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British Design

Introduction

Due to the early emergence of a mass market for goods and a programme of industrialisation, both of which were in place by the mid eighteenth century, compared to that of many other countries, design in Britain has had a long history.¹ Combined with the expansion of the British empire and intensive urbanisation, by the nineteenth century the nation had experienced a democratisation of taste and a huge appetite for designed products, especially among its middle classes.

From that moment onwards a phenomenon called 'British design' can be discerned. Over the last two and a half centuries it has followed a continually mutating trajectory, one which has been always open to influences from abroad; balanced between a pull from the past and a desire to embrace the future; conscious of the slow but continuous decline of both the nation's empire and its industrial pre-eminence over the entire period; and which, above all, has struggled against the incursions of popular culture to maintain high aesthetic and moral values. At times tightly controlled by governments, and at others abandoned to the laws of the marketplace, the story of British design is both rich and complex.

Beginnings

Design in Britain was built on pre-industrial hand-making precedents, including, in the eighteenth century, the work of the cabinet-makers Thomas Chippendale, George

¹ For some general texts about British Design see: Aldersley-Williams, H. *British Design* (New York: MoMA, 2010); Buckley, C. *Designing Modern Britain* (London: Reaktion, 2007); Carrington, N. *Industrial Design in Britain* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976); Huygen, F. *British Design: Image and Identity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989); McCarthy, F. *British Design since 1880* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982); Thackera, J. *New British Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

Hepplewhite and Thomas Sheraton who provided furniture for the social elite. Like the others, Chippendale, who published his famous pattern book, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* in 1754, worked with all his clients individually.² When the factories took over, as they quickly did, making more goods available to more people, this model of product customisation did not disappear entirely, but remained a common route through which the social and economic élite purchased their goods for many decades to come.

Alongside that elitist strand in British design, mass-produced objects – textiles, ceramics and metal goods among them – also emerged owing their existence to the entrepreneurial energies of the men who transformed Britain's manufacturing industries at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. The modern concept of design was a key by-product of the thinking that broke down the traditional craft process into its constituent elements and reconstructed them into a logical sequence of activities. Designing moved from being an activity that occurred in an ad hoc manner as a craftsman worked intuitively with his materials, to a highly planned operation that was conceived in its entirety before manufacturing began. The factory system was dependent on manufacturing teams made up of semi-skilled and unskilled workers who operated as part of a divided labour system. Also, the final appearance of the products that emerged from the factories had to be designed with the constraints of available production machinery in mind. The Jacquard loom, for example, required the design of the textiles created on it to be pre-programmed.

² Chippendale, T. *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (London: Wentworth Press 2016 [1754]).

One of the eighteenth century's most successful entrepreneurs, Josiah Wedgwood, opened his first factory in Burslem in Staffordshire in 1759 to address the growing demand for domestic ceramics brought about by the expanded interest in tea- and coffee-drinking and the increasing popularity of hot cooked meals.³ New industrial processes were introduced, and new classes of pottery workers emerged to transfer their designs into quantity production. Wedgwood's 'Jasperware' products were especially popular. Matthew Boulton's Soho factory in Birmingham produced what were called 'toys', small metal items, such as shoe buckles, tweezers, tooth-picks, snuff boxes, inkstands and watch chains, which were manufactured in vast numbers. Like Wedgwood, Boulton understood the selling power of art in products that were not targeted at the social élite.

The 1851 Exhibition

The *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* was conceived by Prince Albert and Henry Cole and held in London's Hyde Park in 1851.⁴ Its purpose was to demonstrate the strengths of British products to an international audience. The huge glass and steel building created for the event was designed by Joseph Paxton. For many people, however, among them the art critic, John Ruskin, and the architect, William Morris, who were to lead the nineteenth-century design reform movement, the 1851 exhibition represented everything that was reprehensible about the designed goods that flowed from the factories and which targeted nouveau-riche consumers. For them these goods, the design of which was separated from their making, flouted the craft-based principles of 'truth to materials'. The discussion about taste was to dominate debates about design in Britain through the second half of the nineteenth century and beyond.

³ See Dolan, B. *Josiah Wedgwood: Entrepreneur to the Enlightenment* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004).

⁴ See Purbrick, L. *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essay* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

Design reform

The nineteenth century debate about taste was initiated by a group of individuals from the worlds of architecture and fine art who were highly critical of the designed goods that flowed from the new factories. A.W. N. Pugin's response was expressed in his 1812 book *Contrasts*.⁵ John Ruskin shared Pugin's commitment to medievalism, and to the world of nature and expressed his ideas in a number of texts including *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3).⁶ The debate was widened beyond the sphere of the aesthetic, however, by the intervention of the well-known design reformer, William Morris, who was preoccupied with the social and political implications of what he, following the radical ideas of Karl Marx, believed to be the alienating effects of the division of labour. From the 1860s Morris's writings and work also focused on the need to control ornament.⁷ Like those of many of his reforming colleagues Morris's ideas about design were stimulated by his exposure to the 1851 exhibition. While he saw the problem as industrial manufacture he was not, as is often suggested, against the use of the machine per se. Like Ruskin, upon whose ideas he depended, Morris embraced medievalism and believed that ornament should express nature appropriately. He believed that decoration should not be understood as an add-on, linked to social status, but rather as an intrinsic, defining property of objects communicating their functions and their identities to their users.

During the 1860s and 1870s Morris became known for his designs for textiles, wallpapers and carpets. His best-known wallpapers included 'Acanthus' (1875) and 'The Strawberry

⁵ Pugin, A. W. N. *Contrasts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013 [1836]).

⁶ Ruskin, J. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London: Dover Publications, 199 [1849]) and *The Stones of Venice*, v. 1-3 (London: HardPress Publishing, 2019 [1851-3])

⁷ Morris, W. *News from Nowhere and other Writings* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1993 [1890]).

Thief' (1876). His political ideas were also important to the influence he exerted upon the course of modern design. However, while, on the one hand, he sought to democratise design, the work his firm undertook for wealthy clients demonstrated that it was difficult to implement those ideas **and** run a successful business. Many of the other Arts and Crafts protagonists – C.F. A. Voysey and C.R. Ashbee among them - also gazed simultaneously backwards and forwards, creating medieval-style guilds while also embracing the machine, if properly used.⁸ They all believed that Victorian excess needed to be replaced by a new aesthetic simplicity and honesty. While these reformist ideas were highly influential in Europe, inspiring, for example, the work of the Wiener Werkstätte in Austria and the Deutscher Werkbund in Germany, their radicalism had less impact at home.

The early twentieth century

The Design and Industries Association (DIA) was formed in 1915 on the model of the German Werkbund (established in 1907) with a brief to encourage the development of a new industrial aesthetic on British soil. By the inter-war years, however, Britain was displaying a less than enthusiastic approach to European architectural and design Modernism preferring to rely on its own indigenous traditions. At the New York World's Fair of 1939, for example, Britain mounted an exhibit which featured 'pageantry of the past', marking its determination to keep one foot firmly in history.

However, a small number of British designers did rise to the challenge of the European Modern Movement at that time creating a range of aesthetically innovative new products which quickly became iconic. Some designers took up the German Bauhaus baton creating

⁸ See Naylor, G. *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Trefoil, 1990)

objects for the home that focused on function and which displayed a minimal, geometric aesthetic. Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer (both teachers at the Bauhaus in the 1920s) both spent time in Britain in the 1930s during their exile from Nazi Germany and on their way to permanent residence in the USA. While there Breuer worked with Jack Pritchard's company, Isokon, creating a series of furniture pieces in bent plywood. Keith Murray's ceramic designs for Wedgwood also embraced the new aesthetic as did George Cawardins' strikingly modern-looking task lamp of 1932. The aesthetically radical plastic radio cabinets designed by Serge Chermayeff and Wells Coates, for example, also drew on Bauhaus principles.

Designing for war

When war with Germany was declared in 1939, many designers transferred their focus from the commercial marketplace to the national war effort. The British Ministry of Information, for example, depended on the skills of graphic and advertising artists. Many had previously worked for large, private corporations, such as Shell, or for public organisations, such as London Underground or the Post Office. Iconic British war machines developed at that time included the Spitfire fighter plane, famous for its use of aluminium.

Another use for design during war time was stimulated by the 'Utility' scheme, an important project that brought a limited range of consumer goods – furniture, household goods and clothing in particular – to the people who most needed them, primarily young married couples, the owners of bombed out houses, and people in the services. The idea was first mooted by Hugh Dalton, the President of the Board of Trade from 1942, who brought in the furniture designer, Gordon Russell, to help him develop it. Russell was linked to the Arts and

Crafts Movement and he saw, in the Utility project, a chance to realise some of its ideals.⁹

The Utility furniture items were simple, wooden pieces that recalled traditional, vernacular designs, albeit with a modern twist. Ladder-backed dining chairs were combined with new versions of Windsor chairs, for example.

Designing for peace

In 1944 a governmental watchdog, the Council of Industrial Design, was set up by Winston Churchill's coalition government to raise the standards of design in British goods. It remained in place under the Labour government which soon came to power. The first Director of the Council was Gordon Russell. His appointment consolidated the importance of Arts and Crafts principles movement in the post-war years. *Design* magazine, the mouthpiece of the Council, was launched in 1949 and it quickly made clear that in the development of a post-war British design movement, the strategy was to emulate the manufacturing advances of the USA and the humanistic version of the modern aesthetic espoused by the Scandinavian countries. The first step on that path was to try to raise the taste of consumers such that an appetite for 'good design' was developed and with it a strong home market which, in turn, could be transformed into an international market for well-designed British goods. The Design Centre was opened in 1956 in the Haymarket in London as a one means of engaging the British public with good design.

Other design-related developments of the 1940s included the push by manufacturers to employ professionally-trained designers to create modern items – furniture, textiles, glass, ceramics and metal goods for the most part - for the progressive home. The Council of Industrial Design acted as a kind of employment for designers, putting them in touch with

⁹ See Myersen, J. *Gordon Russell: Designer of Furniture, 1892-1992* (London: Design Council, 1992)

manufacturers. A reorganisation of art and design education also took place at that time with the aim of supplying a generation of designers who could work with manufacturing industry. London's Central School of Art and Design was especially prominent in the early post-war years while the Royal College of Art, initially established back in 1837 and linked to the Victoria & Albert Museum, re-organised itself in the 1950s to address the needs of the day.¹⁰ Several key British designers of those years – David Queensbury, David Mellor, Robert Welch and Robert Goodden among them – were all RCA graduates.

'Britain Can Make It'

One of the Council's first initiatives was the conception of the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition which aimed to open the British public's eyes to the importance of standards in design.¹¹ Conceived by Stafford Cripps, the President of the Board of Trade of the Labour government at that time, 'Britain Can Make It', which was held in London's Victoria & Albert Museum in 1946, displayed pre-war goods for the most part as industry had not yet had a chance to get back to production for peace. A year later Cripps was to write:

Design is of crucial importance to British industry today, whether we think of what is due from our own producers to our own people, or how best to meet the very live competition which is ahead of us in foreign markets.¹²

One of the most controversial sections of the exhibition was a series of 'Furnished Rooms' which set out to show a range of interior settings destined for different social and income

¹⁰ See Frayling, C. and Catterall, C. (eds.) *Design of the Times: One hundred years of the Royal College of Art* (London: Richard Dennis, 1996)

¹¹ See Maguire, P., Woodham J. *Design and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain: The "Britain Can Make It" Exhibition of 1946* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997); Sparke, P. *Did Britain Make It?: British Design in Context, 1946-1986* (London: Design Council, 1986)

¹² Buckley, Op. cit. 1, 8.

groups. From a 'Kitchen in a Cottage in a Modern Mining Village' to the 'House of the Managing Director of an Engineering Works' the exhibit crossed the social spectrum revealing the strong interest that existed at that time in the link between design and social class.

One of the stars of the BCMI exhibition was Ernest Race's little BA chair which had an aluminium frame and elegant tapering legs. During the war, the designer-entrepreneur, Ernest Race, had been in the auxiliary fire service and, at the end of the war, had set up a furniture company. He was quick to realise the potential for using redundant wartime materials and set about utilising scrap aluminium and ex-RAF upholstery materials. The BA side chair benefited from the 'Spitfires to Saucepans' campaign that was promoted at 'Britain Can Make It' where a handful of other post-war designs – among them a Wells Coates-designed space-ship, a J. H. K. Henrion-designed aluminium-bodied sewing machine, a streamlined bicycle and an air-conditioned bed - were offered to whet the appetite of a nation hungry for new products. Race went on to create some of the iconic seating designs displayed at the 1951 Festival of Britain, in particular the 'Antelope' and the 'Springbok' metal-rod chairs which were scattered across the South Bank.

The Festival of Britain

The years between 1939 and 1951 had seen a transformation of the modern world and, by 1951, the democratisation of material culture that had been promised in 1939 was beginning to become a reality. The war years had served to prioritise, above all else, the basic needs of human existence and the importance of technological innovation. In turn design, in the hands of engineers, exhibition and graphic designers, and furniture, product fashion designers, had risen to the challenges presented to them. After the war there was

an inevitable swing back to a focus on individuals and their psychological needs and the requirement to improve the national economy by boosting the consumption of goods.

1951 was the year of Britain's celebratory exhibition on the South Bank – the Festival of Britain.¹³ Its two important buildings – the Dome of Discovery and the Trylon - directly echoed the 1939 New York World's Fair's Perisphere and Skylon and expressed a similarly high level of technological utopianism. With rationing nearly at an end, it was time to look forward to a prosperous future once again. The Festival proved hugely popular and exhibits such as the 'House and Gardens' and the 'Lion and Unicorn' pavilions crossed a spectrum from the traditional to the ultra-modern. The work undertaken by the Festival Pattern Group, which involved looking down microscopes and transferring the organic patterns found there on to the surfaces of brightly coloured textiles and ceramic artefacts, provided a new aesthetic for the post-war era.

The contemporary home

The two decades following the end of the Second World War saw a dramatic shift in the British public's engagement with the modern world in terms of its effect upon everyday life, particularly as it was lived at home. The inter-war years had seen a rather cautious response to the push of modernity and a general reluctance to move beyond the comfort of suburban homes furnished in traditional styles. In the post 1945 years consumers exhibited a greater willingness to embrace the new, and to express that forward-looking approach through the

¹³ See Banham, M. and Hillier, B. *A Tonic for the Nation: The Festival of Britain 1951* (London: V & A, 1976)

products they brought into their homes. This was greatly facilitated by the expansion of mass housing in new developments such as Harlow and Cumbernauld New Towns.

The ideal of the 'contemporary' home, was widely disseminated through the mass media, and had a special appeal for new homemakers who had not previously had the opportunity to own their homes and consume on such a scale. Indeed, for a large sector of the population inhabiting a home furnished in the 'contemporary style' represented an important sign of the arrival of modernity into their lives. It was clear that consumption, rather than production, was seen as a key to Britain's future and that it needed to operate within a context of educated taste, or 'good design' which, at that time, meant a preference for the modern style.

New designers for the post-war era

Through the 1950s the mass media were instrumental in communicating a number of lifestyles which could be appropriated through consumption. A new generation of furniture designers, among them Ernest Race and Robin Day, extended the modernist programme by incorporating new materials – extruded aluminium, bent and moulded plywood, and steel rod among them in their cases - into furniture designs.¹⁴ Drawing on both American and Scandinavian examples they both produced several innovative designs that stood out in that era. Day, working at first with Clive Latimer on a buffet mounted on steel which won a prize in a competition organised by New York's Museum of Modern Art, went on to work with his wife, the textile designer Lucienne Day, on an interior exhibited at Milan's Triennale

¹⁴ See Conway, H. *Ernest Race* (London: Design Council, 1982); Jackson, L. *Robin and Lucienne Day: Pioneers of Contemporary Design* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2001)

exhibition of 1954. In the early 1960s he created a polypropylene stacking chair for Hille that quickly became ubiquitous.

The 1950s and early 1960s witnessed the appearance of a vast number of elegant, neo-modernist furniture pieces that were created by British designers - among them Terence Conran, Alan Turville, Robert Heritage, and John and Sylvia Reid – and manufactured by firms such as Hille Ltd., Ercol, G-Plan, HK Furniture, Race Ltd. and Archie Shine. Adventurous manufacturers, such as G-Plan, offered contemporary-looking furniture pieces to young couples setting up home for the first time. They took their lead from Scandinavian examples, emulating their commitment to wood, to light, elegant forms, and to a minimal use of upholstery. By the end of the 1950s and early 1960s they were also looking to Italy for inspiration.

Immediately following the war years many British designers were hugely optimistic about the potential of plastics to create a brave new world. Others were more cautious about the way designers should work with plastics, adamant that they should have an intimate knowledge of their physical properties and capabilities. Following their immediate post-war enthusiasm for plastics, consumers quickly became disenchanted with them, however, and doubts began to emerge about the materials' relationship with 'good design'. As the numbers of plastic products grew, and quantity inevitably took over from quality, they began to earn a reputation for being 'cheap and nasty'.

Designing lifestyles

By the early 1960s it was clear that a mass market for lifestyle retailing and journalism had emerged and the furniture and textile designer, Terence Conran, who opened his first

Habitat store on London's Fulham Road in 1964, was quick to exploit the fact. Habitat targeted a young, fashion-conscious audience.¹⁵ As well as making available a new range of objects imported from overseas, the key message that Conran communicated to his customers was that it was possible to mix old furniture pieces with new items. He was quick, also, to recognise that Italian design had an enormous appeal at that time, and he imported many design icons from abroad – including the Italian designer, Vico Magistretti's 'Carimate' chair.

Transport Design

One of Britain's design strength at that time was in the field of objects of transportation. Alec Issigoni's Morris Minor car was a British automotive icon of the 1950s but his Austin Mini, which he began working on for the British Motor Corporation in 1956, became an even more powerful one by the 1960s. He. The challenge was to create a very small car for four people, plus luggage, that used as little fuel as possible. Issigoni's solution lay in placing the engine in a transverse position, and putting the wheels at the extreme four corners, to create the maximum amount of interior space. Like the Morris Minor the Mini was a timeless design: The streamlined curves of the Minor had disappeared giving way to what was little more than a box on wheels. It quickly became the car of choice for pop stars and fashion models and designers and was celebrated as one of 'Swinging London's cult objects. While Britain acquired a strong reputation for car design in the post-war years with brands such as Jaguar, MG and Rover becoming known internationally, the role of design in other forms of British transport also went from strength to strength in the decades after the

¹⁵ See Phillips, B. *Conran and the Habitat Story* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1984)

Second World War, including among its successes the classic Routemaster bus, and culminating in the Concorde airplane, created in collaboration with French engineers, which, along with the 'E' type Jaguar, designed by Malcolm Sayer, and the Range Rover, designed by David Bache, became one of the lasting icons of the era. Concorde's first commercial flight, which took place in 1969, was the result of nearly twenty years of development that had pushed technological knowledge in the areas of aerodynamics, materials and structures to such a level that completely new solutions were reached. Its strikingly elegant and futuristic nose and wing forms were the result, like those of the Spitfire fighter plane before it, of decisions based on performance-based criteria.

Pop Design

In the 1960s British society underwent a seismic transformation with the emergence of a youth culture with the financial means with which to express its new values through its material possessions. It generated a new movement, later dubbed 'Pop Design', which, in turn, set in motion a rejection of establishment values and the notion of 'good design' that had come to represent it.¹⁶ The objects of Pop (short for popular) aimed, instead, to have an expressive relationship with the fashion-conscious society that produced and consumed them. It represented an acceptance, on the part of both designers and consumers, that design should be led by the psychological needs of the marketplace rather than the practically focused requirement of functionality. Disposability became a priority – it was realised, for example, in the form of paper clothing and items of furniture – was one way forward. Many of the newer plastics – polyurethane foam among them - were inherently

¹⁶ See Whiteley, N. *Pop Design: From Modernism to Mod* (London: Design Council, 1987)

soft and flexible and therefore ideally suited to the new culture of accelerated change. Such was the chameleon-like nature of plastics that they could don the mantle of good design at one moment and reject it at another. Indeed, without plastics the Pop Design movement could not have produced some of its most lasting icons. Alongside the loud music, the colourful clothes and other 'fun' lifestyle accessories that characterised youth culture in 1960s Britain, a range of plastic products also played a role in overturning what had up to that point looked like the universal values of 'good design'. Some inflatable plastic chairs emerged, for example, including the 'Pumpadinc' armchair designed by Englishman, Arthur Quarmby, and a fake fur-covered version created by the record cover illustrator Roger Dean, produced by Hille.

By the end of the decade the new, increasingly youth-focused, concept of life-style had led in two distinct new directions - one to a new flexible form of seating that had abandoned the long-standing dependency upon chairs in favour of seating systems, and the other to a new emphasis on surface pattern that encouraged people to take control away from designers once again by adding their own images of flags and targets and brightly-coloured stripes to the surfaces of their furniture items, both old and new.

In the 1960s Britain's modern furniture design renaissance was hugely influenced by Italian design, which was represented by, among other products, several furniture items manufactured by Cassina. Cassina's products were frequently featured in the British design press and sold to a discerning clientèle through some of the new modern furniture retailing outlets which appeared in London and elsewhere, among them Aram Designs, Geoffrey Drayton's store, Oscar Woollens, and Interspace, which was set up in 1968 by the Danish

designers, Nanna Ditzel and Kurt Heide. A new multinational sense of design was emerging which anticipated the fully-fledged globalisation of the subject in the 1980s.

By the mid-1960s a new generation of British designers – including Max Clendinning, Jon Bannenberg, Peter Murdoch, William Plunkett, Bernard Holdaway, Nicholas Frewing and the team of Jean Schofield and John Wright – embraced the novel concepts of ‘knock-down’, ‘inflate’, and ‘throwaway’, spawning (ironically) such lasting classics as Clendenning’s ‘Maxima’ range for Hille and a side chair for Liberty’s; Murdoch’s so-called ‘paper’ chair for Perspective Designs; and Holdaway’s ‘Tom-o-Tom’ range for Hull Traders.

The decorative arts of the 1960s also succumbed to the pull of modernity, although they stopped short of going completely down the Pop route. Some of the most widely acknowledged metalwork and ceramic and glass objects emerged at this time as a direct result, from the mid-1950s onwards, of a number of companies employing distinguished RCA graduates - David Queensbury, Professor of Ceramics and Glass at the RCA from 1959, who worked for W. R. Midwinter Ltd. and Webb Corbett Glass, among others; David Mellor, who collaborated with the Ministry of Public Building in 1965 on his elegant ‘Thrift’ cutlery range; and Robert Welch, who worked with J and J Wiggin Ltd., for whom he created a highly sculptural three-legged candelabrum, named ‘Campden’, in 1957.

Seminal ceramic designs to emerge in these years included the extremely popular ‘Home-Maker’ tea service, designed by Enid Sweeney for Ridgway Potteries in 1957. Jessie Tait’s pieces for Midwinter, among them ‘Cuban Fantasy’ from 1957 were also hugely influential. Glass design also responded to the spirit of the age: Geoffrey Baxter’s ‘Unica’ and ‘Brick’ vases from 1965 and 1966 respectively, for instance, abandoned the delicacy of 1950s designs in favour of the solid forms and bright colours of 1960s British Pop design.

Nostalgia and revival

By the early 1970s, following the downturn in the economy, the continuing demise of Britain's manufacturing industry, the final death-throws of the empire and the loss of a belief in the future, the British modern design movement, which had begun very tentatively in the 1930s and blossomed in the 1960s, had all but vanished. The cultural pre-eminence of lifestyle products was largely replaced an 'experience culture', fuelled to a significant extent by the expanding nostalgia and heritage industries.¹⁷ Looking forward was replaced by a backward-looking culture that embraced vintage objects, stylistic revivals and craft. The few British designs to make an important international impact included fashion items and punk record covers.¹⁸

1980s Designer-culture

In Britain, the 1980s began with the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister. She remained in that post until 1997 and oversaw a period of British history which prioritised private enterprise, social aspiration and mobility, and the importance of individualism. Within the new-found affluence of the 1980s the designer came to the fore once again and names such as those of Ron Arad,¹⁹ Nigel Coates, Tom Dixon,²⁰ Daniel Weil, Eva Jiricna, Ben Kelly and others became familiar ones to the general public. This was the era of the designer as celebrity.

¹⁷ See Hewison, R. *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987)

¹⁸ See McDermott, C. *Street Style: British Design in the 1980s* (London: Design Council, 1987)

¹⁹ See Sudjic, D. *Ron Arad (Design)* (London: Laurence King, 1999)

²⁰ See Dixon, T. *The Interior World of Tom Dixon* (London: Conran Octopus, 2008)

One of the most successful design-related branding exercises of the late twentieth century undertaken by the household electronic goods designer and manufacturer, James Dyson.²¹ Dyson's key invention was the bag-less vacuum cleaner. The success of the G-Force machine that he developed over many years, later known as the 'Cyclone', was as much a result of its design, however, as of the technological innovation it built upon. Dyson also understood the need to make his goods 'friendly' (and, arguably, 'feminine') and he added a range of colours to his machines – pink when it was being made in Japan, and, later, a whole spectrum of other bright colours – to make that possible.

1989 saw the opening, in London's Shad Thames, of the Design Museum, among the first of its kind in the world. Conceived, and largely funded, by Terence Conran (who had founded the Habitat stores over two decades earlier), the museum's focus was on the cultural importance and achievements of designers as agents of change and innovation. A 2005 exhibition, 'Designing Modern Britain' '[bore] witness to the continuing ingenuity, as well as the creative legacy, of the modern British designer', celebrating the achievement of that nation in the field of design.²²

Kenneth Grange

Kenneth Grange, one of Britain's leading designers, has been working for several decades.²³ His first work was undertaken for Kodak back in the 1950s and his earliest professional

²¹ See Dyson, J. *James Dyson: Against the Odds: An Autobiography* (London: Orion, 1987)

²² Cutlack, D. 'From C5 To Concorde - Modern Britain At The Design Museum', Culture 24, December 2005, <https://www.culture24.org.uk/art/architecture-and-design/art32344> (accessed 22.05.2021).

²³ See Sudjic, D. et al *Kenneth Grange: Making Britain Modern* (London: Black Dog, 2011)

experience was working for Bronek Katz, a modernist architect of mid-European origin, in the field of exhibition design. Between 1948 and 1951 Grange went into the office of another architect, Gordon Bowyer, and subsequently into that of architect, Jack Howe, where he continued to work as a drafting assistant until, in 1958, building on the Kodak experience, he set up his own office as an industrial designer.

In 1958 the Council of Industrial Design introduced Grange to a firm called Kenwood, which specialised in electrical kitchen equipment. The first Kenwood kitchen machine, the *Chef*, designed by Grange, was launched at the Ideal Home Exhibition of 1950. Grange's time with Kenwood generated over a hundred products. Together – from the *Chef*, to the smaller, hand-held *Chefette* (launched in 1959), to ranges of kettles and irons, the more recent food processors (including the *Cuisine* and *Gourmet* models), a slow cooker, a highly sculptural, rechargeable kitchen knife, first launched in 1967, a water filter, a fruit juicer, and many more items besides - they constituted a recognisable and hugely respected family of products. Examples of other Grange designs include, in the late 1970s, a small gas cooker for Osaka Gas and a set of microwave containers designed in the mid-1980s for Thorpac. In the early 2000s the designer became involved with a lighting project: While the original *Anglepoise* lamp, invented by George Cawardine in 1932 and manufactured by Herbert Terry and Son, had been a British modernist icon for decades, in 2001, Grange was asked to revitalise the product.

The new century

In yet another pendulum swing the 1990s and early 2000s saw a shift away from the dominance of the celebrity designer and towards a renewed interest in ideas about the environment; in design teams and the notion of co-design; in the social and wellbeing

implications of design; and in areas of design that do not manifest itself tangibly, such as service, software design and interface design. By the early 1990s the globally recognised British designer, Jasper Morrison,²⁴ had already begun to develop a more self-effacing approach to his work, and a new minimalist aesthetic came to define many products, such as those designed by Barber Osgerby, who set up their studio in 1997.

The idea of a distinctive notion of 'British design' disappeared, however, in the face of ever-growing globalisation. However, Britain did remain distinctive in the field of design education, at which it had excelled since the mid-nineteenth century. Where high technology goods were concerned the contributions of the British, and British-trained, designer, Jonathan Ive, to the American firm, Apple, and of the product designer Bill Moggridge to the formation of the American company, IDEO, represented the British design's global impact at this time. British design also continues to lead the way at the experimental end of the spectrum with the contribution of, among others, the team of Tony Dunne and Fiona Raby, yet more products of the British design education system.

In 2012 the decision to locate the Olympic Games in London provided the city with an opportunity to show the maturity of its creative industries to the rest of the world and the design contributions of Barber Osgerby (the Olympic torch), Thomas Heatherwick (the Olympic Cauldron) and Zaha Hadid (the swimming stadium) were visible around the world. Heatherwick was also responsible for the re-design of the Routemaster bus, a longstanding post-war British design icon, showing that British design had finally come full circle.

Conclusion

In the 2020s, in Britain, design has become multi-faceted. In product terms the 1980s generation continues to move from strength to strength operating as it now does on a global platform, while a younger generation has reacted against the convention that design has to be expressed through material goods and support a capitalist-dominated industrial system. Instead, they use design as a tool with which to make social, environmental and political interventions in a manner, perhaps, that is reminiscent of William Morris and his colleagues a century and a half ago.

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