto Collection continues to be mouth blown at the Iittala factory in Finland and comes in a wide range of colors and sizes. The Collection is a staple of modern Scandinavian design and Iittala’s most iconic series.”

*Fiskars Team, Fiskars Group*
Hue Lighting System

Phillips (Signify), 2012

“Light points are the network for communication, hidden in a light bulb, but capable of much more.”

Ena Voûte, TU Delft

“It effectively changed the way personal lighting was perceived and introduced color lighting into homes. “

José Manuel dos Santos, Signify
“Until Apps, phones were full of things manufacturers decided you needed. Then the App store let you decide what you needed.”

Anthony Dalby, Lego

“With the App Store, Apple pays developers handsomely to create ever-greater apps that make this all possible. All this is refined by a principled, curatorial force of nature that makes us all feel inspired and optimistic that life is perpetually getting better.”

Jason Ring, Uber
“Amazing to think that today instead of going to Tower Records and looking at a few newly released albums, we now have access to every song ever recorded and all you have to do is ask for it.”

David Kelley, IDEO

“Spotify brought the personalization of audio content to a new level and pioneered the discovery of content seamlessly through shared curated playlists.”

Logitech Design Team, Logitech
Prime
Amazon (Jeff Bezos), 2005

“Jeff Bezos changed the way we shop, publish and read through his software design and warehouse system. Amazon Prime’s two-day shipping policy even has the US Postal Service making deliveries on Sundays, a once sacred day for government agencies to close.”

Anonymous

“Press a button and get almost anything delivered to your door, without paying for shipping.”

Jason Ring, Uber
Muji Rice Cooker

Muji (Naoto Fukasawa), 2014

“The design of [Muji’s] “brand universe” and all its dimensions show a subtle and strong systemic coherence.”

Alok Nandi, IxDA

“Simple, tactile feedback.”

Helen Tong, IxDA
Part V

Designs 26 - 100
“Because staying in the home of a local exponentially increases the learning potential of travel. Airbnb experiences typically cost less for travellers, and they help everyday people earn money in a flexible way.”

Jason Ring, Uber
“Intricate interaction design that addresses the complex problem of democratizing and sharing knowledge.”

Barbara Barry, Mayo Clinic
“As a born and raised New Yorker, I would not be working as a designer if not for Vignelli’s ground-breaking work on the NYC subway system, one of the most powerful and ubiquitous civic service experiences on the planet. Though not strictly a product, the cumulative result of all the different elements of the identity was to take something as dynamic and amorphous as the NYC commute and transform it into something that feels like one.”

Robert Fabricant, Dalberg Design
iOS
Apple, 2007

“Pluggable platform with (probably) well-balanced democratic contribution and quality control. Also, a decent user experience that even babies can figure out without being taught.”

Hitachi Design Team, Hitachi
Shinkansen
Japanese National Railways, 1964

“The high-speed train is the symbol of a combination of multiple expertise of multiple design skills. Its impact on the planet shows that 'responsible design' and high tech and sustainable environment should be possible with new behaviours.”

Alok Nandi, Architempo
WeChat
Tencent (Zhang Xiaolong), 2011

“An app [that] integrates so many daily mobile applications, makes our life much easier.”

Yongqi Lou, Tongji University
Nest

Nest Labs (Tony Fadell), 2011

“Because the Nest ecosystem makes your home come to life with intelligence, in a highly integrated, easy-to-use way.”

Jason Ring, Uber
606 Shelving System
Vitsoe (Dieter Rams), 1960

“This is one of the most—if not *the most*—functional and well-built designs I can think of. It fits into practically any interior, and truly lasts a lifetime. Like the Eames chair and Noguchi's Akari lamps, it's a timeless creation, one that is of clean design and impeccable quality.”

Spencer Bailey, Phaidon + The Slowdon
Skype

Skype, 2003

“The ability to connect visually anytime and anyplace furthering opportunities for stronger connection and social human experience.”

Kathleen Brandenburg, IA Collaborative
Modern Classics
Penguin (Jan Tschichold), 1952

“The decision of the British publisher Allen Lane to reproduce great writing in the inexpensive, easily portable form of a paperback book was a key catalyst of social mobility and self-improvement in the 20th century. Lane insisted that each book should cost no more than a packet of cigarettes, and must fit in a typical man's jacket pocket. From a graphic design perspective, the archetypal Penguin paperback is the one devised by the German typographer Jan Tschichold as Penguin's head of design from 1947 to 1949.”

Alice Rawsthorn
“Inspired by the need for safety, the drug delivery system was reformed around creating confidence in key consumer moments — it’s not a pill bottle as much as it is a system.”

Brandon Schauer, Capital One
Mobike
Beijing Mobile Bike Technology, 2015

“Bridges the gap of the 'last kilometer.'”

Yongqi Lou, Tongji University
Round Thermostat

Honeywell (Henry Dreyfuss), 1953

“The seamless marriage of information and interaction into a unified design of unprecedented simplicity long before the rise of Apple. Dreyfuss insisted on the power of design to bridge engineering complexity with consumer taste as a means of elevating the lives of middle class.”

Robert Fabricant, Dalberg Design
Stool 60
Artek (Alvar Aalto), 1933

“Alvar Aalto’s iconic Stool 60 is the most elemental of furniture pieces, suitable as a seat, a table, storage unit, or display surface. Democratic, cheap, stackable.”

Rebekka Bay, Uniqlo
Facebook (and its subsidiaries) has connected people and become a platform for a myriad of movements from political to social. Thanks to this platform, advertising and ecommerce has made way for massive digital sharing, click-bait, and the rise of the 'influencer' economy.”

Frog Design Team, Frog
Billy Bookcase

IKEA, 1979

“A Swedish design icon that is affordable and highly adaptive to the different needs and homes. More than 60 million people have trusted their personal belongings to Billy since its introduction.”

Bas van de Poel, Space 10
**Pride Flag**

*Gilbert Baker, 1979*

“Iconic rainbow is unmistakable, infinitely customizable, and speaks pride for an increasingly wide range of LGBTQ+ people.”

*Sara Aye Cantor, Greater Good*
Lia Pregnancy Test
Bethany Edwards + Anna Simpson, 2017

“First flushable pregnancy test that’s discreet, sanitary, and designed to be environmentally sustainable.”

Zoë Ryan, The Art Institute
Super Mario Bros.

Nintendo (Shigeru Miyamoto), 1985

“A masterpiece of horizontal scroll action. Contributed to massive expansion of gaming industry [and had] a large impact on how so many people spend their time.”

Hitachi Design Team, Hitachi
Vélib Bike Service

JCDecaux, 2007

“The 'Vélib' project is a best practice in social design that goes beyond the limits of bicycle transportation. A project that stimulated Paris' new urban experience and mobility change under a shared economy.”

Bas van de Poel, Space 10
Apple Watch

Apple (Kevin Lynch), 2015

“Before the Apple Watch, smartwatches were bulky wrist computers. Apple transformed this category into a fashionable accessory that improves people’s health.”

Bas van de Poel, Space 10
Bialetti MOKA Pot

Bialetti (Alfonso Bialetti), 1933

“Iconic coffee pot designed in Italy in 1933 and popular around the world. Easy to use on a gas or electric stove.”

Carole Bilson, Design Management Institute
Poäng
IKEA (Noboru Nakamura), 1974

“A blend of Japanese and Nordic design that has democratized furniture design worldwide over the past 40 years, the Poäng is practical, adaptable, simple, and comfortable.”

Logitech Design Team, Logitech
Volkswagen Bug
Volkswagen (Ferdinand Porsche), 1938

“Iconic and unmistakable, and promoting a fix-it-yourself car culture that reflected the freedom of the times.”

Barbara Barry, Mayo Clinic
Office 360
Microsoft, 1990

“The most widely used desktop software and productivity tool is virtually unrivaled in the business space. Excel is the Kleenex of spreadsheets.”

Frog Design Team, Frog
Tupperware
Earl Tupper, 1948

“Excellent for storing food hygienically. Washable, re-usable, [and available in] multiple sizes”

Ena Voûte, TU Delft
View-Master

Charles Harrison, 1962

“Simple design toy for kids to see 3D images. Over 4 million sold and designed by the 1st African American Industrial Designer to head up a large corporate studio (Chuck Harrison of Sears, Roebuck & Co).”

Carole Bilson, Design Management Institute
LifeStraw

Vestergaard Frandsen, 2005

“Portable water purifier that cleans contaminated water. It can be useful in water-scarce countries, such as developing countries. Design using appropriate technology.”

Jooyun Kim, Hongik University
Raspberry Pi
Raspberry Pi Foundation, 2012

“The Raspberry Pi is a simple, single-board computer, designed to promote basic computer science education in schools and developing countries. The product only costs $35 off the shelf, without peripherals like a screen, keyboard, or mouse. The company was founded in 2012 so that “more people are able to harness the power of computing and digital technologies for work, to solve problems that matter to them, and to express themselves creatively.”

Tanner Woodford, Design Museum of Chicago
**Flex-Foot**

Össur, 1971

“Game changing life enhancer.”

Zoë Ryan, Chicago Design Museum
Medical Toy Blocks
Hikaru Imamura, 2012

“In a world where our technology and its side-effects can be frightening, these simple and empathetic toy blocks help prepare a child mentally and emotionally for what could otherwise be a very terrifying experience to receive the care they need.”

Brandon Schauer, Capital One
Life Magazine

Time, Inc., 1936

“The first issue in 1936 lead to the most emblematic of all the American weekly photojournalism journals. It was as significant a medium for introducing images to the world as television later in the century.”

Steven Heller, AIGA
Leica M
Ernst Leitz, 1954

“Legendary combination of beauty and function.”

Yongqi Lou, AIGA
Lettera 32

Marcello Nizzoli, 1963
Airtable

Airtable, 2012

“I’m new to this 'groupware' platform, but so far I’m super-impressed. Adopting everything you love about spreadsheets, combined with resolving everything you hate about spreadsheets, is where Airtable soaks its sweetspot.”

Allan Chochinov, Core 77
Forever Stamps

USPS, 2006

“Brilliant business model ensures they will always be the best price and relevant as long as the USPS exists.”

Sara Aye Cantor, Greater Good
Telephone Area Code

Bell Labs (Ladislav Sutnar), 1947

“The numerals that would allow the Bell Telephone system to expand its overall coverage were placed inside parentheses, an idea conceived by designer Ladislav Sutnar.”

Steven Heller, AIGA
ET66 Calculator

Braun (Dieter Rams), 1947
Apple Pay

Apple, 2014

“Because it’s safer and easier to use than credit cards (which would be on my list if it were not for the fact that ApplePay is infinitely better).”

Jason Ring, Uber
Flyknit
Nike, 2008

“This shoe marked a move away from conventional mass production, redefining manufacturing customization in lockstep with world’s move towards sustainability.”

Logitech Design Team, Logitech
Orange-handled Scissors
Fiskars, 1967

“The orange-handled scissors are one of Fiskars' best-known products. They are the world's first plastic-handled scissors, manufactured since 1967. Over one billion Fiskars scissors have been sold worldwide, and Fiskars has registered the color orange in scissors in Finland, the United States and Canada.”

Jenni Marsio, Fiskars
Pokémon

Satoshi Tajiri, 1989

“It captures the attention of so many people.”

Barbara Barry, Mayo Clinic
EpiPen

Mylan, 1987

“A design that saves lives and gives patients the freedom to monitor their own health on the go.”

Zoë Ryan, Art Institute of Chicago
Medical Drones

Zipline, 2014

“In less than three years, Zipline's drones have flown over a million kilometres to make more than 500 daily deliveries of blood, vaccines and other urgently needed medical supplies in Rwanda and, more recently, Ghana. Zipline's geographical expansion promises to have a dramatic impact on the access to—and quality of—healthcare for many millions of people worldwide, and is an exemplar of the imaginative and hugely beneficial application of a potentially threatening innovation.”

Alice Rawsthorn
Geodesic Dome

Buckminster Fuller, 1948

“The Geodesic Dome is a design template developed by R. Buckminster Fuller in collaboration with the fellow teachers and students of his summer schools at Black Mountain College in North Carolina during the late 1940s. Designed as a response to the post-war housing crisis, the Geodesic Dome is a formula to construct a robust domed shelter from whatever materials are available at the time. It has since provided sorely needed shelter for millions of people, many of them in desperate circumstances.”

Alice Rawsthorn
“The design of the tampon—originally patented by Earle Haas, and developed by Gertrude Schultz Tenderich from 1933—was one of the chief catalysts for the liberation of women during the mid and late 20th century by freeing most women from the physical and hormonal constraints of menstruation.”

Alice Rawsthorn
“It introduces a complex scientific idea in the context of everyday life.”

Barbarra Barry, Mayo Clinic
Dyson Bagless

James Dyson, 1980

“It was a great combination of design & engineering, successfully creating a space among established brands.”

José Manuel dos Santos, Signify
Netscape Browser
AOL & Mercurial Communications, 2005

“The same consistent buttons, behaviors, and that <img> tag made the Web a consistently navigable and visual world, accessible to hundreds of millions.”

Brandon Schauer, Capital One
Futura Typeface

Paul Renner, 1927

“A Futura, as a typographic family remains strong on multiple surfaces and especially on the digital ones.”

Alok Nandi, IxDA
“With its interoperability with multiple modes of transportation, [SUICA] increased convenience and took away a lot of user concerns from Japanese mobility scenes. Its wide adoption also provided a usable platform for additional, pluggable services.”

Anonymous
Air Jordan 1
Nike (Peter Moore), 1985

“A performance product once banned by the NBA helped Michael Jordan become the most beloved and successful athletes of all time, while also setting the stage for current day sportswear.”

Nathan Van Hook, Nike
Pocket Survival Tool
Timothy S. Leatherman, 1983

“This multi-tool offers uncompromising performance through revolutionary design. The innovative center-axis driver opens to align like a real screw driver, yielding maximum torque and rotation.”

Jenni Marsio, Fiskars
Box Chair
Enzo Mari, 1971

“Representative of rational chair design using modern materials, such as plastic and metal, the design realizes democratic values. Easy to assemble and disassemble.”

Jooyun Kim, Hongik University
“Because they take up no space, can be used as pillows for travel, and are affordable and warm. You should publish this and shame Uniqlo into providing them free of charge, all over the world, for migrants and refugees. That’s what a circular economy should be for: and if there was ever a modern conceit, it’s that design needs to solve more than one problem, for more than one person, in more than one place at one time.”

Jessica Helfand, Design Observer
“Simple, functional, and inexpensive design, as close to barefoot feeling while providing foot protection for all. Unlimited styles available today at every price level.”

Carole Bilson, Design Management Institute
Womb Chair
Knoll (Eero Saarinen), 1966

“Style, comfort, and personality. Perfection.”

Marcia Lausen, University of Illinois at Chicago
PeaPod
Andrew Parkinson + Thomas Parkinson, 1989

“Peapod extends me [...] I really dislike grocery shopping. Every store has a different layout. The stores are large, so when you forget something in one section, you need to trek back to get the forgotten item.

With Peapod, this chore takes 45 minutes versus 3 hours. I gain 2 hours and 15 minutes of value back on a weekly basis, totaling 117 hours yearly.”

Brianna Sylver, Sylver Consulting
“Frog's work for Disney resulted in an connected, seamless and overall improved theme park experience. It reduced lines, allowed over 5000 people into the park faster, allowed quick access to a user’s digital wallet, acted as a hotel room and photo pass, and signaled to beloved Disney characters to greet the children as they made their way through the park. Add to that the elegant and beautiful design of the band itself.”

Andrew Zimmerman, Frog
“Since the 1950s, [Volkswagen] has consistently delivered 'the people's van,' through 5 generations of product. There's something for everyone: from a classic utility vehicle for tradespeople the world over, to dreams of escape and adventure promised by 1960s 'hippy busses' and modern day T5 ‘California’ models alike.”

Carole Bilson, Design Management Institute
Unix OS

Bell Labs (Ken Thompson + Dennis Ritchie), 1970

“The Unix operating system was designed by Dennis M. Ritchie and Ken Thompson at Bell Labs in the 1960s and 1970s. Unix and its successors enabled and empowered the development of the open source movement, which has fuelled experimentation in software design.”

Alice Rawsthorn
Wayfarer
Ray-Ban (Raymond Stegeman), 1952

“Every face is improved by this frame.”

Mark Frauenfelder, Boing Boing
Stokke Tripp Trapp
Peter Opsvik, 1972

“One of the greatest increases a person can make to their carbon footprint is having a child. The Tripp Trapp chair is perhaps the only product that you can provide to a child at birth and will last and fit them until they are an adult.”

Brandon Schauer, Capital One
"Avarind pioneered the application of sophisticated design principles to transform the lives of the poor in India, by addressing the issue of needless blindness at a cost, quality and scale previously unimaginable. The Avarind model represents a high bar for the holistic application of design to an entire interconnected system of care that is adaptive, flexible and unwaveringly user-centered."

Robert Fabricant, Dalberg
“Bitcoin wasn't invented, it was designed so that a wide range of stakeholders—developers, investors, businesses, miners, individuals—all had incentives that reinforced adoption of a new digital currency, without any central issuer or governing authority. In just over 10 years since it was released, it is now worth nearly $200B and is used by millions of people in countries around the world. I don’t think any product in the history of the world has bootstrapped quite so effectively.”

David Kelley, IDEO
National Park Map
Massimo Vignelli + Lella Vignelli, 1977

“Visual, educational, authoritative, inviting systems-based information design about national treasures in the USA.”

Marcia Lausen, University of Illinois at Chicago
911 Carrera
Ferdinand Porsche, 1963

“Continuous design evolution and perfection of a single platform dating back over 60 years. Elegant, timeless form.”

Carole Bilson, Design Management Institute
“Functional, durable, and refined, Teema is the perfect tableware for everyday use. Plates, platters, cups, and bowls, each and every Teema piece is oven, freezer, dishwasher, and microwave safe. So not only will they look beautiful on dining table, but they’ll make cooking, serving, and clean-up fast and easy. Launched in 1952, [Teema] follows the belief that objects should always be designed with thought and be available for everyone.”

Anonymous
LINN Sondek LP12

Edgar Villchur, 1963

“More than simply playing music.”

Yongqi Lou
Valentine Typewriter

Ettore Sottsass, 1963

“An outstanding and delightful design. Changed an industry.”

Marcia Lausen, University of Illinois at Chicago
IBM Logo
Paul Rand, 1963

“Paul Rand's redesign of the logo and visual identity defined the computer and information ages in relation to the corporation.”

Steven Heller, AIGA
Model 500

Western Electric (Henry Dreyfuss), 1951
Great Green Wall of Africa

Panafriican Agency of the Great Green Wall, 2007

“The epic design endeavour to plant and cultivate a 5,000 mile swathe of trees and other plants across the southern edge of the Sahara Desert—from Senegal in the West to Djibouti in the East—is an inspiring, optimistic, and wildly ambitious attempt to address the damage caused by drought, deforestation, land erosion, the climate emergency and the social, economic and political problems they cause in one of the poorest parts of the world.”

Alice Rawsthorn
IBM Mainframe

Eliot Noyes, 1952

“Raw computing power.”

Jashmyd Godrej, Godrej
Blackwing 602
Eberhard Faber, 1934

“Buttery-smooth lead and an adjustable eraser.”

Mark Frauenfelder, Boing Boing
Part VI

The Full List
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Designer/Creator</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>Beijing Mobike Technology Co.</td>
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<td>Tesla (Franz von Holzhausen)</td>
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<td>Nokia Model 3210</td>
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<td>Bethany Edwards</td>
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<td>Super Mario Bros</td>
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Part VII

Methodology
Thank you for contributing your design expertise as we seek to collectively determine the **100 Best Designed Products of Modern Times**.
In 1958, Jay Doblin completed a monumental survey to determine the 100 best products of modern times. The results were published in *Fortune* magazine the following year.
In 1958, Jay Doblin completed a monumental survey to determine the 100 best products of modern times. The results were published in *Fortune* magazine the following year.

**Doblin polled the leading designers, architects, and educators of his day.** In updating Doblin’s study 60 years later, we followed his methodology whenever possible and appropriate.
However, we made several notable adjustments:

1. We expanded our sample size to a curated list of **200 leaders in design**.
2. We broadened our target audience to include **design practitioners** (teams and individuals), **design educators**, and **design influencers**.
3. We required each nomination be accompanied by the submitter’s rationale for nominating a given design.
4. Rather than ask participants to re-rank the submissions, as Doblin did, we assembled a team of design researchers to conduct a peer review.
We received 303 unique nominations, excluding those that were disqualified for not meeting the stated criteria. Convergence emerged around 25 designs which became the “top 25 designs of modern times.”

(Doblin failed to achieve his goal of 100% convergence in the original study as well.)
For designs in which there was convergence (i.e., multiple submissions ≥ 3) we determined their rank based on the quantity of submissions.
In the case of a rank-based tie, the ranking position was determined by an analysis of the distribution spread.

Within the three groups, we ranked designers first, influencers second, and educators third and assigned numeric values accordingly (i.e., 3,2,1) to tally the results.

The only exception was if a practitioner, educator, and influencer all independently nominated a design, that constituted a consensus, thereby elevating the ranking.
We treated submissions for which there was convergence differently from independent submissions. In order to assess non-duplicated results, we conducted a linguistic meta-analysis using the rationale provided by the survey participants to determine an abstract set of principles for “good design.”

To do so, we first scripted a Python program that counted select words grouped into like sets, for example:

```
democraticList
[“democratic”, “social mobility”, “liberation”, “freedom”]
```
```python
def filter(filterText):
    count = 0
    print("\n------------------------------------------------------------------\n")
    print("// Matches for words related to " + filterText[0] + " //")
    for i in range(len(data)):
        if any(c in data[i]["reason"] for c in filterText):
            # print(data[i]["product"] + " : " + data[i]["reason"])
            count += 1
            # print("\n------------------------------------------------------------------\n")
    print("\nThere are " + str(count) + " matches."")
    print("\n------------------------------------------------------------------\n")

filter(easeList)
filter(simpleList)
filter(usableList)
filter(formList)
filter(flexibleList)
filter(inclusiveList)
filter(democraticList)
filter(inexpensiveList)
filter(everywhereList)
```
Researchers then collectiverly grouped the subcategories that emerged into a higher order of categorization, from which we arrived at five principles for good design:

1. Adaptable + Expandable
2. Society + Environment
3. Great to Use
4. Market Success
5. Redefined Category
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Methodology // Independent Submissions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adaptable + Expandable</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the design adapt to the needs of users and expand beyond a designer's intent?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the design indirectly or directly address environmental and societal issues?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Great to Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the design bring delight? Is it easily used?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Market Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Does the design demonstrate scale, growth, or impact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Redefined Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the design enhance the scope of the category or field?</td>
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</table>
Finally, a blind study was administered to six design researchers, each of whom independently ranked the submissions using a 1–5 Likert scale.

We then tallied, weighted, and averaged the results in order to determine the selection and ranking of the remaining 75 “best designs.”
## Methodology // Independent Submissions

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>I. Adaptable &amp; Expandable</th>
<th>II. Society &amp; Environment</th>
<th>III. Great to Use</th>
<th>IV. Market Success</th>
<th>V. Redefined Category</th>
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Part VIII

Meta-Analysis
# Meta-Analysis

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<th>Adaptable</th>
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That’s all, folks.