

"They should ideally stay in the background, like a valet in the old days that one hardly noticed," Rams has said of the products he designed for Braun.

AT HOME WITH DIETER RAMS

by Molly Mandell

Filmmaker Gary Hustwit's documentary RAMS, which will be released in fall 2017, will be the first feature-length documentary about the life and work of Dieter Rams. Over the course of 18 months, Hustwit was granted rare access into Rams' life, including his home. "He's created exactly the world that he wants to live in," says Hustwit. "Visiting is like entering his head. His house is filled with his designs—everything from the furniture to the stereo system to the appliances. He even made closet doors." Rams' design influence extends beyond his own home: He is responsible for the urban planning of his neighborhood in Kronberg, Germany. In the early 1960s, Braun enlisted Rams to help plan a housing development for the company's employees. Rams' home, which borders the Taunus mountain range, has an unsurprisingly minimalist interior. Aside from Braun and Vitsoe products, Rams collects Japanese art and ceramics. Hustwit explains, "I think his love for Japanese design stems from its connection to nature. Most people don't associate Rams' work with nature, but it's something that is very important to him. His ideas about reducing visual clutter are also connected to letting surroundings inform aesthetics."



also makes sense ecologically. In my 10 principles of good design, I have written that the aesthetic quality of a product is an integral aspect of its usefulness, for the appliances that we use daily have an impact on our personal environment and influence our sense of well-being. But a thing can only be beautiful if it is also well made. Of course, there are general criteria of beauty such as harmony, contrast or proportions, but individual aesthetic sensibilities can vary a lot and can also depend upon knowledge, education and awareness. This is why I have always tended to steer well clear from this discussion about beauty and argued instead for a design that is as reduced, clear and user-oriented as possible and simply more bearable for a longer period of time. But "simple" is especially hard to achieve; even Leonardo da Vinci knew that.

Does a conflict between practical utility and abstract beauty still encourage innovation in product design, or are there other more assertive mechanisms at play? Calm, sober and intellectual surprises should always be possible with design. Practical value and beauty are not mutually exclusive, even today, and they are unlikely to be so in the future either. For me, a restrained aesthetic and function that is as optimized as possible have always been important. These qualities lead to long utilization cycles: The objects do not become visually unbearable after a short time because they have not pushed themselves into the foreground. Certainly, these qualities also act as a constraint upon innovation. We really should consider very carefully whether we constantly need new things. I have been arguing for a long time for less, but better things.

Early on, artists, critics and manufacturers perceived two key benefits of industrial design: It made products both more desirable and more profitable, and it contributed to a general improvement of public taste. You seem to perceive a third benefit of industrial design, which is that it reduces wasteful consumption by producing objects that people will like and hold on to, which in turn benefits the environment. Do you think the consumer product industries feel a con-