Dieter Rams's Ten Commandments

Back in the early 1980s, Dieter Rams was becoming increasingly concerned by the state of the world around him - "an impenetrable confusion of forms, colours and noises." Aware that he was a significant contributor to that world, he asked himself an important question: is my design good design?

As good design cannot be measured in a finite way he set about expressing the ten most important criteria for what he considered was good design. Subsequently they have become known as the 'Ten commandments'.

Here they are.

Good design is innovative.

It does not copy existing product forms, nor does it produce any kind of novelty for the sake of it. The essence of innovation must be clearly seen in all functions of a product. The possibilities in this respect are by no means exhausted. Technological development keeps offering new chances for innovative solutions.

Good design is useful.

A product is bought in order to be used. It must serve a defined purpose - in both primary and additional functions. The most important task of design is to optimize the utility of a product.

Good design is aesthetic.

The aesthetic quality of a product - and the fascination it inspires - is an integral part of the its utility. Without doubt, it is uncomfortable and tiring to have to put up with products that are confusing, that get on your nerves, that you are unable to relate to. However, it has always been a hard task to argue about aesthetic quality, for two reasons.

Firstly, it is difficult to talk about anything visual, since words have a different meaning for different people.

Secondly, aesthetic quality deals with details, subtle shades, harmony and the equilibrium of a whole variety of visual elements. A good eye is required, schooled by years and years of experience, in order to be able to draw the right conclusion.

Good design helps us to understand a product.

It clarifies the structure of the product. Better still, it can make the product talk. At best, it is self-explanatory and saves you the long, tedious perusal of the operating manual.

Good design is unobtrusive.

Products that satisfy this criterion are tools. They are neither decorative objects nor works of art. Their design should therefore be both neutral and restrained leaving room for the user's self-expression.

Good design is honest.

An honestly-designed product must not claim features it does not have - being more innovative, more efficient, of higher value. It must not influence or manipulate buyers and users.

Good design is durable.

It is nothing trendy that might be out-of-date tomorrow. This is one of the major differences between well-designed products and trivial objects for a waste-producing society. Waste must no longer be tolerated.

Good design is thorough to the last detail.

Thoroughness and accuracy of design are synonymous with the product and its functions, as seen through the eyes of the user.

Good design is concerned with the environment.

Design must contribute towards a stable environment and a sensible use of raw materials. This means considering not only actual pollution, but also the visual pollution and destruction of our environment.

Good design is as little design as possible.

Back to purity, back to simplicity.