

## EDUCATION

# 7 key elements of quality

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Known for its rigid standards of quality, Loro Piana sources the finest wool from around the world for its apparel and accessories. Image credit: Loro Piana

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... *"Make it beautiful, make it well and make it last."* Tomas Maier

Quality may be accurately defined as the reflection of fine materials, design integrity, timelessness, craftsmanship and creativity. Quality is not a trend. Quality is a classic. And interest in quality is enjoying a well-deserved renaissance.

The sad reality is that we have allowed and even been conditioned as consumers to believe that good is good enough. This encroachment on our lives is a dangerous path that could eventually eliminate the need for, and respect of, artisans. The truth, good is not great.

The essence of this article offers a deeper understanding of quality through seven key elements: intellectual curiosity, passion, journey, raw, hand, design and edit.

Intellectual curiosity

*"Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death."* Albert Einstein

In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, Rembrandt had a room in his home filled with collections of intellectual references, which was his version of "A Cabinet of Curiosities." This room was filled with his passion around natural curiosities.

One might find skulls of birds, or dried flowers, a miniature gilt shoe, or a lock of hair tied with ribbon all elements of life that offered insight, provided knowledge and evoked his desire to learn more. It sparked Rembrandt's intellectual curiosity and fed his inspiration. The world is the recipient of his dedication.

Intellectual curiosity is the discipline and practice of learning, seeking exposure to new ideas and experiences and having the ability to apply this knowledge to benefit you or those you serve.

As a very curious child, I quickly became limited to the number of questions I was allowed to ask each day.

It appeared I had an insatiable appetite to know the "why" behind everything. I wanted to know how something worked, why it was made, how it was made, and what its end use would be and even today whether it had that lasting

sense of quality and entitlement to endure.

This, I believe, laid a strong foundation for my career and, ultimately, my appreciation for quality. I was, and remain, terribly curious about the how's, why's and what's in life. This passion has served me well and has provided me with a much fuller and richer life, one full of beauty, integrity, strength and experiential learning.

Our life's work involves selling in some manner or another. Whether we are selling a commodity, an idea or a relationship, we are all ultimately involved in the art of selling, even if only to ourselves. The very word denotes energy, opportunity, accomplishment and reward.

When hired to build a F500 team for Target, I reached out to Dave Matlow, founder of IMPAX, a global sales performance improvement and growth enablement company, as to what comprised the profile of a successful person in sales. I was prepared with pad and paper in hand to write down all of the key attributes I assumed he was about to list. He responded in two eloquent words: intellectual curiosity.

Stunned by the simplicity of his answer, and clearly curious, I asked for a more comprehensive explanation. One was never offered.

Intellectual curiosity is the ultimate currency we have in our lives. The positive events it affords us last longer as we extract more learning from the experiences. Curiosity is attractive. It is a form of showing authenticity and is a personal form of quality.

Intellectual curiosity is the engine of growth. It is about recognizing and reaping the rewards of embracing the uncertain, the unknown and the new.

By being curious we explore, by exploring we discover. The more satisfying this is, the more likely we are to repeat it. By repeating it, we develop competency and mastery. By developing competency and mastery, our knowledge and skills grow and we expand who we are.

Curiosity results in exploration, creates movement, creates relationships and is about authentic discovery.

Intellectual curiosity is naturally, or can be developed, as a part of our personality. It is an essential part of our identities. It is not a question of whether or not you are, it is about the degree of curiosity that you possess.

There are five qualities that characterize a curious person.

- Intensity: highly curious people show a strong preference for novelty, variety and complexity they are open to new experiences
- Frequency: highly curious people have the urge to explore and investigate
- Durability: highly curious people have a pronounced sense of intrigue and desire to explore for longer periods of time
- Breadth and depth: highly curious people are interested in the number of events and span of their work and relationships, passions and their own values.

We know 7 percent of communication is accomplished through verbal exchanges. The rest is determined by how the words are spoken facial expressions, posture, body movements and tone of voice.

The art of observation plays a key role in developing relationships. If you truly want to connect with someone, listening is insufficient, you must be observant.

The University of Minnesota now requires interns to spend time at the Minneapolis Art Institute to hone their observation skills by studying art. Nuances: details are important.

The same principles apply to quality goods and services.

To simply ask about a product or service will give you a mere cursory understanding. To appreciate their true value and to be able to translate that value to another so it is relevant to them is where intellectual curiosity plays a key role in becoming a genuine storyteller.

Old-world luxury is an inflexible enterprise.

Like a castle, it is a closed system, believing that their success depends on their creative genius and the knowledge of what is best for luxury consumers. It is closed to customer feedback as the rightful curator of luxury taste. It fails to see the simple reality that most luxury business interactions are optimized by cooperation and collaboration with

their customers.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century luxury enterprise is an open system on a journey to discover what suits the luxury customer best, no matter where the innovation originates. It is an eco-friendly rainforest where sustainability depends on rapid, elegant adaptation and collaboration from its surroundings, understands the DNA of quality and remains flexible as to how the objectives are achieved.

Why is intellectual curiosity important? Harnessing it provides a competitive edge by which to engage, retain and enjoy becoming a resource engine to yourself and others. It weaves quality, value, and passion into your world.

Mathew Evins, chairman/CEO of Evins Communications, said, "luxury is not about riches, but about enrichment. It's not about being acquisitive, but about being inquisitive and having meaning."

A brand's long-standing heritage is seen as an important part of its value. It serves as an indicator of its value.

In this market, people are gravitating towards quality and history. The number one reason luxury items are purchased is for quality.

As Robert Dumas said, "Hermès is different because we are making a product that we can repair. It's so simple. And it's not so simple. Think that you can repair something because you know how to repair it and why it has been damaged. You have the hands. Think that you can repair it because you want to keep it. And think that you can repair it because you want to give it to someone else. I think it's right. It's what Hermès is about."

We are all keenly aware that as economic conditions fluctuate, we must be resourceful to navigate the management of change.

Being prepared, flexible and ever curious is key. Today's "norm" is a concierge's level of service. The definition becomes broader and farther reaching as client's expectations have moved towards personalization and customization. The brand they care most deeply about is their own.

We must carefully assess which activities and goals we elect to invest in to create the most authentic, competent and rewarding outcomes.

There are, in my opinion, six areas of focus when applying intellectual curiosity to quality goods or services. Passion, journey, raw, hand, design and ultimately edit.

One common element between each area is how trends affect them. A trend tracker is one who looks at the signs to help their business stay up to date. A trend strategist is one who begins by observing a trend and then translates the trend information into a direction that makes sense for a company and its clients.

Business today cannot afford to just be catching on as others are already moving on. We must continue to acquire knowledge and develop the skills to walk in other worlds.

Businesses today need a disruptive innovation strategist who has a full command of quality and the end user.

A great lesson in life is to be intellectually curious about worthy things, great books, the exquisite construction of a building, how Fortuny fabric is made and transformed into clothing and environments, art, music, great food and drink, and great and profound friendships and learning experiences.

The common thread for all these disparate elements must be passion. Goods and services of true quality are not expensive, they are very fine, they entail exquisite craftsmanship and attention to detail, they may be complex or simple, but never easy, and often rare.

"Having the intellectual curiosity to select among the amazing plethora of goods and services today takes a gimlet eye, an educated and intellectually curious one, to filter for the truly fine and worthy and to pursue the why and when and how of its genesis and its actualization," said trend strategist, Jane Franklin Matteson, Benjamin Franklin's fourth great niece.

"The ones that actually have legs,' as they say in the wine business, is a rare privilege," she said. "It does require endless curiosity and a willingness to wade through a lot of dreck. Go to the right back alley behind the Spanish Steps and find the frame restorer judged worthy of doing the Vatican's work, wander Portobello Road for the dealer who knows his Georgian period rose gold and an 18<sup>th</sup> century seal, do a tasting menu that is specially prepared and broaden your knowledge, but always remember to share it with a worthy client or friend, who is like minded in his or her curiosity and wonder at the truly luxurious."

## Passion

*"I have the simplest tastes. I am always satisfied with the best." Oscar Wilde*

Passion is that intense emotion that makes everything possible. Passions and desires more often than not drive our decisions. They are personal, real and vibrant in each of us. Identifying them is not difficult and we can never be wrong. After all, passion is deeply personal.

Passion is a driver for learning, experiencing, changing, collecting, bonding and giving. It allows us to embrace a wide range of actions moving from a more conservative position to one with much higher risks. It drives our creative and intellectual energies.

What is so wonderful about passion is that we all experience it some of us seem to embrace our passions more outwardly, while others shield them in a more private manner.

Whatever our mode of operandi, we know they are important. We value them. It is this very stimulus that makes us more curious, more passionate and reaps more personal rewards. We will work harder, longer or more intensely around those things we are passionate about.

Likewise, we will spend more time and money on those things we are passionate about what we value. We are curious about the nuances and details that support our interests.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century, only royal families were allowed access vicuna garments, as it was considered a "fiber of the gods." At this time 1 million vicuna were in the Inca Empire in Bolivia and Peru. One hundred years later only a few thousand remained as they were being slaughtered for their "silk of the New World." Decrees were issued to protect them, but illegal poaching persisted.

Vicuna became the object of international protection and in 1966 they were classified as a most threatened species and trade was prohibited in any form. The government needed to find a way to motivate the inhabitants from on-going poaching. Restrictions were lifted and Vicuna could be sheared for profit as long as the animals were not harmed.

Further, a competition was won by Loro Piana, which was granted the right to return the fiber to market. Loro Piana's contribution did not end here. It never stopped telling the story of the vicuna and continued to educate the most demanding consumers in the world to choose the "fiber of the gods" that only comes from a rigorous controlled shearing program.

Two thousand hectares have been purchased, establishing a private reserve dedicated to Dr. Franco Loro Piana. It takes 25 to 30 vicuna to produce enough fiber to make a coat.

For all of these reasons, anyone who buys a Loro Piana vicuna garment will not only have the privilege of wearing the softest, warmest and most luxurious fabric, but will contribute to the conservation of the species by discouraging any form of contraband.

This accounting is a perfect example of where passion, conservation, commerce, education and appreciation work in concert and everyone wins. The story, heritage, product and enjoyment clearly demonstrate the price/value equation.

When we determine what we wish to be, own or experience, that which we place a high value on will take the lead. In the case of Madame Clicquot, her motto was, "One quality, the finest." It served to define the brand, define the company's culture, the company's operations and ultimately their clientele.

Passion manifests itself in copious ways.

More often than not, there are visual signals that call out our passions. We may be collectors of fine art, wine or cars. We may give tirelessly to our fellow man by volunteering, mentoring or contributing to causes that touch our hearts and minds. We may join organizations that align with our passions, like adopting a shelter animal, conserving our natural resources or teaching an art class.

We seek educational activities that broaden our understandings or expose us to new ideas about our passions. Whatever we elect to invest in, it is important to us.

Passions lead us to the development of our own brand. We design a lifestyle around our personal brand and enjoy the journey along this continuum. We seek experts to teach us, trusted advisors to introduce us to new or unexplored

opportunities and experiences that deepen or appreciation.

Cheese is a passion of mine. I have traveled to small farms in France where boutique goat cheeses are made, toured factories in Italy to see how Parmesan cheese is made, researched restaurants who offer unusual cheese selections, such as Picholine in New York and wine and cheese pairing events at Artisanal and studied Max McCalam's book on "Mastering Cheese."

A simple passion such as cheese provides me with a topic of conversation for anyone who enjoys food, wine, entertaining, travel, history, animals, agriculture, cutlery, crystal, bread, linens, china or even artisanal production.

There is nothing more authentic in the art of conversation than speaking about those things you are passionate about or listening to others who are well versed in the subjects you are passionate about learning.

Journey

*"The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page."* St. Augustine

The most exciting use of one's baseline understanding of quality takes us next on a journey one of discovery and learning. We begin to move away from being aspirational and become more intentional. Our choices begin to take shape as our learning's play a more significant role in our decision process. We begin to develop a newfound patience as we learn how objects are made, the hours and artisanship required to design and create something of quality. We find we are not in such a hurry.

We know that different cultures share common needs through different forms of expression. Comfort serves as their common denominator. Whether it is a physical comfort or one such as a level of trust, it must be part of the equation.

A journey manifests itself in a number of ways.

Physical travel allows us to use all of our senses to gain insight, knowledge and awareness. This form of a journey offers the greatest breadth of opportunities for intellectual curiosity to be stimulated and satisfied in a comprehensive manner.

By studying the architecture, tasting local foods, drinking regional wines, learning the history of the area, the provenance of the antiques, being a participant in their culture, listening to their music, visiting an artisans workshop, touring a local factory, observing their tradition in short, we begin to appreciate the differences and what they value first hand.

Travel has altered the way we look at the world, our work and our homes. We no longer opt for a single look or feel after all, we are blending families, cultures, passions, acquisitions, experiences all treasures in themselves, rich in connections with a particular place and people. Elements of style and savored tastes of another culture are the way we live. Infusions of an ever-shrinking world. We seek to capture adventure, history, and romance.

Many of the same elements may be found by traveling through less conventional methods those which offer exposure to different cultures and educate us in the process. The attendance of a lecture on Asian art where you learn about the culture, the display of artists' tools on a scholar's desk used to create calligraphy, the rituals they follow, the mastery behind a brush stroke, the stone and the ink stick when mixed with water creates the actual ink, the rice paper traditionally used and the disciplined spiritual environment they surround themselves with.

Cooking classes, language tutorials, museum tours, acting classes, theatre productions, the history channel, photography exhibits, guest speakers on literature, design, technology, communication all will serve you well. Social media is a new form of a travel surfing the net, searching for information, not that much different than Marco Polo's travels.

Drilling down yet to another level we find the journey of a product.

Think for a moment of the process of making a pair of bespoke shoes. The process begins by determining the purpose of the shoe, where upon a style is selected. Once this decision has been made, your foot is measured. Tracing the outline of both of your feet on a piece of paper is then followed by a series of 15 tape measurements, making special notations of any foot characteristics that need to be taken into consideration length, width, height, radius of your arch. The measurements will be transferred to a block of wood from which the last is hand carved.

A pattern is then developed and clicking occurs, where a pattern is marked on the leather. A clicking knife cuts the leather pieces. Ornamental details, such as a medallion on the toe are then punched into the leather. Sewing begins on the leather pieces to assemble the uppers. The upper is then attached to a fitting sole as it begins to take shape.

The shoe is now ready for a fitting.

The shoe is at a stage where minor adjustments are still possible. The final sole is cut out and the layers of leather for the sole are beaten down to a condensed state to ensure durability and longevity, providing a smooth edge surface that carries a sheen upon completion.

For a more durable shoe Goodyear welting, the oldest, most labor intensive and involves multiple steps may come next. The technique layers the upper to the sole with an insert, often using cork.

At this stage, based on the fitting, the adjustments to the last and the uppers are now sewn into place. The wooden hand carved shoetree is made for the shoe based on the last or shape of your foot. If desired, the finished shoe is polished to a high sheen by a process known as boning, using a deer bone, bee's wax and elbow grease.

Your name, initials or crest may be placed on the shoe tress. A customer number goes on the inside of the shoe to identify the customer to the shoemaker and on the corresponding lasts, which will be stored for future orders. Five pairs of skilled hands have touched these shoes and anywhere from three to 18 months will pass before you are take possession.

If we move for a moment into the furniture world we can contrast the journey of a bespoke shoe to that of a quality piece of French furniture. The Tour de France was not originally a bicycle race as we know it today, but rather the apprentice route for learning the trade of furniture building and finishing by moving from village to village or "touring" the countryside of France to learn each step of the trade.

French Heritage, whose furniture is primarily made in France, often speaks of the 44 pairs of hands it takes to complete a chest of drawers in its collection. Each step lovingly completed by an artisan.

At the very least, while in France, learn something about Champagne, the difference between Veuve Clicquot's lovely orange label and a friend or client's home deserving of a bottle of the crown jewel of Champagne Louis Roederer's Cristal, created in 1876 for Tsar Alexander II of Russia or a 1990 Veuve Clicquot, La Grande Dame Rose. Perhaps include a copy of *The Widow Clicquot* or do the unusual and go with Brillat-Saumon.

You might now look differently at a bespoke shoe or a piece of finely constructed furniture or a glass of Champagne. Will the price be the most important factor or has a somewhat deeper appreciation surfaced for the training and process, which went into making them? Should you elect to purchase, might you enjoy them a bit more knowing more details about the journey of creating them?

Taking it one step further you travel through your acquisitions. Acquisitions create a lifestyle, but they also provide experiences. Each time I sit in my living room, I extend my travels. Acquisitions of artifacts have been made from each trip and when I look upon them I continue to travel. My journey is filled with memories, history, beauty all which we share with friends and family.

Acquiring is a type of a journey. Hopefully, we do not just accumulate. We study, understand and, above all, see and appreciate. Collecting is part of the journey. Do not accumulate, but acquire, store and treasure great experiential learning, memorable meals, resounding friendships born of common journeys and be ever present to the experience for yourself and, hopefully, it becomes a philosophy that will perpetuate itself.

If I think sequentially of my own journeys, one comes to mind. It began on a trip to France with friends. We had rented a charming farm house in southern France, which turned out to be a bit of a disaster, so we drove over to San Sebastian, in the Basque region of northern Spain, to have lunch at Arzak, and then on to tour the Guggenheim Museum, in nearby Bilbao.

Once there I was enthralled seeing the Terracotta Warriors on loan from Xian, China. The next trip was planned we were off to China. The planning began food, wine, language classes, architecture, history, culture, and so forth.

Storytelling is a wonderful form of a journey. It is rich in context and sequential. It is the joy of the process itself that is rewarding. Any type of travel or journey may help to move the perception of acquisitions from being an expense to an investment. The joys of a journey are being "in the present" or engaging in the experience as it unfolds.

Raw

*"One quality, the finest."* Madame Clicquot

Quality is determined by the use of fine raw materials and the attention to detail.

When we appreciate a finished good for its quality we are considering raw elements, no matter how far it is from its

when we appraise a finished good for its quality, we are considering raw elements, no matter how far it is from its natural state.

Raw harkens back to the mysterious creation that predates the final product.

Raw elements mark finery because they are the origin transformed, and this is the essence of the art-making process. When we come to appreciate the rawness of things, we are appreciating beauty, rarity and integrity.

Raw offers us endless possibilities and awaits our creative intentions. It begs us to be thoughtful, evocative, clever and respectful even intuitive.

In its simplest form raw refers to using the strength of each element to create beauty and integrity, allowing the materials to do what they do best.

Raw refers to the beginning, the fundamental elements used when creating an item or an experience of quality. What quality of materials one elects to use will greatly affect the outcome. By acquiring a baseline understanding of raw materials, their attributes, their rarity, their beauty one can begin to better appreciate the integrity of the final piece.

We describe raw using a number of different scenarios. It offers us endless possibilities and awaits our creative intentions. It begs us to be thoughtful, evocative, clever, respectful or even intuitive.

Raw refers to the materials used in creating a product, such as Russian Karelian birch selected to build a John Widdicomb cabinet, black marble with gold veins found only in Italy at a quarry owned by the Vatican and Chilean cranberry seeds introduced in England in 1844 a favorite of Queen Victoria's that produce a wild strawberry flavored fruit as well as 200-year-old, well-preserved Russian reindeer hides perfectly preserved in the freezing waters of the Atlantic after the sinking of the Metta Catharina traveling from St. Petersburg and now used in George Cleverly's English bespoke shoes, steel from Belgium used to support the cantilever in the Guthrie Theatre designed by Jean Nouvel, cow horns or Brazilian nuts called vegetable ivory for buttons used on Savile Row in London, appropriately mined rough diamonds from South Africa by De Beers, the quality of the sand used to create fine-crystal Baccarat, the natural thistle use to create the striation on cashmere fabrics for Ralph Lauren Purple Label or the length of a cashmere goat's hair, the natural raw edge on a Caro slab table found at BDDW in New York.

Raw refers to a blank canvas awaiting linseed oil and pigments to capture an image or sentiment, an empty room in which the selection and arrangement of furnishings will reflect the owner and create their unique lifestyle, a piece of fabric carefully washed, ironed damp and laid out to be cut into a suit at Liverano & Liverano, an assortment of loose stones ready to be set in a fine piece of jewelry designed by Nicholas Varney in a hand-lapped mounting using crushed egg shells or a piece of land waiting to be developed or awarded conservation status.

We see raw in the unfinished works of Michelangelo's *Prisoners* lining the hallway to his David at The Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence, Italy.

Quality begins by using fine raw materials.

Think of a sumptuous meal that evoked pleasure because of an unexpected pairing of flavors. The use of fresh ingredients played a role.

Glance out the window onto a garden of English flowers planted so each one takes center stage as another bows down during the summer. Cook in a kitchen sleek with restraint begging for smells to bounce back and forth across the stainless and granite surfaces.

In movies, raw footage waits to be edited while an actor's raw emotions bring depth to a role. Fresh, raw ingredients provide texture and pleasure to the palette or raw materials. Raw is a natural state.

However raw is defined, it serves as the foundation from which quality may be built. In its simplest form, raw refers to using the strength of each element to create beauty and integrity, allowing the materials to do what they do best.

Hand

*"The Impact of Hand" - "The best the mind of man can imagine and the hand of man can create." Stanley Marcus*

We are learning to place a higher value on true craftsmanship, on design, on beauty, on being able to see and feel the hand of the artisan behind objects, structures and experiences, encouraging an emotional as well as an aesthetic response.

When we speak of hand, we must consider addressing the word using a breadth of descriptors. The overarching

when we speak of hand, we must consider addressing the word using a breadth of descriptors. The overarching beauty of hand is its imperfect perfection in every application.

It is hand that contributes so magnificently to what we all envision quality should be. It plays a key role in every aspect and definition of quality. It is intimate, fragile, strong, versatile, disciplined, measured and desirable. It is human.

There is the hand of a fabric a tactile experience that indicates its firmness, texture and durability.

There is the steady hand that engraves a sterling plaque on a gun and the hand that still builds about 50 percent of a Ferrari.

It is that which is responsible for the eight-way, hand-tied springs of a sofa, signaling the mark of quality or the hand that laps a mounting with a string of leather before setting the stones so that the beauty is equally refined looking at the final piece from the inside or the outside.

It is the hand that is responsible for riddling Champagne every two weeks while it ferments or a turning a Parmesan wheel every seven days while they age. There is the hand that turns the wand transforming a blob of molten glass into a vase or the hand that carves a mantel of wood or a statue from stone.

It is the hand of a human being that works in concert with the eye. It refers to the artisanal aspects of a product, many which have been handed down generation after generation and will be lost if we do not continue to honor and value this exceptional work through education and acquisition. It is a way to identify and determine the authenticity of people, products and services.

More often, it is most easily recognized in bespoke goods or truly one-of-a-kind objects. The hand is responsible for executing what the eye and mind can only imagine. Natural talent and years of apprenticeship perfect one's hand.

In our human affairs, it may be that genuine extension of care, trust and support. Machine has yet to replicate this little detail.

While on a private tour of the Gucci factory in Italy we were shown how man and machine have established an ideal working relationship, one of mutual respect. Gucci has long prided itself on tradition and innovation.

A perfect example was the marriage of man and computers that had been pre-programmed with the pattern pieces for all the items that Gucci was making that season.

The first one scanned a piece of leather and determined what item should be cut from the hide to maximum the use of the leather hide, determining exactly which piece of the hide, due to its condition, should be used for what handle, belt, attach side panel providing minimum waste of the hide and offering suggestions for other items as well. It then rolled out of the scanner into a glass box where extremely high-pressured water cuts the hide, leaving not a trace of water on the hide. After which, each piece is distributed to the proper workstation.

"The world is divided into two: those who know how to use tools, and those who do not," according to Herms principals.

"Herms is different from other luxury brands in that it is not so much a design identity as it is a culture, a rarefied world with its own values and ways of working ("the way the grandfathers of our grandfathers did"). Retired workers don't leave the company; they join its Club des Anciens 'the ancients' which meets for monthly lunches and yearly trips and is a living library of company history and wisdom."

After years of experimenting, Gucci determined that *Il Giornale*, an Italian newspaper, is the best conduit, due to the pulp and ink combination, to hold the leather glued securely to the wooden frame of their attach. The remainder of the attach is assembled by hand.

The hand may take possession of, make indisputable decisions or pass down to the next generation. These descriptors are but one critical detail of quality. The attention to, the lack of, the consistency of, the execution of, the amount of, the authenticity of, the heritage of and the intention to.

Jane Campion, the movie writer and director, was quoted as saying about the set for *Bright Star*, "People find comfort in history many appreciate the expert hand craftsmanship that goes into creating a fine antique which, in many cases employs a slow and a careful skill. Pieces which such intrinsic value add an element to interiors that goes beyond the piece itself. A sense of history of things is enriching, especially if they have a handmade quality."

Ms. Campion went on to describe the color pallet used, "It is a kind of stark Regency with a bit of daring, built around



a "bruised palette" of lilacs, dirty golds and greys contrasting with more intense shades of smaller scale, subtle accessories."

Hand, be it used to describe an object or a method, is man's greatest and most versatile tool. Understanding its complexion gives you insight to its meaning.

Hand, or the tactile quality of whatever you touch, is the magic. We see through our hands or whatever touch-based senses we have. We may hear the Mercedes Gullwing car door shut, but we feel the reverberations. We literally feel the unctuous amazing quality of good foie gras melting on your tongue with a phenomenally astute wine pairing, a sweet Ice Wine.

Run your hand over a letter-pressed card, the tiny persistent mousse in a good Champagne as it hits the tongue, or the slither of silk charmeuse, the drop of wool drapes, a judicious amount of texture imbedded canvas or woven leather from Bottega Veneta, all of these classics.

By age 10, Pierre-Alexis Dumas of Hermès was asking to learn the saddle stitch. "It's not really about the stitch," he said. "It's about being aware of the sense of touch, being able to stitch with your eyes closed, being able to represent yourself and the object you're making in space, being able to listen to what your hands tell you. These are fundamental acts, which built our civilization. When I was able to control my hands, I was so proud."

Christian Dior Couture believes it is essential to preserve the savoir-faire to be able to offer clients exceptional products. "From leather goods to haute couture, ready-to-wear and more, the apprenticeship experience is made possible due to the generosity and support of highly experienced and unusually senior supervisors, who are charged with sharing their knowledge and providing daily support to their apprentices in the workplace."

This commitment provides hands on learning, a continuation of quality in standards, and creates community and family.

It is hand that contributes so magnificently to what we all envision quality goods should be. It plays a key role in every aspect and definition of genuine luxury. It is intimate, fragile, strong, versatile, disciplined, measured and desirable. It is human.

## Design

*"I dream my painting, then I paint my dream."* Vincent van Gogh

Nothing transpires without need or desire. There is purpose and intent behind such words. To this end, design occurs.

Design is a calculated journey towards the unknown. Design allows us to escape into style, elegance and comfort through the value of association of line, scale, form and function. It is the planning that lays the basis for the making of every object or system.

There is virtually no part of our lives that does not encompass design on some level. To fully appreciate good design it is important to understand the basic principles behind it.

In 1896, Louis Sullivan, an American architect, coined the phrase, "form follows function." This has become the credo without exception for all design.

This single rule is applied in all areas of design, be it architecture, graphics, corporate identities, interior design, home furnishings, fashion, publishing, Web sites, automobiles, computers, sports equipment, appliances, process improvement or lifestyles.

Great design always includes the following four elements:

*Line* is the eloquence that defines. Think about the line of a great building: Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao; or the line of a car: Pininfarina's Ferraris; or Frank Lloyd Wright's house, Falling Water; or even the beauty of a vintage Yves Saint Laurent dress; or the scribed element of a Cy Twombly painting. Line is the perimeter and the defining element.

*Proportion and scale* may best be illustrated through The Golden Mean of Greece. It is what made every statue so seductive, and it is, as science has taught us, the thing that defines attraction in a human the perfect and sublime proportion in a face, a body, the rule of seven that every artist knows.

Look at the works of Andrzej Arbus or, in today's world, Christian Liagre they are sublime. The leg of a chair is in

perfect scale and proportion to the whole, to the height and heft of the seat. All elements are in true harmony as a whole and in their individual parts.

*Form:* Put yourself in mind of Auguste Rodin's work. He understood form in the same way that British sculptor Henry Moore did; Ustad Ahmad Lahauri, the architect of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India, did; and the great gardens of Antoni Gaudí in Barcelona, Spain did. They have substance and the form that gave them a life of their own, almost a palpable place in time and space that was and is unique.

*Function:* The eloquence of getting the job done in the most efficient and elegant way possible. That may be with a marvelously efficient vegetable peeler that takes into account the ergonomics of movement and creates grace in a daily function or it may be in the visions of Philippe Starck, or Michael Graves who loaned his imaginative use of function to Target.

Understanding the basic principles allows us to view and appreciate our world in a more informed manner.

We begin to better understand the reasons and relationships of materials used in constructing a house, the flow of a room or the shape of a piece of furniture. We begin to understand the associations between the different periods of art, architecture, furniture and music.

All disciplines have a standard set of design principles.

Picasso is a perfect example of someone who mastered the disciplines of art surrounding classical composition, color and scale, producing works in a realistic style. By learning these fundamental principles, he then had the foundation from which to change his style by experimenting with different theories, techniques and ideas from which he cofounded the cubist movement.

In interior design, once the basic principles are mastered and in play, creativity invites juxtaposition to enter the equation. That intentional tension created between two contrasting styles, the dissonance that alters symmetry or the unabashed use of color begins to personalize the solution.

Dramatic designs are expressed in eclectic rooms as a result of blended families, cultures, passions and furnishings.

Design is expected to encourage an emotional as well as aesthetic response.

Inspiration for design comes from every facet of the world. It stems from historical references, travel, emotions, nature, cultures, color, industries, textures, the human body, smells, tastes, the list is endless.

Let us look at a few examples of design principles in play:

- **Furniture:** The son of a Russian furniture maker, Vladimir Kagan, learned to draw and thus design. Instead of English country seating with down cushions that you sink into, he sketched "female shapes" to envelop the body. He streamlined chair frames, selecting walnut for its "delicious" grain when rubbed with steel wool and Tung oil, a wood that was strong enough to arc like a "slender tree branch." He hated seeing friends sitting on long sofas "like sparrows on a telephone line" so he used curves allowing him to squeeze casual seating for 20 into a 6x8 footprint.
- **Art:** The movie about Rembrandt's "The Night Watch" called *Rembrandt's J'accuse* is an inventive film bringing art to life in a documentary that carries out a meticulous examination of the group portrait searching for clues to murder and the motives behind the 34 characters depicted. Peter Greenway, the filmmaker, weaves the social history of 17<sup>th</sup> century Amsterdam as he unravels a murder conspiracy involving everyone in the painting. The narrator addresses an interesting fact that most people are visually illiterate due to our text based culture. He states that "our educational systems tend to value text over image. We do not spend the time reading paintings as we do text. We are under-nourished, under- and ill-informed and impoverished. Just because we have eyes, does not mean we can see. From childhood we are persuaded to learn the alphabet, then as adolescents we are taught to amass our vocabulary skills to adulthood where we are never finished polishing our ability to communicate the words proportionately through our culture. Very few people spend the time and patience and intelligence reading paintings as they do text. The image has the last word, but the word is an image.
- **Fashion:** Christian Dior and Gabrielle Chanel essentially embraced a design philosophy of elegance and sophistication. All of their products delivered on quality and design excellence. Fashion is about trends, where style is about more eternal qualities. The essence of good design lies in the consistency of approach. A

style is about more eternal qualities. The essence of good design lies in the consistency of approach. A designer should have a point of view and be passionate about pursuing and developing it. Nothing is gained by following transient trends, you will lose your voice. Good design should aim to produce things that are both beautiful and functional. Comfort, be it a glove, an earring or a suit, is key to the quality of their work.

- Interior design: Peter Marino, whose philosophy is known as the "design world's sartorially distinguished rebel," bedecked in black leather, who "dreams up show-stopping retail spaces and residences that both dazzle the eye and advance the cultural conversation using his signature touches of sumptuous surfaces by expert craftsmen and site-specific art installations" (AD100). Or Robert A.M. Stern, whose philosophy is working from "a centuries-spanning playbook to devise personable structures that possess a masterful air of aesthetic self-assuredness," elevating "modern traditionalism exploring languages of architecture while saying something new" (AD100).
- Automobile: A stunning example of this would be Ralph Lauren's 1938 Bugatti Type 57SC. It exemplifies an aesthetic point of view which good design can heighten.

Attention to design has improved our physical landscape that has made people more critical as an audience. They are now demanding and creating, enticing, stimulating, a more diverse and beautiful world.

The design industry is an institute that possesses no boundaries, only unexplored terrains.

Technology has not only changed the way designs are accomplished, it has changed the perception of design from a hard-earned skill to something you can learn in an afternoon provided one has the skills to create and not simply produce. A firm distinction concerning good design.

Understanding the principles of design provides a common language to make sound references and associations across a broad range of subjects.

Edit.

*"You create your own universe as you go along."* Sir Winston Churchill

The word "luxury" is virtually impossible to define as a single definitive interpretation. It carries such a vast breadth of meanings dependent upon our own personal situation and life experiences.

Quality, on the other hand, is quantifiable.

Consumers are like chameleons one day they are polished, the next tribal. We have all become global consumers. In fact, we excel at consuming.

We create personal lifestyles through acquisitions in an effort to help define who we are as individuals.

We consume as an experience, as an act of integration, an act of clarification and often as a form of play.

We form relationships with brands that help establish our own identity, link ourselves to the past, perform daily rituals and provide a channel to obtain emotional connections.

Marketers have relied on consumer behavior to help clients be financially successful in an ever-changing world of needs, wants and desires.

Marketers of luxury goods and services made a significant shift from what the products are to what they represent.

Today the pendulum is swinging back the other direction, focusing on the heritage, quality, durability and alignment with the client's values.

Cultural creatives are the millions who are shaping a new kind of culture through personal values centered on curiosity about the world, selfreflection and concern for the environment.

While all buyers do not fit into this group, many have like ideals. There is a renaissance or rest occurring where consumers are getting back to taking the time to assess what they value. They are willing to invest time, a precious commodity, be educated on the price/value relationship as it applies specifically to them.

Editing will play a definite role in this reset, for editing is the ongoing practice of making appropriate choices with intention. It is the combined discipline of patience, education, self-awareness, confidence, prioritization and courage. It is a fluid process that requires baseline knowledge and experiences to begin and demands you remain engaged and, most of all, authentic to yourself.

The consumer of quality goods will acquire objects at a different pace, for different reasons and on their terms.

I believe that the experience of acquiring needs to be more focused, meaningful and comprehensive for them. After all, consumers are typically well educated, well traveled and interested in acquiring greater knowledge.

A key part of editing is to be able to suggest alternatives. Sometimes this entails being in the know about new introductions, limited editions, or unknown sources.

We have the ability today to have anything we want. However, we may not be able to have everything. This also applies to the very wealthy.

Helen Clarke-Klein, previous head of The European Fine Arts Fair (TEFAF) in The Netherlands and who now works privately with curators of major museums globally, shared that "there are not enough masters to go around. The demand is far greater than the available inventory, whether for a private acquisition or a museum collection".

The frame of reference we have on creating and accessorizing our lifestyles is greater than ever and the markets of the world are open to us as never before, as long as we have the imagination to appreciate the ideas for sale.

To have the knowledge and courage to edit is very powerful. It signals we have taken the time to learn, appreciate, place our own values on our acquisitions and have acquired an understanding of the lifestyle we intend to build.

Only now are we at the point of becoming our own curators.

No longer are we simply willing to be led by marketing strategies that favor a company over our own desires. We have empowered ourselves to begin to say "yes" for well-defined personal reasons and "no" to those that do not apply.

Set designer Charlotte Watts remarked, "Simplicity is often the hardest look to achieve, because it is easier to add things onto a set. But to take them away is stronger and leaves more space for the actors and drama to unfold the viewer is left with the essence."

Mediocrity is the enemy of success.

Knowledge and innovation are essential.

Quality is absolute.

*To edit "things chosen well rather than often."* Hollis S. Baker

*"To be interesting, one needs first to be interested."* Rebecca Miller



*Rebecca Miller*

*Rebecca Miller is founder and principal of **Miller&company**, New York. Sister organization Q is an independent authority that ensures a life spent well. It sources the globe, curates genuine quality and unites the passion, heritage and future of the artisan with the joy of the knowledgeable patron. Q re-establishes an informed and rewarding connection between artisans and consumers who deserve to know the difference between the mass produced and the realization of passion and purpose. Q features products made by someone, for someone. Reach her at [ramiller1000@gmail.com](mailto:ramiller1000@gmail.com).*

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