



Quotidian:

**Finding inspiration
in everyday design**

Curated by Matt Blomeley

15 May — 26 June



Introduction

Philip Clarke
Director

In Just Hold Me (Objectspace, 2006) curator Jonty Valentine wrote “the design profession needs alternative discourses that include the local, personal individual, peripheral, grey and imperfect.” That project encouraged visitors to consider design “as a series of different complex interactions – between people, objects, ideals, tools”. Objectspace aims to provoke new assessments about the making, functioning of works and practices and Quotidian posits that the quotidian, or everyday, is a useful lens for understanding aspects of contemporary design practice ranging from fashion, furniture, graphic, product to spatial design. Specifically it demonstrates how the quotidian is a resource for contemporary designers and the participating designers in particular; Alt Group, Nat Cheshire, Formway Design, Adrian Hailwood, Peter Haythornthwaite, Guy Hohmann, Jamie McLellan, Jonty Valentine, Matthew von Sturmer, Katy Wallace and Cybèle Wiren. Objectspace would like to thank these designers for so enthusiastically and generously agreeing to talk about their practices and participate in Quotidian.

Quotidian has been curated by Objectspace staffer Matt Blomeley who has assembled, and worked closely with this fantastically interesting group of contemporary designers. He is also the author of a very thoughtful essay which considers the works and words of these designers. Curatorial projects in the field of design field are, I believe, often complex and tricky to get right. Matt has worked hard on Quotidian and I want to acknowledge this dedication, which has ensured that Quotidian is not just a visually arresting exhibition but a thoughtful consideration on contemporary New Zealand design practice.

The assistance and generosity of a number of people including lenders has enabled Objectspace to present Quotidian and we gratefully acknowledge; Alt Group, Art News, Roger Bateman, Stephen Brookbanks of Object Support, Cheshire Architects, Karl Chitham, Cybèle, Nadene Carr, Designers Institute of New Zealand, Dilana Rugs, Fel

Group, Formway Design, Andrew Grigg, Adrian Hailwood, Peter Haythornthwaite, Guy Hohmann, Masport, Jamie McLellan, Kim Meek, Ross Millar, Schindler Lifts NZ Ltd (particularly Angus Varcoe), Rigel Sorzano, Jeremy Toth, David Trubridge, Kathryn Tsui, Jonty Valentine, Matthew von Sturmer, Katy Wallace and Peter Wright.

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In Just Hold Me the ubiquitous Mr Valentine (Just Hold Me, 2006, Printing Types, 2009, Quotidian, 2010 and the ongoing The National Grid) commented upon the “the fiction surrounding the brief” and how “The existence of briefs is what’s meant to separate designers from artists: designers work to someone’s prescription, while artists invent their own. As you know I disagree with this.” The works and stories in Quotidian align with this observation in that they show that the designer’s personality is present in the works of their authorship. In another Objectspace publication, Clay Economies (2008) Dr Christopher Thompson wrote about “accepting design as nuanced equation of producer, distributor and consumer”. Like all of us the Quotidian designers are consumers of objects and ideas from the everyday world and this consumption, not unsurprisingly, fuels them as producers which suggests, that in spite of differences around the nature of material, production and scale, their creative processes are similar to those of other cultural producers.

“The human mind is exquisitely tailored to make sense of the world. Give it the slightest cue and off it goes, providing explanation, rationalization, understanding. Consider the objects – books, radios, kitchen appliances, office appliances, office machines, and light switches – that make up our everyday lives. Well-designed objects are easy to interpret and understand. They contain visible clues to their operation.”

Donald A. Norman¹

1. Donald A. Norman, *The Psychology of Everyday Things*, Basic Books, New York, 1988. (pp2)

2. John Thackara, *In the Bubble: Designing in a Complex World*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2006. (pp18,21) Thackara, writing about the outcome of a recent study conducted in Europe regarding design and the environment, remarks “the designers and researchers at PRé

[a Dutch group] insist that environmentally sound materials do not exist; environmentally friendly design approaches do.”

3. <http://www.objectspace.org.nz/programme/show.php?documentCode=1984> (accessed 14 May 2010)

The Quotidian

Matt Blomeley
Objectspace
Programme
Coordinator

Quotidian: finding inspiration in everyday design offers a selection of New Zealand designers who talk about existing objects of design that have inspired their practice. These nine individuals and two collectives have each chosen a quotidian (def: everyday, common-place) object not conceived by them which in some sense is a design inspiration, partnered it with an object of their own design and then written about the relationship between the two. The result is a collection of unique discussions that provide a designers eye view of our varied and complex relationships to objects that surround us.

The eleven everyday objects chosen evidence an impressive variety of influences upon the objects produced by these designers with which they are partnered. Through these qualities identified as influences it becomes apparent that what we call ‘original’ is often inspired by, or negotiated, through our appreciation of the everyday. Significant qualities highlighted by these designers and discussed in this exhibition project include; categorical references, aesthetics, mechanical principles, universal design, balance, precision, systems, economy, ecology, sensuality, purposefulness, freedom, beauty, history, skill, craft, and the decorative arts.

Matthew von Sturmer compares his exhibited design to an axe, using this ubiquitous and age old object to explain a simple mechanical principle, which is a driving force in his design process, “work equals force multiplied by distance.” Drawing upon this idea and another principle inherent in the design of the axe; the taper, it is apparent that modern digital tooling has fundamentally altered von Sturmer’s approach to his practice. Prototyping objects with a digital workflow in his studio and using ‘Trimatrix’, a “friendly” product developed as an alternative to more toxic materials such as MDF, von Sturmer observes that it is not the technology or the possibility of a smaller carbon footprint that drives him.² Through his renewed consideration of the engineering properties of an axe, von Sturmer has discovered new understandings, and perhaps new possibilities, in prototyping and manufacturing, as the Taper bench seat he presents in this exhibition bears witness.

In 2009 product designer Jamie McLellan wrote, “over the years I have learned to live with and celebrate my inner engineer”³. McLellan draws a significant amount of inspiration from the forms within industrially produced objects. What could in some sense be referred to as a form of ‘interior design’ is upon closer inspection a process involving direct formal and philosophical influences that draw upon the technology, processes and materials often unseen within the everyday, to inform the new products he designs. McLellan’s prototype carbon fibre Floor Lamp presented in Quotidian is expressive of this aim, “my fascination with engineered objects has led to many of my designs being expressive of their ‘insides’, with nothing hidden and no sides that shouldn’t be seen.” Peter Haythornthwaite, a well known New Zealand designer with a great deal of experience and a particular interest in manufactured objects, similarly finds “beauty in honesty.” Haythornthwaite, in his discussion of a design classic, the Olivetti Lettera 22, suggests that this complex and well developed object wasn’t indulgent, but exceptional, and what made it so was that the Lettera 22 “was

not a product of styling imagination but rather of form determined by purposefulness – and that’s where its beauty originates.” Relating this modern classic to a principle of design such as purposefulness seems all the more important when considering the complex keyboard product for disabled computer users that his company peterhaythornthwaite//creativelab was involved with, the Lomak “focused on causing the users to feel advantaged, rather than disadvantaged.”

An interesting design opportunity popular with many contemporary designers is the extension of use of a single material. Plywood, for instance, is a versatile material and a fitting example of this as a material with a great deal of history in New Zealand design, attested to recently by the Hawkes Bay Museum and Art Gallery exhibition, Ply-ability, in which Katy Wallace featured. In Quotidian, Wallace discusses her Leaning Shelf, a ‘flat pack’ plywood design, the philosophy of which is interestingly demonstrated through her discussion of the staple-less stapler, an innovative product that simplifies the concept of binding multiple pieces of paper together without the use of that familiar small sliver of bent metal. Another example of “beauty in honesty”, the Leaning Shelf loses little functionality in its economy of form, literally being cut from a single piece of material.

Nat Cheshire uses the everyday as a point of departure in his design practice. Writing about a recent residential project, one aspect of which involved the conception and construction of an innovative four metre long cantilevered table, Cheshire, a delineator for Cheshire Architects, says “we have sought to destroy form.” In rejecting the everyday, Cheshire is of course aware the table still exists and in fact it is a central feature in the design of the property, but it is immediately apparent that he wishes to minimize the influence of the everyday objects in this project, without wholly purging them. It is fitting, having chosen an ornate demi-lune console table as his quotidian object, that the decorative detail in this object shares a lineage with decorative gilded painting

frames. In paring back the visual impact of the necessary and the everyday, the interior of the residence in question ‘frames’ the contemporary art collection that it houses.

Kent Parker of Formway Design discusses the age old requirements for support and protection of the human body. Relaying the story of footwear’s history and highlighting the recent interest in ‘barefoot’ running with advanced yet simple shoes that are aligned closely with the natural mechanics of our feet, Parker raises an interesting point that sometimes innovation is startlingly obvious, sometimes it is hard to improve on nature’s good design. Formway’s award winning Be chair, for instance, employs a design process analogous to that of the Nike Free shoe design concept. Encouraging the body into maintaining a natural and healthy posture while sitting seems like an obvious requirement for a chair design, yet as countless uncomfortable chairs (and shoes) attest, this is a rare feat. Auckland design company Alt Group similarly have found it hard to improve a design archetype. In talking about the everyday, they observe that “every object has been designed, but some objects are considered common because we take them for granted.” Drawing upon the Bordeaux wine bottle, Alt Group “unlock new meaning” from this archetype. Their version of the bottle entitled A Lean Year, literally has a leaning body and neck and was designed as a gift to clients during the current economic recession. Valuing the power of keen observation to offer timely and wry commentary, they write; “so what happens when you mess with an archetype? You push up against what you already know, open up possibilities, unlock new meaning and make the familiar worth another look.”

Jonty Valentine describes his typeface design, Yonkers Line, as “a formal system of arbitrary signs.” Reworking the grid-based elevator display screen typeface that many of us interact with everyday, Valentine employed the grid as a set of parameters that were applied to a new typeface design resembling the elevator display but in which the grid

system is advanced to incorporate a wide range of letters. Although the quotidian inspiration and his designed outcome have a close resemblance to one another, the geometry within Valentine’s adapted system is tested and pushed nearer to its logical limits. Valentine describes this kind of grid as “an essentially modernist point of view” in which “the best typefaces are the ones that make perfect sense within the logic of their own systems”. In some sense paying homage to the elevator display in this project, Valentine also illustrates the ‘borders’ of a designed world in which we may occasionally feel trapped.

“The use and manipulation of textiles is a growing interest both personally and within my practice,” says Guy Hohmann. He considers that the outside world is something from which we seek distraction in order to find a measure of comfort and Hohmann suggests that textiles can provide that distraction. He discusses his reaction to the writer Angeli Sachs, who said that “forms inspired by nature become topical when modern society finds itself in crisis.” Hohmann’s take is that in times of crisis – an everyday experience for many people – we do not express “a collective yearning for the pastoral,” but what we really seek is distraction. Cut and Sew Lamp, currently in prototype form, Hohmann says “attempts to replicate and exaggerate this idea of distraction, mimicking the soft ‘reconciliation’ of the carpet in the gentle bell curvature of the frame and the ease of the draping fabric.”

The proliferation of objects produced for the modern world suggest that we should sit back more frequently and reflect upon the relevance and value of existing objects. Fashion designers, Adrian Hailwood and Cybèle Wiren have each identified objects of influence that, while not coming from the discipline of fashion, illustrate the power of everyday objects to affect us, inspire contextualization and visual relationships, and remind us not to forget the beauty in that which already exists. Wiren talks about the inspiration board in her workroom, where two images of spiral staircases have lived on the wall, while Hailwood tells the story of an

4. Kenya Hara, Designing Design, Lars Muller, Japan, 2007. (pp410).

Oriental screen bought at a market that is used as an elegant and effective divider between his retail space and worktable. Some might regard it as paradoxical that these two designers, who work in a design field associated with the temporary or seasonal, are inspired by everyday objects that have stood the test of time.

Frequently we marvel and curse at the simplicity, elegance and limitations of that which already exists. But the designers featuring in Quotidian remind us that the objects in the quotidian can and do inspire outstanding contemporary design, their discussions emphasizing that design and design practice can be located, to some extent, in the quotidian. Considering the aesthetic and functional values of the objects around us, these designers highlight that in the pace of the modern world we often forget the everyday. It is fitting then for Japanese designer Kenya Hara to ask: “In a situation like this, might it be more important to listen to the cries and face the delicate values that are about to be dissipated in the whirling change, than to look for the next big thing on the horizon?”⁴



Alt Group
Nat Cheshire
Formway Design
Adrian Hailwood
Peter Haythornthwaite
Guy Hohmann
Jamie McLellan
Jonty Valentine
Matthew von Sturmer
Katy Wallace
Cybèle Wiren

What is the everyday other than living it? We live around, through and alongside objects. Every object has been designed, but some objects are considered common because we take them for granted. Their form has become familiar, normalised and therefore unquestionable. In a sense the everyday is "reality as a disappearing act" because we have forgotten the way things are. Objects don't just exist; they come into being through a complex choreography of interactions that are built up over time.

Every material object has a genesis. The 'everyday' object had to start some day by someone, somewhere, but what or who determines the form? There is no material form without effort. Designed objects evolve through a number of states, from prototype to stereotype to archetype. Our relationships with objects change over time and through the frequency of use. So why then has the wine bottle largely retained its original form?

Wine, primarily the fermented juice of grapes has been a common beverage since at least 2000 B.C. Since prehistoric times, bottle containers were created from clay or asphaltum sealed woven containers. Early glass bottles were produced by the Phoenicians who passed on glass making techniques and technology to the Romans. The history of wine production in Bordeaux began sometime after 48 AD, during the Roman occupation of St. Émilion, when the Romans established vineyards to cultivate wine for the soldiers. The ubiquitous 750ml bottle, as a unit of measure, was not decided on arbitrarily nor empirically. Through prototyping 750ml was determined as the lung capacity of the average French glass blower, nothing more, nothing less.

Historically the high shouldered Bordeaux Bottle has been used by most wineries for Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec and most Bordeaux blends, including Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon, the primary grape varieties allowed in the production of white wines in the region. The bottle shape was used as a signifier of providence and origin before branding and labelling became part of product identification. The stereotypical bottle shape was the brand.

Today the archetypal Bordeaux bottle continues in these traditions, in terms of its volume, size and its shape as a common signifier of wine varietal. When considering a wine bottle, it is often therefore the silhouette shape that immediately comes to mind and in this way it has become a symbol for conversation, celebration and commemoration. We all have an 'everyday' relationship with the bottle, but when that relationship becomes a habit, we sometimes forget the day before.

So what happens when you mess with an archetype? You push up against what you already know, open up possibilities, unlock new meaning and make the familiar worth another look.



The Bottle

Alt Group

A Lean Year bottle
Alt Group
2009
Glass, Cork, Merlot,
Cardboard, Foam
Limited Edition
Courtesy of Alt Group

Bordeaux bottle
O-I Asia Pacific
Year unknown
Glass
Industrially produced
Courtesy of Alt Group

**Flying Table**

Cheshire Architects
2009
Seamless white Corian sheath on undisclosed structure
Single bespoke piece
Private Residence
Courtesy of Cheshire Architects

Demi lune console table

Designer unknown
Year unknown
Gold paint, plaster, wood
Production unknown
Courtesy of Cheshire Architects

The Table

Nat Cheshire

Photograph: Jeremy Toth / www.esthetic.co.nz

And I transformed myself in the zero of form.

And emerged from nothing to creation.

Malevich

Material, its thickness eliminated by taut edge detailing, is reduced to surface. Surface, all apparent fixing removed, slips adrift in space. Space, no longer circumscribed by static objects, is defined only by this field of free, virtualised surfaces. We have sought to destroy form. Pale, soft and barely-defined, living here is like living in a cloud.

The exhibited photograph of a table (pictured) addresses many thousands of objects, of which almost all are quotidian, and almost none are apparent. Architecture is always like this – besieged by rubbish. Its program is of necessity a drawing-out of the extraordinary from the prosaic.

The idea is that the apartment should be defined by paintings, not by architectural form. The activation of painting's plastic characteristic is the tipping point of the project, inducing an experience that is so spatial as to overwhelm any residual form in the building.

The table presented here is a leitmotif in this operation. Almost four meters long, but with neither support nor thickness, it cannot be digested as a sensible object. In the nonsense of its form it defeats the associative

shorthand of our process of looking. What remains is the unexpected physicality of our confrontation with an image. Nonsense gives rise to a new sense, a sensitivity to the taut relationship between image and object.

The table is the most blurred point in a project that seeks to operate out-of-focus. Once introduced, painting defines the focal plane. It has rich surface, colour, frame and, above all, thickness. Paintings, affixed in an apartment in which image and object are inverted, become its primary objects.

Architecture is what has happened to the viewer here. In this cloud-like apartment, it is painterly images, rather than architectural form, that define the parameters of its spaces. This is a reductivist practice in which a baroque sensuality is sought in a space that never concedes to the details of its making. It is a removal of ego, support, thickness, fixture, frame, clasp and the prosaic effluvia of construction. Its architecture is virtual surface; the mass burial of the quotidian and an exaltation in the sensual.

The Shoe

Formway Design

One of earliest recorded uses of shoes was in Mesopotamia (1600-1200 BC), a soft shoe worn by mountain people living on the border of Iran. Made of wraparound leather and similar to a moccasin, this shoe basically added a second skin to protect the foot from local terrain. In addition to this fundamental protective task, shoes have evolved to be sophisticated objects with performance features designed for specific tasks; super light spiked shoes for sprinting, or heavy leather and steel-capped boots with high ankles for hazardous work environments for example.

Unfortunately in targeting specific performance criteria, many shoes constrain or modify the natural movement of the foot and body, in the worst cases causing irreparable damage to the user.

With increasing frequency coaches and podiatrists are suggesting runners incorporate barefoot runs into their training schedule. The logic behind this is that with the use of cushioned, supportive modern running shoes, our feet have become lazy. We don't use our feet muscles very efficiently because the shoes overcompensate for us, "cushioning"

our errors so when we do place our foot the wrong way or with too much intensity, they take the impact on our behalf.

The Nike Free shoe is very different to the highly cushioned and structured running shoes of today. Harking back to the shoes of Mesopotamia, the Free shoe fulfills a basic need for protection from the elements while allowing the foot and body to move and flex in a natural balanced way – supporting the task but letting the body get stronger by doing the work.

As designers of another product with an intimate relationship to the human body, we are great fans of the Nike Free shoe and the ideal of its concept. As with shoes, chairs for task work have become very prescriptive, often constraining and over-supporting the user, in time risking their wellbeing.

In designing the Be chair, Formway asked, what determines the shape and performance of a chair? Well of course you, the sitter, should determine this. You need to sit the way you want to sit. Similar in many respects to the Nike Free shoe, we need a chair that provides freedom of movement with continuous support; a chair that follows your lead; a chair that enables multiple positions for the many tasks you perform throughout the day; a chair where you can simply 'be'.

Free Run + shoe

Nike
2009
Upper – synthetic suede, breathable mesh. Sole – Phylite outsole with rubber heel inserts for durability
Industrially produced
Courtesy of Formway Design

Be chair

Formway Design/Formway
2009
Hytrel Elastomeric back skin and Flex mechanism, PET structure, Aluminum base and arm posts
Industrially produced
Courtesy of Formway Design





The Screen

Adrian Hailwood

I acquired a very charming antique screen about ten years ago at a market in Auckland for \$100. To me its eight panels appear to tell the story of a white crane and a pine tree (both are symbols of longevity). This may or may not be the 'true' story – perhaps I just made it up in my own mind years ago – but surely a little poetic license is something granted to the viewer of most everyday objects; especially to those objects that seem to offer us an enchanted history.

My screen, or room divider if you will, has an illustrative story hand painted on delicate handmade paper on the reverse side of its embroidered silk fronts, along with a stamp and signature. I'm not really sure of its origin and its age is also a complete mystery to me. I like it that way. And although I understand it is of Chinese origin, the calligraphy on its back reminds me of the forms of katakana, an intricate Japanese syllabary system for interpreting words borrowed from foreign languages.

Perhaps to some it will appear as a tacky wall hanging from a 60's restaurant, but to others it surely conveys a beautifully crafted piece of furniture (I kind of like the idea of both!) As a designer of clothes and having a background – in a 'previous life' – as a professional illustrator, my appreciation for graphic and textural details means that I take immense pleasure in ubiquitous, well crafted objects such as this. Regardless of historical details, etc, it is readily apparent that the embroidery is exquisite, the crafting is exact and the bold colours are combined, making what in my eyes is a very striking piece. Does anything else really matter?

Like all practical objects there is a use for my screen: it acts as a room divider in my store, blocking off the bomb site of the work table from the public. Interestingly however, I have used embroidery and block colour in my clothing designs for a while now. Capturing the extraordinary preciousness and tactile nature of hand crafted objects and images within a garment is, for me, an honorable thing to do. It is something that is reflected in the screen that I picked up for a song all those years ago and which now holds pride of place in my store.

Winton Gown

Hailwood
2010
Silk
Autumn/Winter collection
2010
Courtesy of Adrian Hailwood

Oriental screen

Designer unknown
Year unknown
Fabric, wood, metal, paper
Production unknown
Courtesy of Adrian Hailwood

Small and smoothly oval, a greywacke stone, so uniquely shaped by natural abrasion that its form requests to be explored. A minimal spinning wheel, pure honest form, finely balanced, beautifully crafted in kauri. A symbolic fish, made of bright yellow Bakelite, designed for bath play – with no specific detail but for large black eyes – I can still hear the laughter.

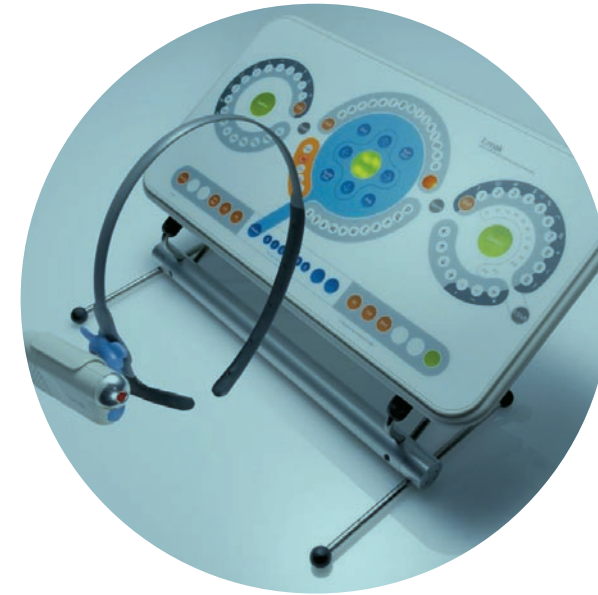
And there's more. But what do you choose as the object that has been an 'everyday' design inspiration? For me it is the Olivetti Lettera 22 portable typewriter, introduced 60 years ago. But for its' obsolete, but remarkably ingenious, mechanical function it is as fresh in resolution today as when it was introduced. Marcello Nizzoli was its author. He had a genius for seeing what products should and could become. Unshackling the user from mechanical subservience, Nizzoli created objects of beauty that made everyday use a delight.

Olivetti was the Apple of its day and mid 20th century, Nizzoli was its' head of design. The Lettera was a new paradigm of portability. This was a product for mass production, for the mass market. It was affordable, functional, and very loveable. Its shape was both geometric and softly organic as human touch necessitated – such as where the finger made contact to index the page to the next line. This was not a product of styling imagination but rather of form determined by purposefulness – and that's where its beauty originates.

Somehow in this modest, compact package everything was in the right place. It could minimize its presence for storage, yet offered almost the full functionality of a full sized machine. The cupped black round keys fell easily to touch. The bright red tab key proudly announced its function. This was universal design. There is perfection in its combination of materials [chrome steel, matte and bright anodized aluminum, painted body, exposed fasteners, black mat rubber], in its expression of positive and negative space, in its joint lines that trace across its surface.

Twelve years after the Lettera's introduction I was a design student at Elam. I discovered for myself that the Lettera wasn't indulgent; it was a product with a purpose that brought pleasure to the user while communicating the unique values of Olivetti. I found that very agreeable and it inspired me to seek to understand the thinking of its creator. I still see this product as an exceptional benchmark of design.

Just as the Lettera 22 was designed for communication, so was the Lomak keyboard. The Lomak was designed for physically disabled people who cannot effectively use a computer. The design focused on causing the users to feel advantaged, rather than disadvantaged. It is an integrated solution comprising a plug and play keyboard, two variants of laser 'mice' and a keyboard/laptop computer stand. No styling, just purposeful design. The needs of the user guided the form and function. There is beauty in honesty.



The Typewriter

*Peter
Haythornthwaite*

Lomak light operated keyboard and mouse
Design by peterhaythornthwaite//creativelab, invented by Mike Watling 2005
Metal, plastic, rubber, electronics, lights
Industrially produced
Courtesy of Peter Haythornthwaite

Olivetti Lettera 22 typewriter
Marcello Nizzoli 1949
Metal, plastic, rubber
Industrially produced
Courtesy of Peter Haythornthwaite



The Carpet

Guy Hohmann

My relationship with objects is a fraught one, as around them I am almost always distracted. Take carpet for instance. We commonly lay this form of cloth at our feet and after a lifetime of daily engagement with this quotidian object, as a designer I now begin to reconsider the role of carpet in my life. The writer Angeli Sachs argues that in times of societal crisis, design begins to reflect a stronger link with the natural world. Sachs contends that “forms inspired by nature become topical when modern society finds itself in crisis”¹ and then suggests “the use of organic forms is intended to bring about harmonization and reconciliation with an external world perceived as inhospitable or hostile.”

I am intrigued by the automatic correlation Sachs makes between organic forms and historical crisis points. In contrast to Sachs’ statements however, what I regularly see occurring around me – particularly in response to the current economic and ecological crises – is a tendency towards ‘distraction’ rather than as Sachs’ statement implies, a collective yearning for the pastoral. My feeling is simply that we furnish our houses with carpet, rugs, drapes and throws to distract ourselves from the external world.

To this end, something that fascinates me as a designer is the deliberate use of textile to function as both a buffer and a distraction inside the home. The use and manipulation of textiles is a growing interest both personally and within my practice. I am particularly interested in investigating production techniques and capabilities. My most recent work, the Cut and Sew Lamp, for instance attempts to replicate and exaggerate this idea of distraction, mimicking the soft ‘reconciliation’ of the carpet in the gentle bell curvature of the frame and the ease of the draping fabric. An additional ‘distraction’ is that these lamps can be manipulated in length to become, like our carpet choices, more – or less – obtrusive in the domestic environment.

Cut and Sew Lamp

Guy Hohmann
2010
Cotton Knit, Bronze Wire
Prototype
Courtesy of Guy Hohmann

Maori Motif D88 rug

Avis Higgs
Contemporary rug using
reproduction of design
from 1949
Dilana Rug
Edition of 20
With thanks to Dilana Rugs

1. Angeli Sachs, Paradise Lost? Contemporary Strategies of Nature Design, **From Inspiration to Innovation Nature Design**, ed. Angeli Sachs, Lars Muller Publishers, Zurich, 2007. (pp266)

There is little question as to the impact of the automobile on modern society. The automobile, or more specifically the internal combustion engine, has also played an important role in shaping my design practice although not for reasons of mobility. Instead, I have been captivated by the process of making an engine, and the unnoticed, almost unintentionally sculptural beauty that results from casting such a complex mechanism out of metal.

In recent years I have been fortunate to develop products with foundries which, alongside my candelabras and coffee tables, also produce components for engines. In this sense it is no surprise that cylinder heads and engine blocks for example – many times more sophisticated than my meagre attempts at taming molten metal – have been a constant source of reference and inspiration.

The form of these engine components is derived entirely from function, be it internal cavities for supplying fuel, ducting for exhaust gases, fins for cooling, fastening bosses, or

structural ribs. Standing on their own and out of context, these components and their moulded features often have a particular sculptural beauty. I have tried to express my appreciation of this beauty externally in my own work with cast metal. For instance, structural ribs are apt to become fundamental to the silhouette and corner fillets promoting easier casting, become key features to the final design.

I have also become smitten with the material itself. Both cast aluminium and cast iron are substantial, age gracefully and can be reused. Sand castings have a kind of rawness not found in other manufacturing processes – this rawness literally being the negative imprint of the sand mould into which the liquid metal was poured. Contrasting this rawness is the ability to precisely machine a casting to within a fraction of a millimetre, allowing for example a piston to slide smoothly against the walls of its cylinder.

There is something beautiful and honest about a foundry too. It is a factory that still feels suited to the word. Of course technology moves on but elements of the industrial age are destined to linger. Even the most high tech foundries still contain steaming furnaces, piles of sand, large suspended crucibles of glowing molten metal; all handled by workers clad in heavy-duty protective wear.

One such place is the Masport foundry in Mount Wellington, Auckland. Producing a wide range of cast goods, including engine components for American automotive companies, the Chevrolet cylinder head selected for this exhibition is one of the products made locally by Masport.

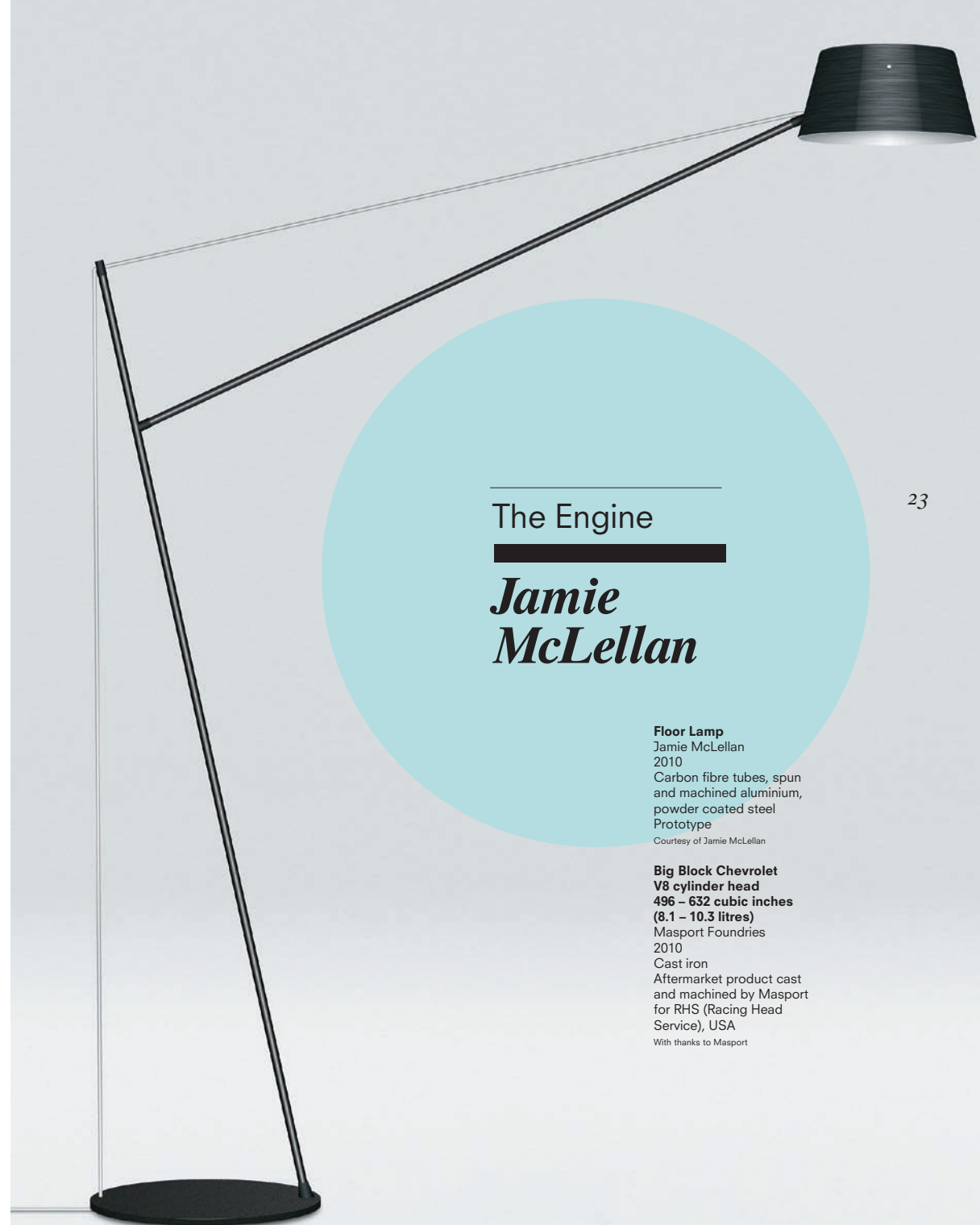
Beyond cast metal, this fascination with engineered objects has led to many of my designs being expressive of their 'insides', with nothing hidden and no sides that shouldn't be seen. Indeed, my carbon floor light is born of this process. Instead of being routed internally as is typical for standing lamps, the electrical cable in this work is crucial not only to the silhouette of the object, but also to the structure.

The Engine

Jamie McLellan

Floor Lamp
Jamie McLellan
2010
Carbon fibre tubes, spun
and machined aluminium,
powder coated steel
Prototype
Courtesy of Jamie McLellan

**Big Block Chevrolet
V8 cylinder head**
496 – 632 cubic inches
(8.1 – 10.3 litres)
Masport Foundries
2010
Cast iron
Aftermarket product cast
and machined by Masport
for RHS (Racing Head
Service), USA
With thanks to Masport



exclam	quotedbl	numeralsign	dollar	percent	ampersand	quotesingle	parenleft	parenright	asterisk	plus	comma	hyphen	period
!	"	#	\$	%	&	'	[]	*	+	,	-	.
zero	one	two	three	four	five	six	seven	eight	nine	colon	semicolon	less	greater
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	:	;	<	>
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
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a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n
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infinity	plusminus	lessequal	greaterequal	Omega	mu	partialdiff	summation	product	pi	mu	integral	ordfeminine	ordmasculine
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The Display

Jonty Valentine

The LCD signage technology currently used here in Auckland by Schindler elevators is the next generation on from the changing LED light system (used in Britomart for example) and the classic flipping letter system made by Solari Udine (used at Airports). Although it is missing the beautiful 'fluttering' sound of the mechanised Solari Udine display system, Schindler's liquid crystal display is made from an equally ingenious grid system that anticipates all of the possible forms of the Roman alphabet. It is a kind of digital mosaic where the 117 areas of the grid are turned on or off to define each changing letter of the alphabet.

My Yonkers typeface was developed from this liquid crystal signage system.¹ What was most interesting for me in developing this typeface was the contradiction or tension in attempting to on the one hand simplify the letterforms so that they fit in to the system, while at the same time trying to create a really complex system that could accommodate an advanced set of letters never meant to be so homogenized. Yonkers incorporates my attempt at re-designing the ubiquitous LCD typeface grid and then expands upon it to create an almost implausibly extended "expert" set of characters.

I consider that there are a number of ways types can be read or evaluated. Of these, I would describe Yonkers as a formal system of arbitrary signs. In this mode – what I define

(opposite)
Yonkers Line
typeface design
 Jonty Valentine
 2006
 Font created in Fontlab
 Courtesy of Jonty Valentine

LCD elevator display
 Schindler Lifts
 Year Unknown
 Liquid Crystal display
 Industrially produced
 With thanks to Angus Varcoe,
 Schindler Lifts NZ Ltd

as an essentially modernist point of view – the best typefaces are the ones that make perfect sense within the logic of their own systems. For example, by this evaluation a typeface's lower case "b" acquires most of its meaning through its visual and structural relationship to the "n". Further to this, such types can be read by the way that they play with (or mess-up) the logic or restrictions of their own system.

I do feel slightly uncomfortable in promoting this now decidedly 1990s field of experimental typeface design. Given that the Roman alphabet is itself a set of arbitrary signs, the seemingly endless re-interpretation of its forms by type designers could seem like a fairly pointless exercise. It is for this reason that, in the publication for the Objectspace exhibition, Printing Types², I referred to type as being seen by many as relatively "dumb". By dumb, I meant in the way that their formal (or material) qualities do not speak. But actually I don't think type is **really** dumb in this sense – it is just talking to itself.

1. The name Yonkers is because I originally saw this system used at Grand Central Train Station New York.

2. Valentine, Jonty, Printing Types: New Zealand type design since 1870, Objectspace, Auckland, 2009. (pp8)

'Work equals force multiplied by distance.' This simple equation is at the core of every question I ask, especially on my day off when the decision is how far do I travel for what quality of waves. Digital design and 3D milling are the core processes I use to generate most of what I do. At the end of the day, the aim of my design studio is to maintain my creative independence while efficiently moving concepts to prototypes and then production with minimum wastage and a small footprint.

I have been designing for long enough now that the 'magic' of technologies like rapid prototyping, fab labs, rep rap, 3d printing etc, no longer raise my eyebrows, or my heart rate. To some extent technology just offers newer tools and robots to keep working so I can do other things. What is currently exciting me however, is that the above technological advances have actually caused me to reconsider the fundamental machines and engineering principles that continue to serve us so well.

Take the axe for example, one of the simplest machines; a wedge of metal attached to a handle. The axe eloquently typifies a fundamental principle of engineering, the inclined plane (an axe is two inclined planes that

form a wedge.) This machine makes splitting wood less work therefore we gain time to go to the gym, watch TV, or pursue recreation. However what we really do with our time is other work to pay for services (including firewood chopping.)

As someone coming to engineering from a self taught direction my renewed interest and appreciation in the enormity of the taper and other engineering basics came about for me, ironically, through the use of digital devices and software in my design studio. My Taper chair has been developed recently for Street Furniture New Zealand. Without the critical 1% of taper we would never free the tool from the mould and produce this cast iron device for resting. Nor would we have the humble axe.

In a world where going outdoors is for many an increasingly novel way to experience the world, it is not the app for my iPhone to unlock my door that interests me as a designer of objects. It is the combination of levers, springs and gears that I am infatuated with. Six of the most beautiful machines will continue to do most of the work we desire, while gravity and physics hold us in the suspended moment, which is our life.

Long live the ramp, screw, wedge, lever, wheel and pulley.



The Axe

*Matthew
von Sturmer*

Taper seat
Matthew von Sturmer
2010
Metal, wood
Industrially produced
Courtesy of Fel Group

Axe
Year unknown
Metal, wood
Industrially produced
Courtesy of Matthew von Sturmer



The Stapler

Katy Wallace

Leaning shelf

Katy Wallace
2006
Plywood
Prototype
Courtesy of Katy Wallace

Paper stapler

Designer unknown,
imprinted as 'distributed
by InForm design'
Year unknown
Plastic, metal
Industrially produced
Courtesy of Katy Wallace

My father came back from a trip to New York several years ago with gifts from MOMA. My husband was given this staple-less stapler. I can't remember what I was given as I only had eyes for the stapler.

Magical things happen inside this small device, it cuts and threads the paper back through itself using no more than the quick press of a typical stapler. The beauty is in the fastening; the object that performs the task is but the tool. Only special people get paper staples.

I thrive on design like this, where basic material engineering concepts exceed expectations. The paper stapler expresses that desirous combination of simplicity and sophistication, beauty within function. No disservice intended to the metal staple, which in itself is genius and more robust than the paper version, but it is the extension of a single material that also happens to inspire many of my own material investigations.

As a fan of Victor Papanek's work from the 70's, I often take inspiration from his cut, fold, and assemble plans that put many different accessible materials into a furniture context. Papanek's kitset DIY plans brought a distinctive aesthetic into the domestic environment through their innovative ways of tool-less construction. Today with the capabilities of CNC and laser cutting technologies designers are able to achieve more complex

and sophisticated results, using similar cut and assemble concepts. Simple, efficient engineering processes combined with clever design make the potential to connect and deliver to an international audience much more feasible for an independent designer.

The shelf that accompanies the paper stapler in *Quotidian* works to maximise the aesthetic and engineering qualities of plywood. Cut from a rectangle of material, the shelves, once slotted in place leave the voids they have been cut from for books and objects. Gravity rests the shelves to a level position in each slot, and once pushed through to contact the wall and wedged in place, the shelves act as a brace to stop the unit flexing. Essentially it is the tolerances between the plywood parts and how they operate in space that make the whole work.

The physics of design, material, and functionality working together create a visual language that would never have emerged if I were solely designing for looks. As with the paper stapler, I see beauty in the aesthetics of engineering and relish in the process of push and pull between aesthetics and function. In a furniture context if economy in design, materials, manufacturing, packaging, assembly, and use can come together with simplicity and sophistication, it is a beautiful thing.

Virtue Dress

Cybèle
2010
100% Silk Dupion
Virtue collection, Autumn/
Winter 2010
Courtesy of Cybèle

Spiral staircase

Designer unknown
Year unknown
Production unknown
Courtesy of private collector

In my workroom I have two black and white photocopied images of spiral staircases pinned on the wall, amongst a whole sea of images that interest me for all sorts of reasons. I am drawn to the way light and shadow fall on the overlapping segment-like steps, the firm structure of the staircase's core and its graceful curved helix-shaped banister. Beyond the purely visual attraction of the staircase, it also invokes feelings of mystery and historical drama. The staircase happens to have inspired the fan detail used in a garment from my Winter 2010 range, the *Virtue* dress and in other garments throughout this collection.

Maybe it is the sense of clear structure implied in the construction of a staircase, the way the interior of a building is willfully exposed, implying an engineered authority that any epoch can seemingly dress up, or down, and which then seems to fit so naturally with the dominant aesthetic of a particular time.

The way in which I work when designing a seasonal collection involves pulling together a range of visual material, thoughts and impulses which relate variously to colour combinations, figurative imagery, textures, shape and form. The inspiration board where my two images of spiral staircases have lived for the past 6 months or so is a living and ever changing work in progress. The inspiration board matches the seasons and collections as they develop in an organic way that cannot be fully articulated in words or theories.

Of the many epochs in which I imagine the staircase has featured strongly, it is currently the Victorian era that inspires me the most. For me this ties into a parallel investigation into the juxtaposition of sculptural forms and the restrained romanticism within Victorian dress and architecture.



The Staircase

Cybèle Wiren

objectspace

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