National College of Art & Design
Faculty of Design
Department of Industrial Design

Past, present & future - an analysis of the product identity in Braun design

by

Sean Keenan

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Introduction

During the last forty years, functionalism - the ideal that objects should be honest simple and unambiguous in their use ; has been under constant bombardment from the forces that vie for free expression in products.

Yet as the theory of functionalism has been challenged and criticised for many years, one company, Braun, based on its adherence to this thought process, has achieved many accolades even throughout the adversely critical period of the post-modern movement.

Complicated, unnecessary forms are nothing more than designers, escapades that function as self-expression instead of expressing the product's functions ... The economy of Braun design is a rejection of this type of approach. Braun products eliminate the superfluous to emphasise that which is more important (Rams, 1989, p.111).

In describing the policies of Braun which have been maintained since the fifties to the present day, Schneider 1997 states that

Braun identifies needs and, drawing on our experience and expertise, we produce innovative appliances that accomplish the task, that are a pleasure to use and that also have a simple, aesthetic appeal. Like our customers we distrust gimmicks and gadgets. Every item, whether it is a shaver or a food processor, is born of extensive research and development. (Schneider, 1997, p.1)

Whether one likes or loathes the simple aesthetics of the Braun product range, it is intriguing to ascertain how these products have maintained their timeless appeal for the consumer despite changes in public attitudes with regard to design.

In the following chapters, my intention is to examine the product identity that Braun appliances have conveyed to the world since the 1950s. My main aim is to trace the success (or otherwise) and appeal

of these endearing products through forty years of change, both in attitudes and fashions, and pose questions such as;

What factors have made Braun appliances appealing ?

What impact have these products had in the design world ?

Schneider, 1997 says that

> Every item is designed to perform at the peak of its capacity and is built to last. (Schneider, 1997, p.1)

Therefore it is important to assess if the company too 'is built to last' and thus to question;

What does the future hold for Braun and functional design?

Chapter 1

Braun historical context and the German design context.

Over the course of this century, Germany has witnessed the emergence not only of a series of original theories and significant events, but also of one world of form that has prevailed over the others, and that has therefore become 'typical' to some extent : a world of form so homogenous that in Germany it is possible to speak of the twentieth century as the century of the functional style, a style which emerged around 1910 and still prevails today.

The persistence of this style probably depends on the high value that is placed in Germany on perfect fulfilment of purpose, precision, safety, durability, the quality of the product and in more recent times environmental consideration. In the same way it appears that the importance of the theoretical superstructure and social implications of functionalism are in tune with the tendency to theorise and moralise that is so prevalent in Germany.

Design for Function

The functional aesthetic, which has been in existence for over a century, has been adopted by many architects, designers and artists. It has been applied to many divergent types of objects. In a historical manner, however, and indeed the main focus of the subsequent chapters in this thesis, this 'style' has been directed mainly toward those objects created for domicile use, an area where intemperate ornamentation, eccentricity, and individuality were hazards which were more likely candidates for the application of aesthetic properties.

Functionalism - the notion that objects made to be used should be simple, honest, and direct; well-adapted to their purpose; bare of

ornament; standardised, machine-made, and reasonably priced; and expressive of their structure and materials (Marcus, 1995, p.9).

Functionalist theory established itself at the beginning of this century through the efforts of people like the Viennese architect Adolf Loos. In 1907 his vociferous attacks, voiced in his now famous essay *Ornament and Crime,* were a condemnation of the use of ornament in design, most notably of the nineteenth century **(Fig.1.)**, positing the crime of outlandishly embellished pieces as a waste of labour force.

Fig. 1. 19th century ornamented flower vase by Hans Friedel

In Germany, in conjunction with a few notable individuals, a number of societies of artists, manufacturers and craftsmen were established which followed the aesthetics of William Morris. However, it was in this regard alone that these groups supported the theories which Morris postulated. These new societies afforded more thought to economic considerations for objects, rejecting Morris' anti-machine manufacturing stance. Emphasis focused on the importance of integrating artistic values with industrial methods by giving artists the control of designing, whether it was for machine production or manual work.

The most significant protagonist of this new approach to design was Peter Behrens, today regarded as the first industrial designer. He emphasised the importance of form when in 1907 he called for

> a manner of design [to be] established appropriate to machine production. This will not be achieved through the imitation of handcraftmanship, of other materials and of historical styles, but will be achieved through the most intimate union possible between art and industry. This could be done by concentrating on and implementing exactly the technique of mechanical production in order to arrive by artistic means at those forms that derive directly from and correspond to the machine and machine production.... The attempt should now be made, using standard types, to achieve a graceful beauty that is cleanly constructed and appropriate to the materials used (Marcus, 1995, p.53).

The AEG company entrusted him with the design of their products, advertising and buildings in 1907. Concepts of standardisation were introduced by Behrens to products like clocks, fans and kettles **(Figs.3. & 2. respectively)**, the latter of which he explored in the most detail. The use of interchangeable parts such as handles, lids and bases, and with common electrical components, subtle redesigning of the same

essential kettle tidied their forms and integrated them with the also fresh concept of a corporate company identity.

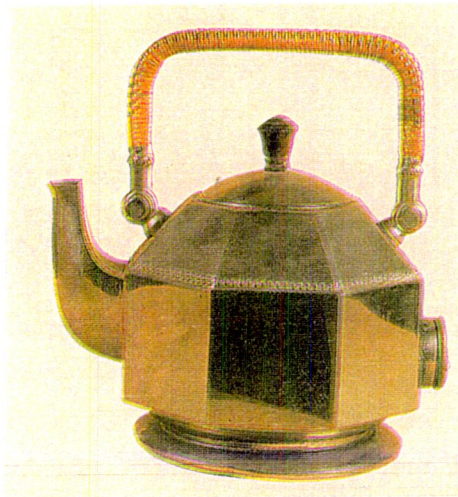


Fig. 2 . Electric kettle, 1908

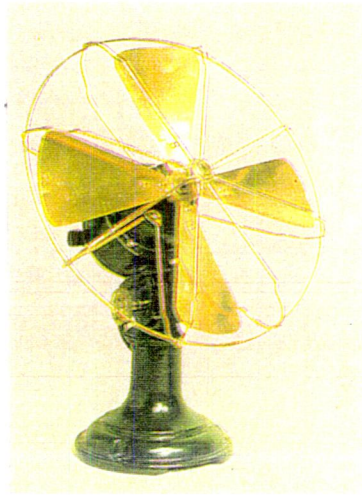


Fig. 3. Electric fan, 1908

However it was not Behrens alone who instigated this alternative approach to industry. As previously mentioned, a number of new design orientated societies began to appear in Germany. The year 1907 saw the emergence of the most influential organisation connected with the rejection of unnecessary ornament and the introduction of a style which, with the passage of time, has become synonymous with the aesthetics of modern industrial production; The Deutscher Werkbund.

The Deutscher Werkbund

Translated as the German Work Confederation, the Deutscher Werkbund was established as a collective group of artists, manufacturers and design workshops. The main objective of the organisation was the promotion of quality design within German industry. The members of the group all looked to demonstrate the progressive learning from within the Werkbund in their own respective

disciplines, sharing the common goal of exhibiting examples of functional, unadorned objects.

In the initial period of the organisation however there existed some indifference due largely to the fact that there was no unanimous stylistic or philosophical approach among the collective members.

The period 1914 to 1918 saw an abrupt decline in the progress of both the Werkbund and functionalism in Germany, with the nation and the world turning its attention to matters of war. With the consequent fall of the German empire came social and environmental change. Theorists felt the need for art and people to merge as one. There was know more impetus on the Werkbund to come together under a common thematic banner.

In the summer of 1924 the Werkbund finally created the opportunity to display the common ground which it had now established among its members. This was done through the exhibition "Die Form" in Stuttgart. The exhibition displayed the work of the group which consisted of

> objects from the realm of the applied arts which bear no ornament whatsoever...[to] demonstrate the extraordinary wealth of expression that can be embodied in pure form without the addition of any ornament (Kirsch, 1989, p. 11).

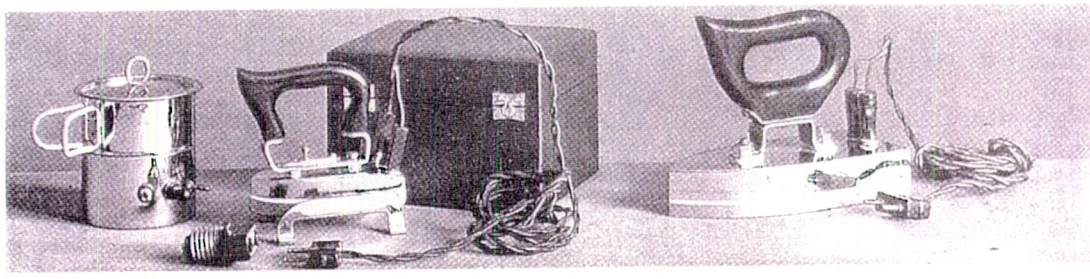


Fig. 4. Portable electric cooker & travelling iron with case, 1915

Fig. 5. Tea making equipment, 1915

Further impetus to the development of functionalism would also come from two schools; first the Bauhaus, active from 1919, an establishment which initially directed its activities towards a return to craft based production before reverting to the production of prototypes for industry, and later the rather more politically orientated Hochschule fur Gestaltung at Ulm.

The Bauhaus

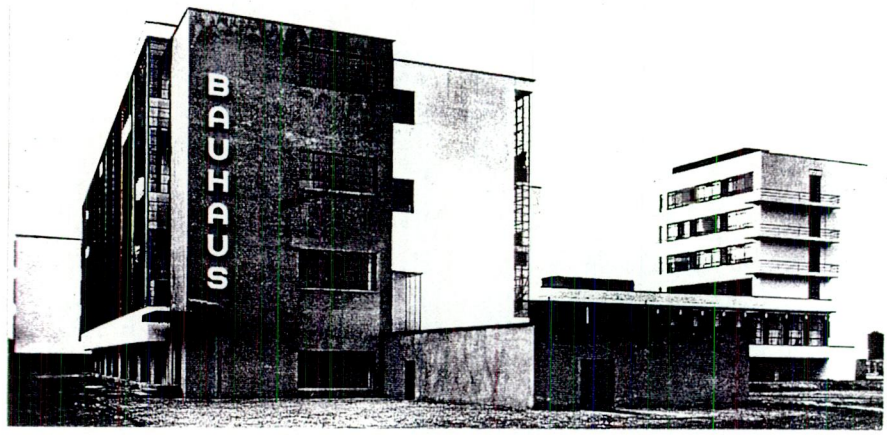


Fig. 6. Bauhaus buildings, Walter Gropius, 1926

In the entire field of trade and industry there has arisen a demand for beauty of external form as well as for technical and economic perfection. Apparently, material improvement of products does not itself suffice to achieve victories in international competitions. A thing that is technically excellent in all respects must be impregnated with an intellectual idea - with form - in order to secure preference among the large quantity of products of the same kind (Marcus, 1995, p.54, 55).

Walter Gropius wrote these words in 1916 as part of a recommendation to establish the concept of an educational establishment that would supply design advice and suitable examples for industry.

Established in 1919 and located in Weimar, the Kunstgewerbeschule (school of Applied Arts) and the Academy of Art were amalgamated to form the State Bauhaus. With Walter Gropius appointed as its director, emphasis was laid on the elimination of the division between design and production. Gropius, set on a syllabus of non-academic structure, divided the school into a number of workshops for work with various materials.

Johannes Itten revolutionised the idea of an "elementary course" on the problems of form, as an autonomous instruction independent of the technique of construction or production **(Fig.7)**. However a change of attitude arose in 1922 with the dismissal of Itten through the Russian constructivist theories of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Gropius, won over by the new theories, considered constructivism to be the "artistic means" in which the social and revolutionary requirements of the emerging age of machines were made manifest. New products utilised the fundamental solids of Euclidean geometry and, instead of gentle shifts of plane, favoured sharp contrasts of form

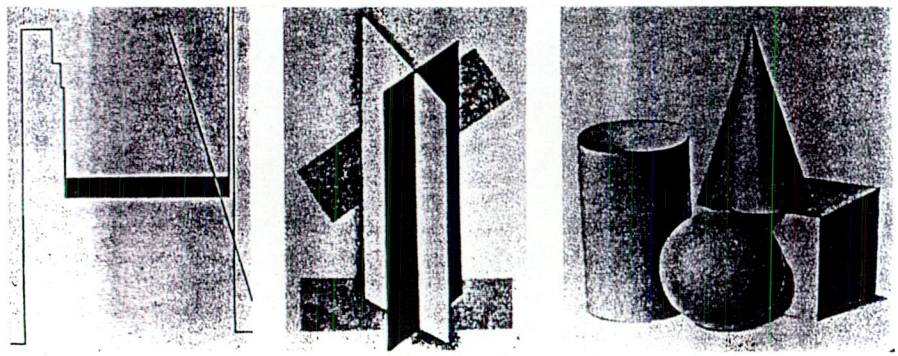


Fig. 7. Representation of contrast, Johannes Itten, 1920

By 1924 it was "good industrial form" that was sought after; the need to carefully analyse the essence of an object, to ensure that it functions as it should, be economic, easy to handle and aesthetically attractive.

Previous students of the school returned in teaching capacities; men such as Marcel Breuer and Josef Albers. They now came to recognise the limits of expressionism in dealing with the technical and social problem which existed at the time.

Under growing pressure from right-wing politics and conflicting attitudes, Gropius gave up his position, passing it on to Johannes Meyer. The Swiss designer laid out a more rigorous course of functionalism towards the needs and problems within society. Meyer stipulated the justification in choice of materials, process of manufacture, and the form with the criterion for this evaluation being the proportion of the cost to the function. This was an important conclusion for the years ahead, with Braun making it a prime criteria in the 1960s due to the importance of 'price performance' ratio.

1933 marked the end of the Bauhaus' existence. Under pressure from the Nazi regime, the school had moved to Berlin the previous year.

Pre-war products

In this section the focus is on pre-war electrical appliances; the appearance of these products and what influences gave shape to these objects. The intention in this section is to establish how Braun altered and improved the appliances of this period.

The shortages of war had a bearing on the design of appliances in the early part of the 1920s. Material used in the artillery and equipment

of battle was utilised in the appliances which followed. Industry had to be regenerated and so forms were influenced by large, bulky machines which were commonplace in most industrial workplaces.

The attention with which designers afforded to household appliances in the years previous to the Second World War depended in part on the uses for whom they were intended. In the 1920s small appliances, such as mixers or kettles, which were used regularly in the living areas of the home, were given more aesthetic attention than cleaning appliances. There was no reason for such appliances to be more aesthetically pleasing, with many of the products used by servants resembling industrial equipment **(Fig.8)**. The main imperative for the design of these objects was to miniaturise existing industrial products, with bulk and weight of little consequence to the middle class consumer as it was for use by the servants.

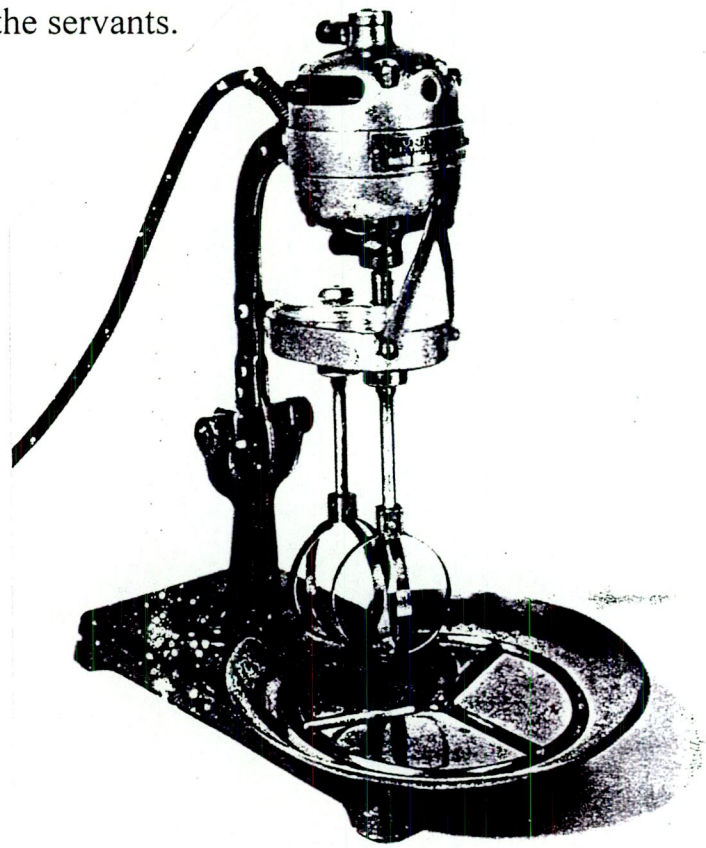


Fig. 8. Domestic electric food mixer, 1920

If we look at the illustration here, it is obvious that its form is influenced by the form of larger industrial products. Mass production at this time was not yet a widely accepted application for household appliances; this to is evident in this example.

From the 1930s onwards the essential criteria of easy assembly, operation and efficiency became established. Manufacturers became aware that if more attention was applied to the styling and overall appearance of their products, they would convince the public of the labour saving potential of their appliances. Styling focused on mirroring the forms that the public associated with factory equipment and the metaphors of such efficiency. Mass production was the most potent metaphor of this image.

However, the marketing of appliances in the form of factory machines worked in a negative way with the advent of the fifties. Domestic appliances became more affordable to the public, and people didn't want to be reminded of their work when they were at home.

Chapter 2

The influence of the Hochschule fur Gestaltung

After the war design was used as a form of organisation for German

society. German political thinking was hinged on concrete notions. Design in Germany had a socio-political side to it, or tried to establish such, positing the healthy relationship between subject and object as the source of the dream of identity; yet at the same time it implicitly accorded priority to the objects themselves. It was seen that objects were the basis of experience and action, while human beings made the experiences and carried out the actions. It was then up to design either to adopt the latest didactic thrust of this conception or develop one of its own.

A common feature of the post-Second World War period was the variety of experiments carried out in design education. Emphasis lay in the need for designers to be disciplined through rigorous training, rather than simply being left to fulfil individual creative potential. Most notable among them was the work of the Hochshule fur Gestaltung in Ulm, West Germany.

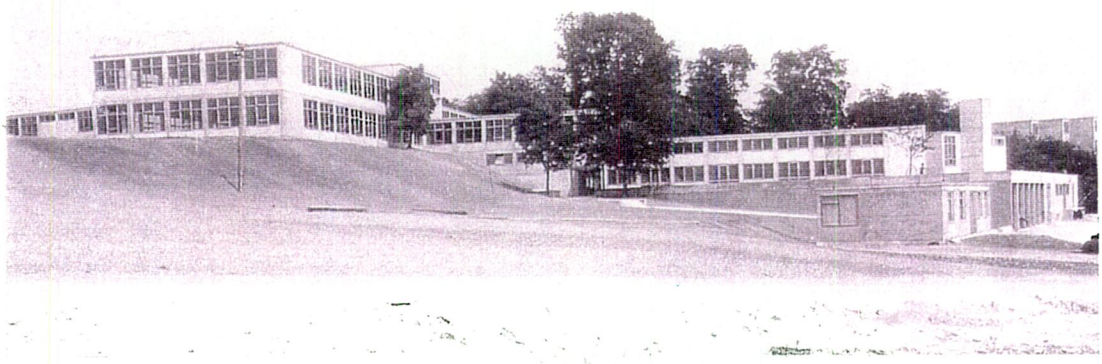


Fig. 9. Hochschule fur Gestaltung buildings, Ulm, 1955

Here the vision of design as a much broader, cultural phenomenon was promoted, as opposed to design being just a creative and simple problem-solving exercise.

Inge Aicher-Scholl created the school in 1951, a tribute to members of her family who were killed by the Nazis. Finally established four years later, the sculptor Max. Bill became the schools first director. The new educational facility defined itself as a natural extension of the pre-war Bauhaus, but with all the necessary alterations which were appropriate to a different, more advanced time. However it was in the following year (1956), with the resignation of Bill, that a broader, more culturally based approach to design education was followed.

The Argentinian, Tomas Maldonado, established a foundation course for the school, with subjects ranging from cultural history and sociology to mathematics. Emphasis lay in the design of industrial products and also the design of visual and verbal means of communication.

The role of aesthetics was moved to the background; functionalism pushed into the foreground. The method of form instruction at the school was highly mathematical in nature, with the designers evolving a highly geometric aesthetic for their products, a neo-Rationalist style which characterised much German design of this period. Functionalism was supported strongly but was viewed as a theory of design as opposed to a style. This attitude was, as far as its supporters were concerned, a method of bypassing the pitfalls which kitsch design engendered, seen as an inevitable aspect of capitalism in the aftermath of the war.

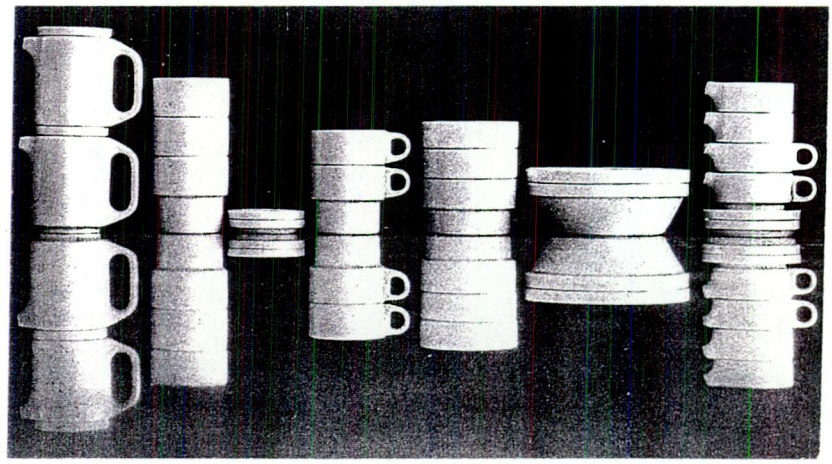


Fig. 10. TC 100 compact crockery, Hans Roericht, 1958-59

The educating body within Ulm held a highly critical view of the capitalist economy which stressed meeting the needs of demand rather than the needs of the public. Through the teaching of subjects like ergonomics, psychology and economics, students were encouraged to develop a critical approach towards the role of design in modern society. Products ere seen more as services than as forms of expression and ideally they ought to tend towards invisibility. Teachings explained that the main objective to design was the realisation of the function of an object, not the end product.

One of the main design considerations of contemporary designers is the issue of green design, and it was to the credit of the Ulm school that ecological problems were tackled for the first time, with the teaching staff making every effort to establish this new subject as a profession in Germany.

Unfortunately for the school, the combination of these ideas and an ever increasing financial debt eventually resulted in the demise of the establishment in the late 1960s.

In Ulm, an educational establishment had been created that was unique with respect to the educational, cultural and design policies pursued. A small group of lecturers and students committed themselves to creating a social, well designed environment, treating utility objects with as much dedication as was paid to theoretical or empirical analyses of urbanisation, technology, industry and peoples life and work contexts. Rather than indulge in styling and the creation of modish designs with multiple curves, they investigated the social dimensions and its applications to the way objects are used, developing systems with as high a degree of transparency as possible.

From this background of theoretical design practice emerged two significant influential figures of the design world; Dieter Rams and the Braun company.

Chapter 3

Dieter Rams

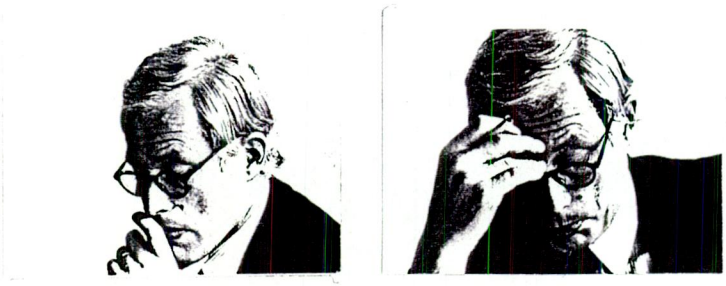


Fig. 11. Photographs of Dieter Rams, 1975

Admiration may be given to any individual who has the ability to adhere to their beliefs, especially through times of continual criticism. This homage can be granted to Dieter Rams, whose defining characteristic is his thoroughly assiduous belief in the 'modern' style.

This chapter aims to investigate the thinking which goes into Ram's products and thus give some insight into the success that he has achieved as a designer for Braun.

Rams joined ranks with the Braun company in 1955, becoming a product designer for the appliance manufacturers the following year. He joined the company under the patronage of Hans Gugelot, the Ulm school professor who had been instrumental in establishing Braun's design philosophy. Later Rams was also to teach at Ulm to educate and influence others to the ways of the functional style. By the year 1960 Rams held the new position as director of design for the company. From 1980 up until 1995 his primary duty was the management of the German appliance manufacturers.

Rams approach to design has been the hallmark of the Braun product range right up to the present day ;

> One of the most significant design principles is to omit the unimportant in order to emphasise the important.....therefore, products should be well designed and as neutral and open as possible, leaving room for the self expression of those using them (Rams, 1989, p.111).

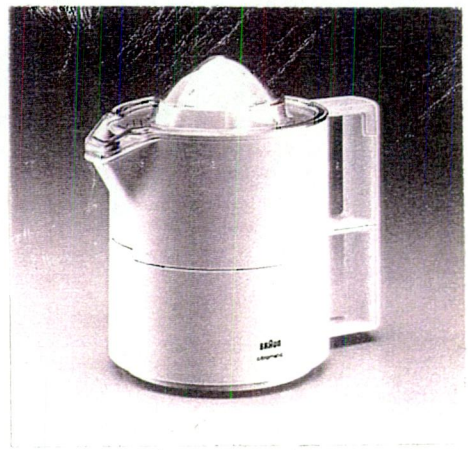


Fig. 12. MPZ 4 Juice container ***Fig. 13. MPZ 5 Juice container***

As head designer of Braun for almost four decades, Dieter Rams has attained the respect and trust of management and has built a team which can work with unusual freedom. Moreover, Rams has a reputation for drawing engineers to the furthest limits of their possibilities. But it is through his demanding and hard working approach that Rams has gained such reverence. In 1986 he collaborated with the door handle manufacturers FSB, the result of which lead the company's managing director to say

> The work with Alessandro Mendini was great fun, but with Rams it was unbelievably strenuous. He questioned everything and criticised everything, absolutely terrible, but he was absolutely right. This is perhaps reflected in the fact that Mendini has one page in our new catalogue and Rams has twenty-four (Dormer, 1991, p.213).

One relationship is highlighted by this statement; a relationship between two nations with opposing design philosophies - Italian modernism as opposed to German modernism. It is an intriguing association, the essence of which was generated, most notably in the eighties, because the German belief in serving human needs through rigorously clean design, did not correspond with the post modern,

pluralist, fashionable concepts supported by Italians like Mendini or Ettore Sottsass.

Rams in his long and varied career has designed products outside the realms of the Braun product region. In addition to his work for FSB, Rams' design capabilities have expanded to other companies such as Vitsoe (furniture manufacturers) and Erco (lighting producers). In both Braun products and Vitsoe furniture, Rams has focused on creating complete systems, which are both functional and combinable. His audio components, with tape deck, stereo turntable, and television capable of being either stacked vertically or aligned horizontally, exemplify this flexibility and ingenuity **(Fig.14)**.

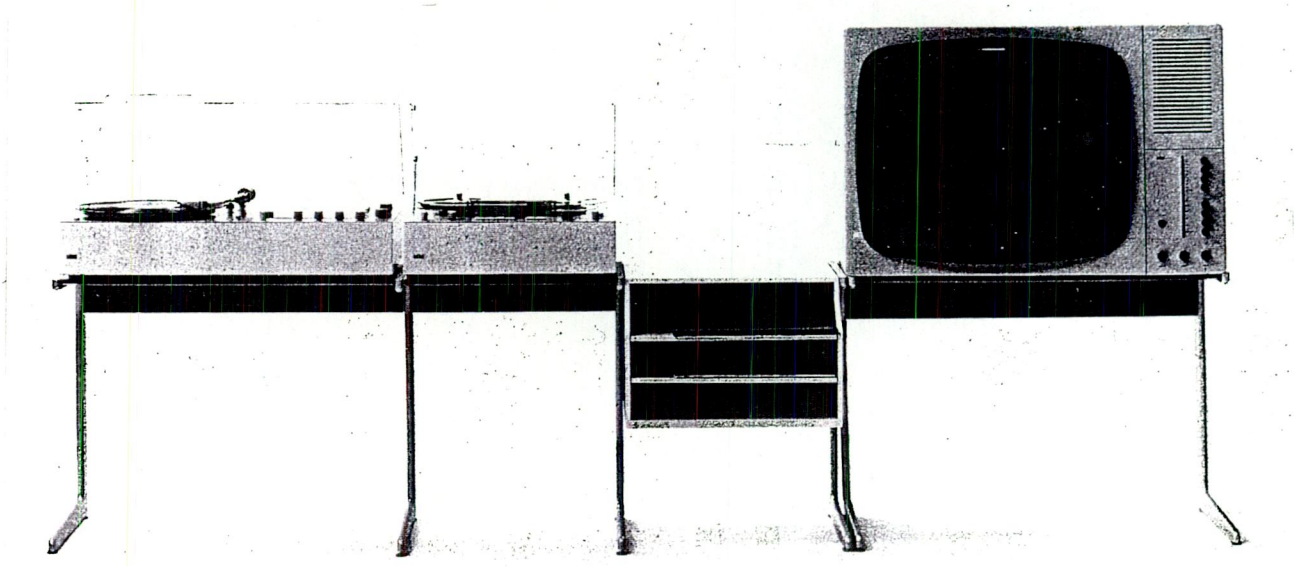


Fig. 14. Audio combined radio & phonograph, 1962-63

Another aspect of Rams design philosophy is portability - a highly developed mode in the Braun line. Radio, hair dryers and shavers not only captivate efficient use of materials and technology in their respective designs, but they are also sensitive to a fundamental poignant

element of industrial design - user needs **(Fig.15)**. Pleonastic travel, frequent moves from one living space to another and a perpetually increasing pace in peoples lives have highlighted the effectiveness of these well designed products.

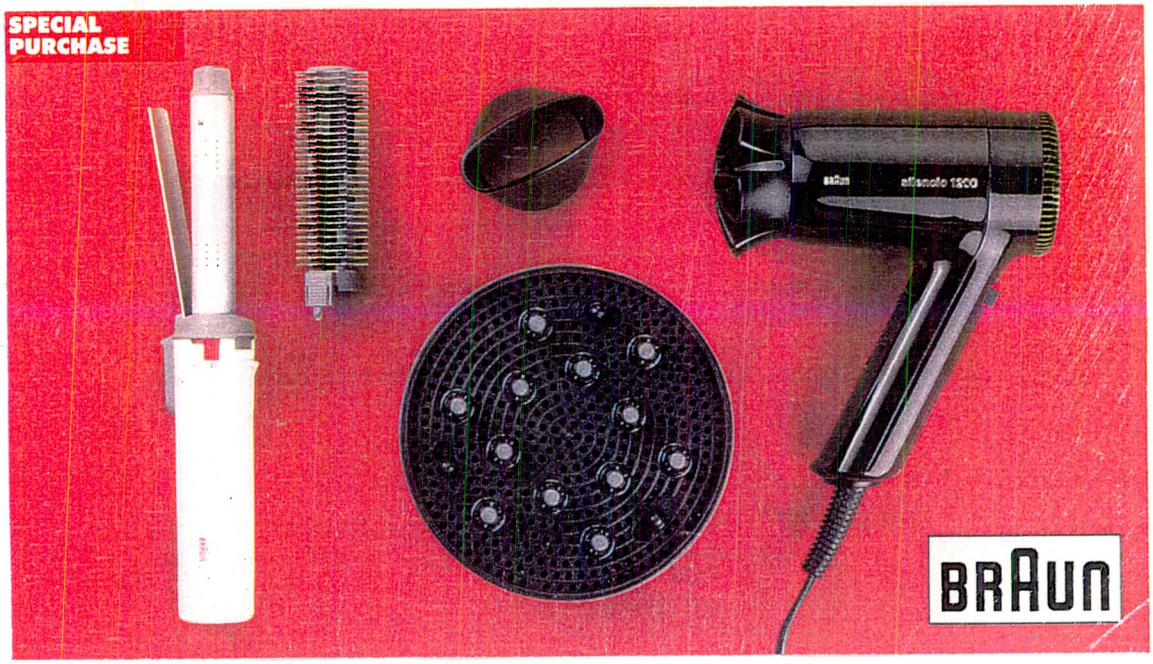


Fig. 15. "Curls 'n' Waves" Hairdryer & combi styler set, 1996

His solutions are streamlined, light-weight, durable everyday objects. In a tribute to the appropriateness of Rams designs, all the Vitsoe furniture systems, including shelving, stacking units, and wall panelling, which have come on the market since 1958 are still available today.

Belief that design should not be intrusive or visually aggressive is a strong opinion held by the German designer

Good design means as little design as possible.....The aggressiveness of design is expressed in the harshness of combat to attain first place in people's perception and awareness and to win the fight for a front place in store display windows....The festival of colours and forms and the entertainment of form sensations enlarges the world's chaos.... The alternative is to return to simplicity.....We should not forego innovation, but reject novelty as the sole aim. Our culture is our

home, especially the everyday culture expressed in items for whose forms I am responsible. It would be a great help if we could feel more at home in this everyday culture, if alienation, confusion and sensory overload would lessen (Rams, 1989, pp. 111-113).

His product design, therefore, while similar in clarity of expression, precise relationships of volumes and shapes, and minimalist akin to modern twentieth century architecture, such as that of Erich Mendelsohn **(Fig.16)**, is concerned with the potential of material, engineering and contemporary technology in its application to user need.

Fig. 16. Schoken Dept. Store, Erich Mendelson, 1926-28

In the design of his products, Rams considers three main aspects; utility, followed by practicality and finally aesthetics. This pragmatic approach, as much as the actual products - which rely on a simple range

of neutrals: black, white, and grey; and basic geometric volumes: cubes, cylinders, and spheres - has given presence and success to his designs.

The accomplishments which Dieter Rams has achieved have reached out to all the regions of the design world. Right up to the present day, Rams' designs are respected and regarded very highly, no more so than in Japan, a country where he himself admires many natively produced goods, particularly Japanese lacquer ware **(Fig.17)** which can be seen as a reflection of his own design concerns - simple yet individually complete, comfortable yet easily dismantled.

Fig. 17. Japenese lacquered 'shunkei' box, Hida Kihonshu, 1990

Continuity in design development and product families, where several products are interconnected, supplementing and complimenting each other **(Fig.18)**, are the hallmarks of the Rams' design approach and as a result the quality of Braun's products.

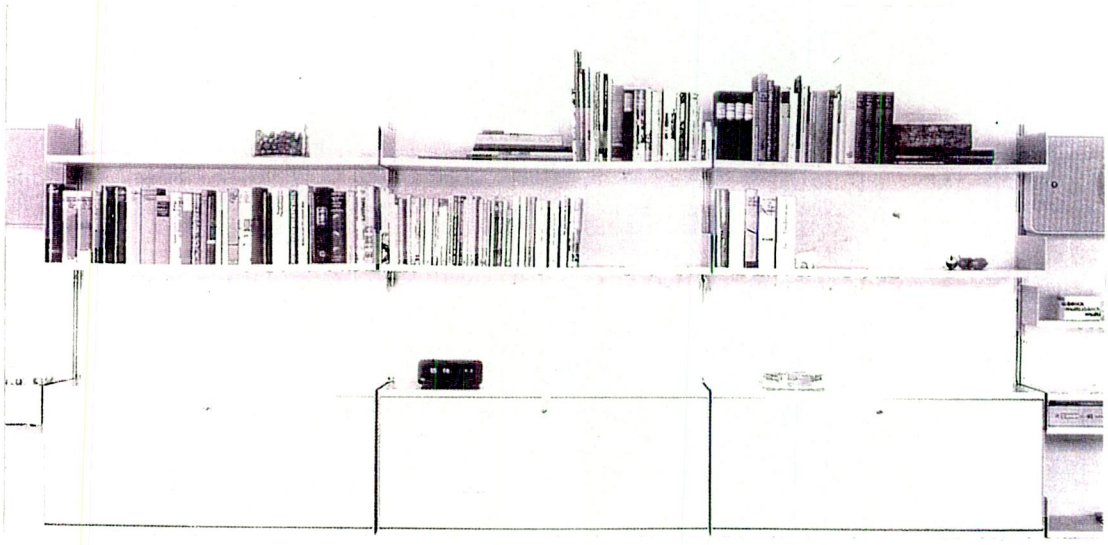


Fig. 18. Vitsoe shelving system, Dieter Rams, 1960

Chapter 4

Braun

If there is one company that epitomises and exemplifies German style for the design conscious consumer one need look no further than Braun. The domestic electrical products which the company produces, ranging from kitchen appliances to shavers to calculators, emanate from a surprisingly small in-house studio of just seven designers. Despite the modest scale of this operation it does not prevent the company from being confident in their ability to cater effectively for the needs of the consumer. Through the leadership of Dieter Rams (up until 1995) the primary concern has been

> to cater to the true needs of the people for whom the products are intended.....For my team and me what is important is not just coming up with an overall concept of the product....We are as intent on achieving a meaningful and functional shaping of all its details as well, of everything that pertains to the usefulness of the product....We seek to become as knowledgeable as possible about the actual uses to which the appliance will be put. Together with a whole team of specialist, we address the task of creating a good, durable product, and one that can be afforded for sale at a reasonable price (Rams, 1993, p. 83)

Fig. 19. Dieter Rams & colleagues, Braun offices, 1975

In the post war period an environment was created with good product manufacturing opportunities for any company or designer that was ready to take the gauntlet.

With times of shortage, hardship and fundamental supply problems there was enormous demand. At this point in time it was quite irrelevant or unimportant to the German public whether an object was designed well, aesthetically or ergonomically. Instead efforts were dedicated to securing the bare necessities and restoring something resembling normal everyday life and industrial production. More careful consideration was paid to the form and aesthetics of products. This renewed impetus grew stronger, with designers gaining inspiration from the freshly released Bauhaus ideas which had been suppressed by the ravages of fascism for so many years.

This new functionalist aesthetic shed its former guise of war induced functionalism : all people involved with the war wished to shake off the hardships and memories of enforced functionalism ; clothing was made from uniforms and material from ammunition casings found its way into kitchen products.

As the economy began to recover, so emerged an environment within which people were beginning to consume on a wide scale. Braun was in an advantageous position to benefit from the ensuing economic miracle.

Although long established as an electrical manufacturer, Braun did not begin making appliances until the 1950s. In 1951 a former theatre designer, Fritz Eichler was employed by Artur Braun and appointed as the company's director of design. What the company required was a definite corporate image and design philosophy. As a result, Otl Aicher

was employed by Eichler the same year as consultant designer of the company's graphic image.

In search of a suitable design philosophy, Eichler looked to the ideas formulated by the Hochschule fur Gestaltung in Ulm. In doing so he found two custodians of the Ulm teachings: Dieter Rams and Hans Gugelot.

Their first fruitful collaboration resulted in the Phonosuper SK4 record player (1955) **(Fig.20)**, a product which expressed purity of both function and technology. Both men developed a standard of appearance that departed radically from all previous appliance design; a new aesthetic which distanced itself from the discipline of art.

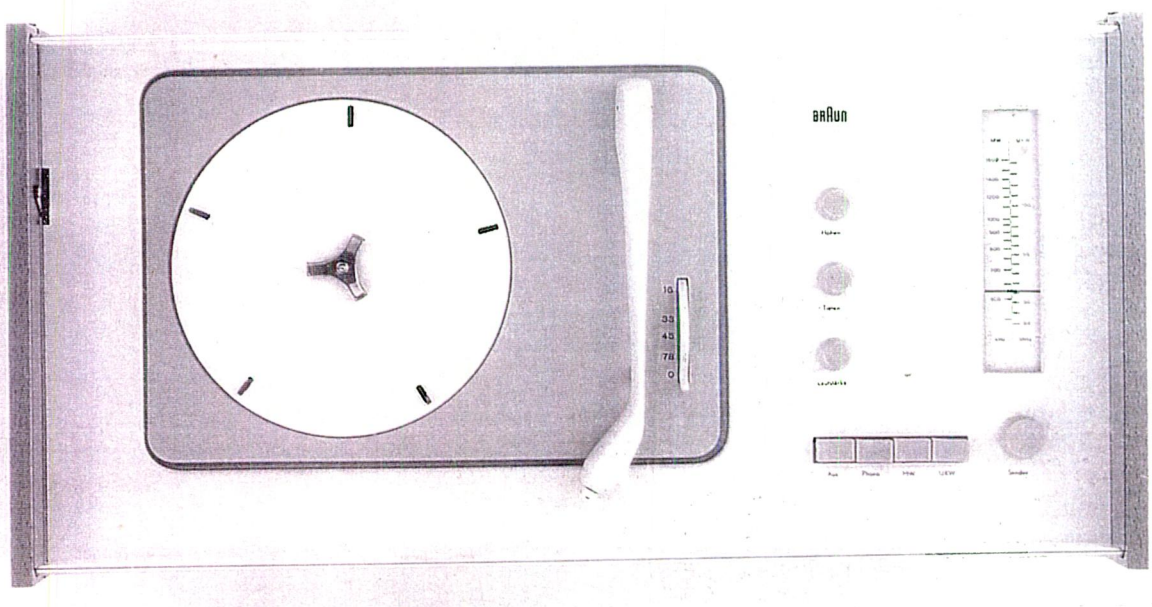


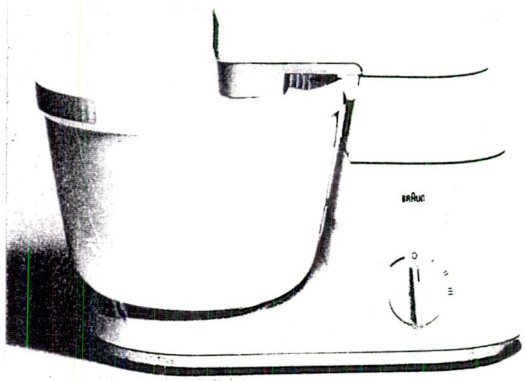
Fig. 20. "Snow White's Coffin" SK4 radio & phongraph, 1956

Q. ***What was it that made these German appliances appealing to a world-wide market?***

The forms established by the company had an immediate marketing attraction because they distanced from previous designs based on industrial equipment. Smooth, unassuming, black and white boxes

displayed a purity and elegance of form which had not been seen before in the electrical appliance market; appliances which belied the strength and robustness of their industrial predecessors.

What was paramount to any sort of success in the future for Braun was the creation of a suitable product identity. Text played an important role in the charming identity of Braun products. Previous models, such as those of Kenwood **(Fig.22.)** did not initially have the same extent of precision or attention to detail that Braun appliances projected to prospective buyers. The use of Helvetica text for the Braun logo was regarded as the best textual message to portray the discipline which was adhered to within the design philosophy of the company.



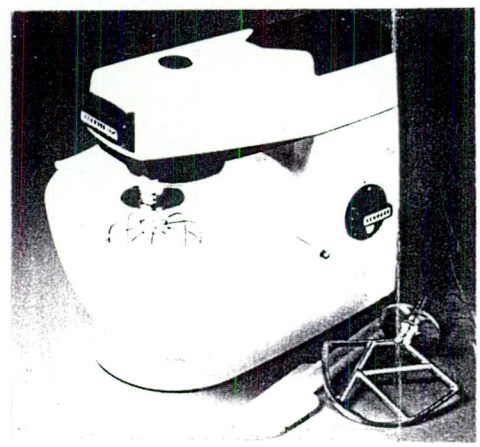


Fig. 21. Braun blender, 1959 ***Fig. 22. Kenwood blender, 1959***

A clear identifiable logo and product form contributed greatly to the prosperity of Braun. This was a feature of Braun products (as it still is today) which Lambert says is to do with the well mannered pebble like nature of many recent Braun products.... [which] gives them a family likeness. This is fundamental to their recognition as Braun products and, thus, to the firms success (Lambert, 1993, p.56).

The direction for a new way of life in Germany after the war channelled the way for practical, functional and modern goods. There was rapid development of the plastics industry, a hitherto relatively unknown sector where new materials made possible new forms and manufacturing processes. In the kitchen, surfaces sparkled hygienically with their new Formica coatings, a dream in white for the new housewife or indeed working wife, who was soon to become a force to be reckoned with. It was in this new clean, plastic environment that Braun became an attractive addition to the homes of so many people. The new crisp clean aesthetics of the Braun mixer or toaster commingled comfortably in the distinctly modern Formica ensemble of the fifties kitchen. Housewives were now surrounded by their latest acquisitions which made life in the kitchen a more beguiling experience, both in a functional and visual manner.

The 1960s

Probably the most successful year for the company, the sixties was the decade of the electrical appliance. Household electrical goods were becoming less of a luxury in the majority of homes in Europe. The variety and choice of domestic electrical products available to the public increased.

One major contributory factor for the success of electrical appliances throughout this decade was that daily housework, such as cooking and cleaning, was made much easier to perform and less time consuming, thus reducing the physical labour required by the user of these products. Convenient, functional and affordable appliances were

what the consumer demanded and that was what Braun furnished them with.

The automation of everyday chores was the result of technological progress. People therefore had to learn how to work these new machines, something which did not sit comfortably with many users. Braun catered for the 'techno-phobic' consumer through clear, smart, structured and intelligent products, designing appliances which did not convey any sort of ambiguity in relation to its form or function.

Fig. 23. Braun MX32 food mixer

Fig. 23a. KGZ 2 applicator

Fig. 23b. KS 33 applicator

In the initial period of the sixties, the market for electrical goods in Germany was mainly occupied by a small number of manufacturers like Braun. This situation soon changed with the various manufacturers reaching comparable levels of technological development. It became rare for a company to secure a market advantage through a new technological feature and thus it was quality of service that attracted potential buyers. So even as other manufacturers profited from similar technological features, Braun accomplished considerable market success through careful consideration of human factors and needs.

The end of the sixties saw the beginnings of Post Modern thinking and action. People were influenced by design theorists which helped develop a critical attitude toward the products they purchased; company profits became increasingly dependant on the so called " price performance ratio " of products they offered.

Consumers rights became a larger issue for the general public, especially in Germany. Organisations were established which kept a watchful eye on the quality and appropriateness of products, ensuring that the basic interests of buyers and users were upheld. Consumers became critically aware of the appliances that surrounded them.

> We heard attacks on design as a "goods aesthetic" that does not produce consumer values but is simply an encouragement to buy... criticism of the production of goods running out of control, squandering our resources, and destroying our environment (Rams, 1990, p.149)

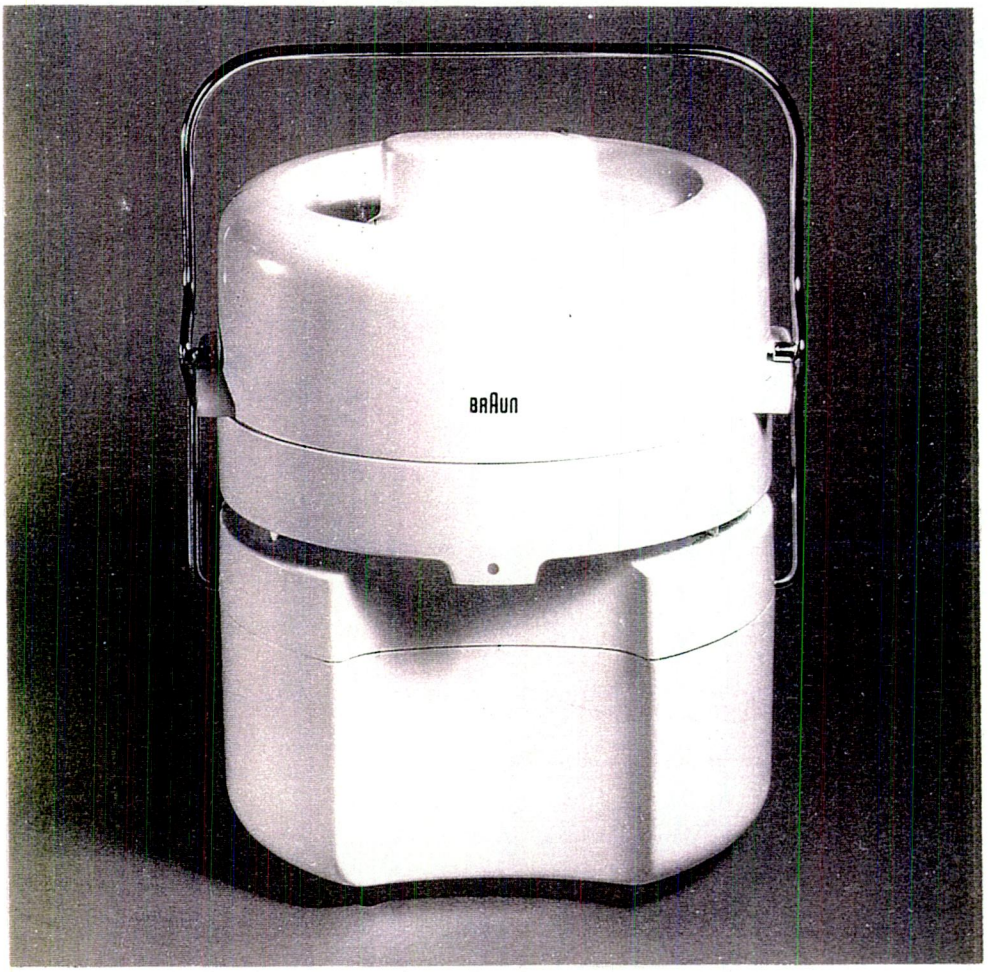


Fig. 24. Braun MP50 juicer

The products which Braun manufactured at this time, such as the Multipress MP50 centrifugal juicer **(Fig.24.)** and the table top fan **(Fig.25.)** conformed to the criteria's of form and function which the public buyer was now more knowledgeable about. Safety, durability and easy handling were all encompassed within the Braun range of goods, fully functional to meet the requirements of daily life.

A coincidental occurrence took place as the sixties drew to a conclusion. 1968 witnessed the closure of the Hochschule fur

Gestaltung and it was also the year which, through the combination of increased post modern activity and bad sales management, saw the US company Gillette take over its European neighbour Braun.

For many a company, this may have marked a change in design philosophy and practice, but not for Braun. Rams and his colleagues continued to apply the teachings of the Ulm school in a consistent and unequivocal manner. The strength which existed through this solid approach bore fruitful rewards despite criticism from those post modernists who wanted change.

'Good form' was the label that became attached with Braun products, with many of the company's appliances winning awards for outstanding design endeavour.

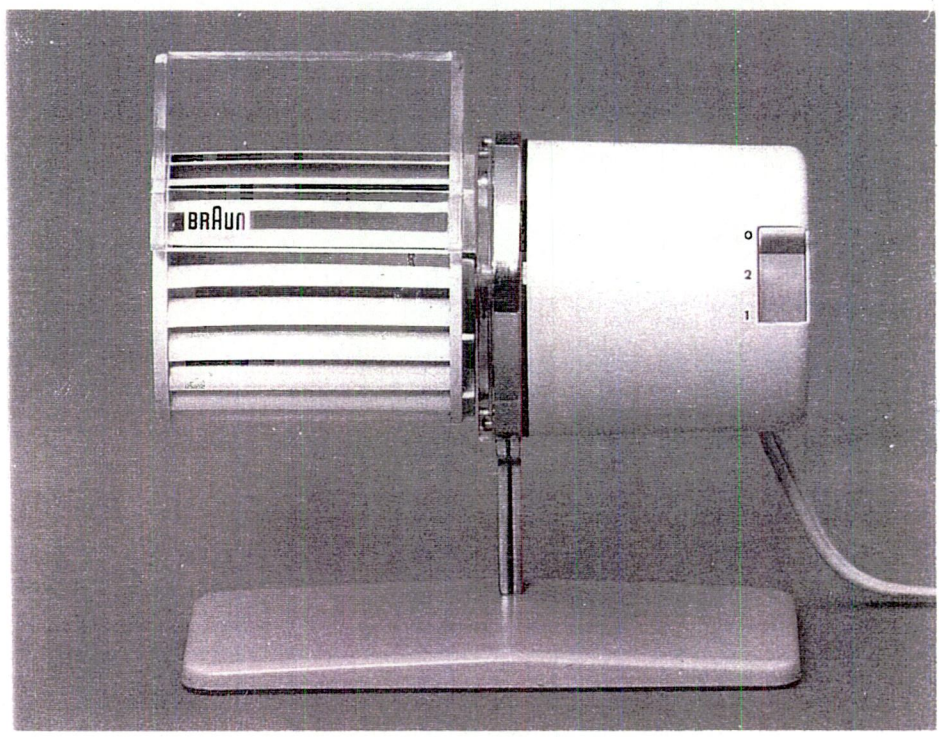


Fig. 25. Braun ML 1/11 table top fan, 1968

More and more companies - convinced more of the marketing aspect than the idea of functional design - were devoting attention to design. We, though.... continued in our daily routine, seeking to improve the practical qualities of products through well-conceived, well executed-design. We are still doing this today (Rams, 1990, p.132)

The closure of the Ulm school in 1968 was, as mentioned in Chapter Two, essentially a political act. Design too, around this period and into the seventies, was heavily influenced by political events. Student movements attracted the most interest and were the main protagonists in the press and on television. The young rejected any aesthetics that compromised the state of the environment and voiced vociferous opinion against the terror of public consumption.

Braun took on these challenging issues with the aided by the company's well established functional unornamented style, despite the mounting criticism obstreperously aired by the supporters of post modern design theories.

German design was host to an unusual process of emancipation at this time. An independent theoretical superstructure was created, which set itself free from the domination of architecture. Functionalism in architecture was no longer discussed in the same theoretical framework as functionalism in product design. This was of some advantage to Braun, as by the late seventies most members of the architectural fraternity saw functionalism as being an non creditable approach to architectural design

with the faceless monotony of the rebuilt city, the "cataclysmic purism of contemporary urban renewal... brought so many cities to the brink of catastrophe" (Marcus, 1995, p.152)

Indeed as early as 1960 Philip Johnson, and adamant believer and practitioner of functional purist architecture, turned his back on the cause. Unlike Johnson, Braun, under the constant guidance of Rams, stuck unequivocally to the functional philosophy, one which had succeeded for them up until then.

The 1970s

New freedom and expression was manifest in the seventies. Two main consumer groups emerged to a large extent at this time ; the young and the working woman. In the case of the latter, labour saving measures were demanded in the kitchen to allow women to do other things outside of the home. The kitchen developed a form which was sympathetic to the burdens of manual chores. Housework became industrialised. This rational planning of work in the home was the commercial answer to the desire for emancipation.

However the kitchen now became increasingly more congested with a plethora of operating controls on cookers, washing machines and other appliances. The supposed time saving element of these new products was an illusion, as more time was spent operating these products. It was therefore the duty of Braun and its 'good design' aesthetic **(Fig.26.)** to help clear up the unresolved time saving aspect and also the confusion associated with the function of many appliances

Fig. 26. Braun KF 20 "Aromaster" coffee machine, 1972

The introduction of the microprocessor by the American corporation Intel, had a huge impact on the forms of products. Many of the internal components of appliances could be reduced in size and thus gave designers more freedom. Interestingly, the issue of bulk had been tackled by Braun twenty years previously in the successful SK4 Phonosuper record player.

With the reduction of internal volume, products such as washing machines and calculators reduced in size. Emphasis on fine detailing increased, the importance of clarity being foremost in the designers considerations. The ET22 pocket calculator (1977) **(Fig.27.)** was one such article that succeeded for Braun and later the ET66 based on the same form ten years later.

Fig. 27. Braun ET 22 calculator, 1977

The volume and diversity of products on offer continued to expand steadily, and design was predominantly influenced by marketing considerations. Many designers found the scope left to them for autonomous decisions and creativity steadily shrinking. Manufacturers, to reduce sale risks, oriented themselves towards the most successful product within a particular group of products. Pre-established specifications , colour and production costs confronted designers. However Braun, through its adherence to function principles and the omission of the unimportant, succeeded where others had failed as design for function didn't require much alteration in styling - function was the styles prerequisite.

The 1980s

The microchip became the new vehicle for design in the 1980s. Small electrical components gave companies such as Braun the possibility to design smaller hand-held objects such as calculators **(Fig.28.)**, electric shavers **(Fig.29.)**and radios.

Fig. 28. Braun ET 66 calculator, 1987

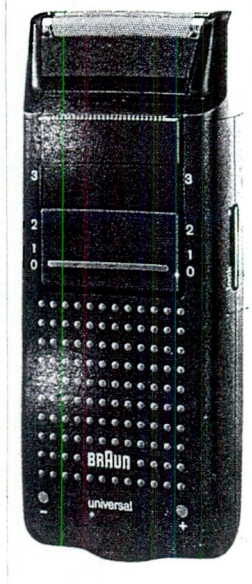


Fig. 29. Braun universal shaver

As previously mentioned, more attention to detailing had to be devoted to products due to the decreasing scale of these goods. According to McDermott

> If the functional aspects are well designed, if - for example - the buttons depress with just the right resistance to the finger tips, then the object is desirable. Braun capitalised on this instinctive pleasure by miniaturising and refining its products to a jewel-like quality
>
> (McDermott, 1992, p.40)

While Braun continued to cater for human needs through their functional methods, other groups looked for new and alternative design approaches which challenged the status quo.

The most notable movement of this period to challenge the aesthetics of 'modern' functional design was the Memphis collective, formed in 1981. This group recalled the more self-consciously socio-political designs of the sixties via their use of flamboyant shapes and colourful contrasts.

Ettore Sottsass Jr., the most prominent designer of the Memphis group, postulated

> It [Memphis]... sees functionality... not only as a respect for certain ergonomic rules or for saleability statistics, but also for a cultural vision, a public necessity, a historical thrust (Dormer, 1983, p.81).

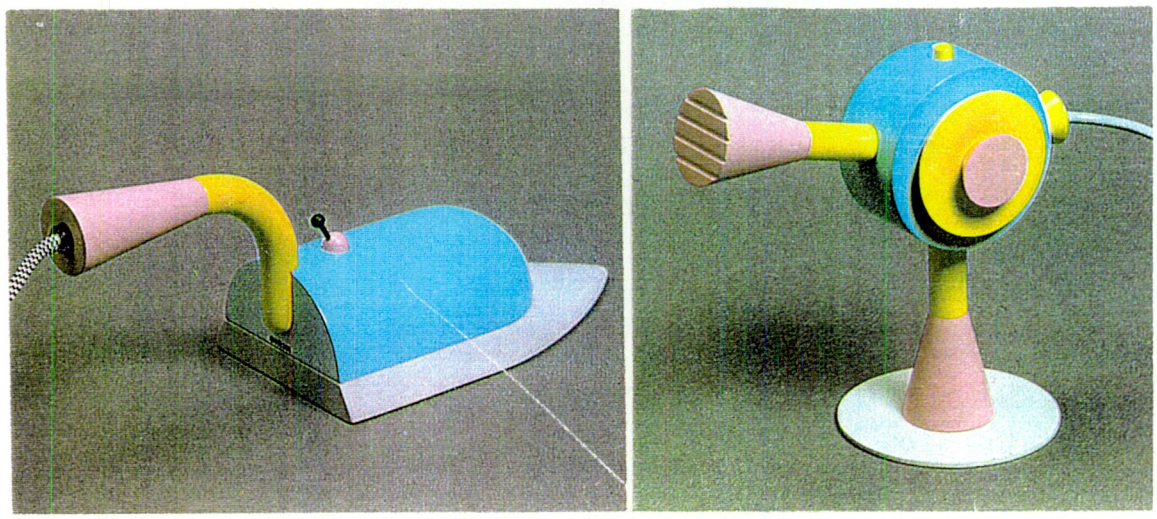


Fig. 30. Lacquered wood prototype appliances, De Lucchi, 1979

Memphis represented direct opposition to the theories and products of Braun. But for both Dieter Rams and Braun, this sort of critical resistance was familiar ground. And indeed neither had anything to worry about. For in spite of the apparent popular appeal of Memphis - its claim to express the emotional energy of society and its use of industrial materials - its objects were produced in limited quantities at high prices by traditional craft based workshops.

However, with the advent of the nineties, most theorists regarded functionalism as a fading theory in design. For the impression left by

post modern movements of the seventies and eighties began to give rise to increased questioning about the true benefits of functional design. According to Dormer

> Functionalism led the way of progressive design for over a century and, as formed by the Bauhaus, shaped this century's conception of modernity. Those who found it a criterion too restrictive to address richness, symbolism's, and accelerating technology of the post-war world have pushed design in a variety of different directions without achieving the influence that functionalism could claim. The loss of a dominant universal concept has left a vacuum...one is left to ponder how the ground between the poles as they now exist will be filled
>
> (Dormer, 1983, p.82)

Nevertheless, the concept of modernity was given a boost towards the end of the eighties. It extended into the nineties and has become known as 'Green' design.

The 1990s

A primary concern of contemporary society is the effect of design on our surrounding environment. Germany was one of the first countries to integrate these ecological considerations with the design of consumer goods.

These are important issues which are of prevalent concern to all manufacturing companies. This position is a manifestation of the nineties and if these manufacturers are to be successful then they must cater carefully for the 'green' conscious culture of today and tomorrow.

> This means that businessmen, developers and designers must include environmental friendliness as part of their responsibility for industrial culture, and develop it further in creative fashion
>
> (Gerlach, 1990, p.154).

The underlying point here is that Braun has appealed to the consumer in this regard, both in its nature as a German 'eco' conscious company and also in its unequivocal adherence to functionalist, minimalist design etiquette.

> Always alert to global environment issues, Braun recognises its responsibilities and operates a strict ecological policy....Ozone damaging CFCs have been banned from all products and production processes. In all our German plants production waste is retrieved, reprocessed and returned to the production cycle.... In addition to care taken in the manufacturing process, Braun is also crucially aware that product packaging should be kept to a minimum. Where possible recycled papers and boards are used and the use of PVC has been banned.
>
> (Schneider, 1997, p.6)

As a German company, emphasis on ecological friendliness is inherent of a well organised social structure. Whether it is BMW cars, Braun appliances or supermarket packaging, environmental thoughtfulness has been harmonised with all of these products.

Through the ever increasing 'green consciousness' of contemporary culture designers have elevated the criteria for the design of products which have longer lives and fewer varieties.

It can be seen that social attitudes which inevitably give rise to changes in democratic societies have in many regards come full circle. A feature of the late sixties was the widespread student unrest which occurred throughout much of Western Europe. In Germany especially protests were particularly confrontational and obstreperous. Although these rumblings did not do much to alter anything major, there was a shift in the background mood of thought and culture which strongly influenced designers' consciousness and work.

Criticism was centred at companies which designed goods that created no utility value and was nothing more than sales promotion; criticism was also targeted at those who squandered resources and destroyed the environment through excessive production.

Within this environment the concept of function has undergone somewhat of a resurgence. Both energy conservation and reduced material waste rest auspiciously on the side of functionalist design, welcome news for those of such philosophical persuasion, most notably Braun.

The continued accomplishments of Braun goods is evident throughout the world, no more so than in Japan. The influence which the Braun design philosophy of order, harmony and economy has had on the design world continues to be profound and far reaching, particularly in this Asian country. This success is reinforced through the receipt of one of Japans most prestigious design accolades, the G-mark. Similar in stature to the German "iF-Designpreis" and Italian "Compasso d'Oro" awards, it is a well established yearly event which has been in existence since 1956. In Asia the reputation of the G-mark is high,

> and if a foreign manufacturer in particular is favourably evaluated in Japan, which lies outside the sphere of European and American culture, it means its product has achieved a kind of globalisation. Moreover… it signifies a high degree of trustworthiness
>
> (Takashi, 1996, p. 43).

Braun and chief designer Rams have been recipients of this award on a number of occasions. It is no secret that the Japanese hold great respect and admiration for the efficient work that emanates from the company and indeed Germany in general.

One feature of this admiration is the self discipline to adhere to ones beliefs and, according to Takashi, in the case of Braun, the confidence to keep things as they are (Takashi, 1996, p. 45).

Fig. 31. ADS Atelier Audio Components, Dieter Rams, 1983

This confidence was questioned in 1995 when the time finally arrived for Dieter Rams, after forty years, to relinquish his throne as Braun's Director of product design. Peter Schneider was appointed as successor to the long time hero of functional design. The question that needed to be answered: **what kind of Braun design would he develop ?** To the happiness of all associated and involved with the functionalist

sphere of influence, Schneider admitted there would be little divergence from the principles set out by Rams

Braun's ten design principles are identical to my own. And these... are important not only in the manufacture of products but human existence as well. Although human values do not change all that much, maintaining them within the tumultuous flow of our world is not so simple a matter. There exists the danger that in trying to maintain unchanging human values we may be trapped by the past, and become unable to see the present or the future (Takashi, 1996, p. 45).

Schneider is a man who is proud of the traditional approach that Braun takes to design and the fact that this approach can not be mistaken. Braun's world-wide reputation and performance are testimonials to the confidence of the company. Furthermore, according to Takashi, Peter Schneider claims he will not be swayed from Braun's position no matter what methodologies are adapted by other companies (Takashi, 1996, p.45). Testimony to his confidence as a designer in the Braun tradition, Schneider says

When I get an idea I express it verbally to well trained professionals conversant on the computer, who give it three-dimensional form. I don't operate the computer, I'm a designer (Takashi, 1996, p.45).

Q. What of the future of German design and Braun design ?

In light of Peter Schneider's comments of his intention to stick to the approach established by his predecessor an event of great relevance for Braun occurred on the other side of the Atlantic in 1996.

Aspen , Colorado was the stage for a major design conference. The purpose of this conference : to examine the current state of German design and what design visions are being envisaged for the future.

People concerned with theory and practice, companies including Braun, Mercedes, BMW and Siemens, university lecturers, museum directors and even film-makers gave an overview, in the complexity of which the myths of the Bauhaus and Ulm were still clearly identified.

Much of the talk in this conference centred around the need for a change in theoretical design which has dominated Germany for so many years. Albus, speaking about the influence in Germany of the functionalist ideals of Ulm and the Bauhaus said

> Their [Ulm & Bauhaus] outstanding dominance is gradually fading and being outshone by a broader interpretation of design. This very fact- that design is now being interpreted as something more than precisely defined functionalism, an idea which until the mid-eighties in this country [USA] was still castigated as a horrific vision but has become generally accepted in recent years - received its official confirmation in Aspen (Burkhardt, 1996, p. 83).

Albus argues the point that there is a definite need for change in Germany, change which has been a long time coming

> new beginnings and breakthroughs are important in German design; they are long overdue, for only by overstepping boundaries in this way is distance and insight created and thus the ground in which complex perspectives can be developed and visions can flourish
> (Burkhardt, 1996, p. 83).

There were approximately ninety speakers in attendance at the five day conference, people such as Bazon Brock, Otl Aicher, Dieter Rams, Alessandro Alessi and even a taped speech by Walter Gropius.

In many respects the conference was a contemporary reflection of the long term battle between modernism and post modernism. The Germanness in German design (Burkhardt, 1996, p. 85) was one of the essential aspects of the argument and what its meaning was. Those supporters of the post modern argument seemed to have gained most ground by the conference. Klaus Jurgen Maack, the head of the Erco lighting manufacturers, argued in favour of modernism the fact that

> Germany has been the mother to industrial culture and developed it in a form that does not exist in any other European country. Quality and dimensions were defined in order to make it possible to reproduce them. And this created the conditions necessary for industrial design
>
> (Albus, 1996, p. 87).

Hartmut Esslinger, the founding member of frog design and a post modern sympathiser, objected to Maack's comments

> Germany suffers from changes like a child who has lived at home too long and suddenly emerges into the big wide world at the age of 45. That, too, is a German problem and also applies to design : we were living in a cocoon in which everything worked beautifully ; good from, design funding and many other things of the sort
>
> (Albus, 1996, p. 87).

Conclusion

This whole argument has repercussions for Braun, for the appliance manufacturers have had to battle against much criticism since its conception in 1951. The supporters of post modern, radical or anti-deign movements have all attempted to thwart the theoretical stance of functionalism held by Dieter Rams and companies like Braun. These critical voices have been silenced by the accomplishments of Braun's product range right up until the nineties.

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Today, these voices are louder than ever and the question which must be asked at this point is ***can Braun continue to succeed ?***

As exemplified in the Aspen conference, the enemies of the modern approach to design are not only moving in from outside but also from within the German sphere. People such as Bazon Brock, a cultural critic and media expert, criticised his own nations 'Germanness'. According to Burkhardt, Brock revealed everything that stops Germans from fleeing to the heights of Ulm. This open attack on the nation's most sacred goods was tantamount to self crucifixion...Brock had... not only shot the German cuckoo but also hit Gessler's hat (Burkhardt, 1996, p. 85).

Peter Schneider inherited the modernist armour from Rams in 1995 with one significant chink - faltering sales figures in 1994. These facts gave rise to some concerns over the future of the company. Whether Braun could battle through another extended period of criticism lay very much in the hands of Peter Schneider. And it could have been envisaged that if Schneider was a man of such strong , nearly stubborn beliefs as his predecessor, then metaphorically speaking the Braun brigade may have reason to feel uneasy about the prospects of future conflicts. There are only ever three possible outcomes of battle : victory, injury or fatality. Many people harboured the hope that the latter of these would not be the fate of a company which has developed and shaped much of the design history of this century.

The good news for Braun and indeed the popularity of its kitchen appliances today is the insurgent interest in cooking. Contemporary T.V. is crowded with increasing numbers of cooking programs, with many chefs becoming celebrities in their own right.

The kitchen, no longer just a room for cooking, has become chic again. It is now the nerve center for sophisticated culinary operations. Sean Blair of the London Design Council has noticed the change

We take our culinary lives more seriously now than we ever used to.

(Becker, 1997, p.3)

Increased success is evident in U.S. sales figures which show consolidated net sales totaling $1,773 billion in 1996, with an operating profit of $ 300 million. Sarah Caden of the Irish Times wrote that

Braun Ireland is to invest about 7 million in a new product line at its Carlow town factory, beginning in June 1997. Money will be invested in state of the art automated systems. (Caden, 1997, p.14)

It would appear then that Braun has indeed defended its territory well, emerging triumphantly from battle with minimal casualties and more importantly proving the critics wrong by taking its functional design philosophy successfully from the middle of the twentieth century into the dawn of a new century.

It would seem the sun isn't setting in Kronberg, Germany just yet

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