



**DESIGN LEGEND.** A young Dieter Rams changed the face of industrial design.

▼ **ON APRIL 20TH**, ART CENTER COLLEGE OF DESIGN WILL AWARD AN HONORARY DOCTORATE DEGREE TO ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL DESIGNERS OF THE 20TH CENTURY, THE LEGENDARY DIETER RAMS.

As Chief of Design at Braun from 1961 until his retirement in 1997, Rams designed an array of iconic products—including coffee makers, shavers, radios, watches and record players—that continue to shape the aesthetics and functionality of many products today.

Jonathan Ive, head of design at Apple, attributes his own design of the iPod, MacBook Pro, iPhone and other Apple products to Rams' austere but user-friendly aesthetic. In a recent interview in the U.K.'s *Telegraph*, Ive said that Rams designed "surfaces that were without apology, bold, pure, perfectly-proportioned, coherent and effortless." Ive's Apple designs can be seen as homage to Rams, a point underscored in the recent international exhibition of Rams' work, "Less and More," where Apple products were displayed side by side with Rams'.

Rams remains a profound influence on students at Art Center, especially in the

nationally top-ranked Product Design and Graduate Industrial Design programs. Fridolin Beisert, Associate Professor of Product Design, says that the students are thrilled about Rams' visit. "He represents an ideal in the world of industrial design," Beisert says.

For Andrew Kim, an Art Center student who is graduating this year and heading to work at Microsoft, admiration rises almost to the level of worship. "Every child needs a superhero to look up to, and he has been mine," Kim says. Department Chair Karen Hofmann adds, "Dieter Rams' approach to design has had a tremendous influence on the Product Design department at Art Center over the last several decades and it is inherent in the ethos of our curriculum." Hofmann teaches an empathic, human-centered approach to design and quotes Rams as her inspiration: "You cannot understand good design if you do not understand people; design is made for people. It

must be ergonomically correct, meaning it must harmonize with a human being's strengths, dimensions, senses and understanding."

Dieter Rams has stayed relevant for another reason—the growing belief that design is an essential component to innovation and competitive edge in the marketplace. Today's "design-driven company" finds its prototype at Braun 50 years ago. Rams frequently credits his success to the fact that he worked directly with the CEOs at Braun, the brothers Erwin and Artur Braun, early in his career, a revealing parallel to Ive's relationship with Steve Jobs. Inspired by Rams' role at Braun, Art Center and Caltech will soon launch The Design Accelerator, an incubator for design-driven, start-up companies, based on the premise that design and technology are the twin engines of entrepreneurial innovation.

In 1985, Rams looked back at over 20 years of work at Braun and wrote his famous "Ten Principles of Good Design." The list is both traditional and prescient. Recalling the influence of his father, a master carpenter, he wrote: "good design is long-lasting; it avoids being fashionable and therefore never appears antiquated." Another principle expresses what we now call sustainable design: "good design is environmentally friendly." But it's his tenth principle that captures the Rams ethos best: "Good design is as little design as possible: less, but better, because it concentrates on the essential aspects, and the products are not burdened with non-essentials. Back to purity, back to simplicity."

Simplicity. Empathy. Harmony with the environment. Dieter Rams reminds us that the highest values of design are timeless. ☺

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