

VITSOE Voice

Issue two, 2019

Unravelling the conundrum that is living
better with less that lasts longer



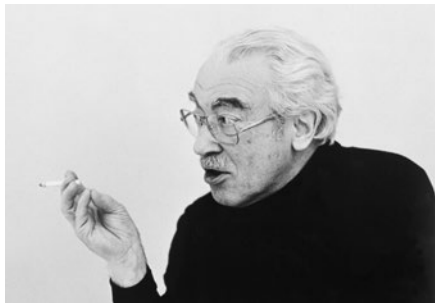


Since its founding in 1959 Vitsoe has spoken with a quiet voice, advocating self-effacement, adaptability and longevity. In 1976 Dieter Rams gave a speech in New York talking of the error of “thoughtless production for thoughtless consumption”.

Fast-forward to September 2018 when the film-maker Gary Hustwit unveiled, ‘Rams’. It distilled six decades into a film that Hustwit describes as “a rumination on consumerism, sustainability and the future of design” – at a time when academics, broadcasters and commentators are pleading for a change in our collective behaviour.

As Vitsoe marks its 60th anniversary this issue of Vitsoe Voice brings together that speech and that film – with a love of books, chairs, dancers and more. It’s time to cock an ear to that quiet voice.

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Vitsoe’s founder,
Niels Vitsoe (1913 – 1995)

Cover:
Gary Hustwit at home
in New York, See page 38

Left:
Vitsoe in Royal
Leamington Spa

Design by Vitsoë

The ideas behind my work as a designer have to match with a company's objectives. This principle applies to my work not only at Braun but also at Vitsoë. I have been working for these two companies for about 20 years and – I like to point out – only for these two companies.

I am convinced that design – at least in the terms I understand it – cannot be performed by someone outside the company. I am absolutely convinced that this is true if products are designed as part of a larger system, like we do at Vitsoë.

In 1957 I began to develop a storage system that formed the basis of the company Vitsoë, which was founded in 1959. Thus the ideology behind my design is engrained within the company.

Ladies and gentlemen, design is a popular subject today. No wonder because, in the face of increasing competition, design is often the only product differentiation that is truly discernible to the buyer.

I am convinced that a well-thought-out design is decisive to the quality of a product. A poorly-designed product is not only uglier than a well-designed one but it is of less value and use. Worst of all it might be intrusive.

The development and changes that we have initiated with our work at Vitsoë are, I believe, positive for the development of good design as a whole.

The introduction of good design is needed for a company to be successful. However, our definition of success may be different to yours. Striving for good design is of social importance as it means, amongst other things, absolutely avoiding waste.

What is good design? Product design is the total configuration of a product: its form, colour, material and construction. The product must serve its intended purpose efficiently.

A designer who wants to achieve good design must not regard himself as an artist who, according to taste and aesthetics, is merely dressing-up products with a last-minute garment.

The designer must be the 'gestaltgenieur' or creative engineer. They synthesise the completed product from the various elements that make up its design. Their work is largely rational, meaning that aesthetic decisions are justified by an understanding of the product's purpose.

I am convinced that people have an interest in what we are doing at Vitsoë since our products are useful; I expect they also appreciate the aesthetic that follows.

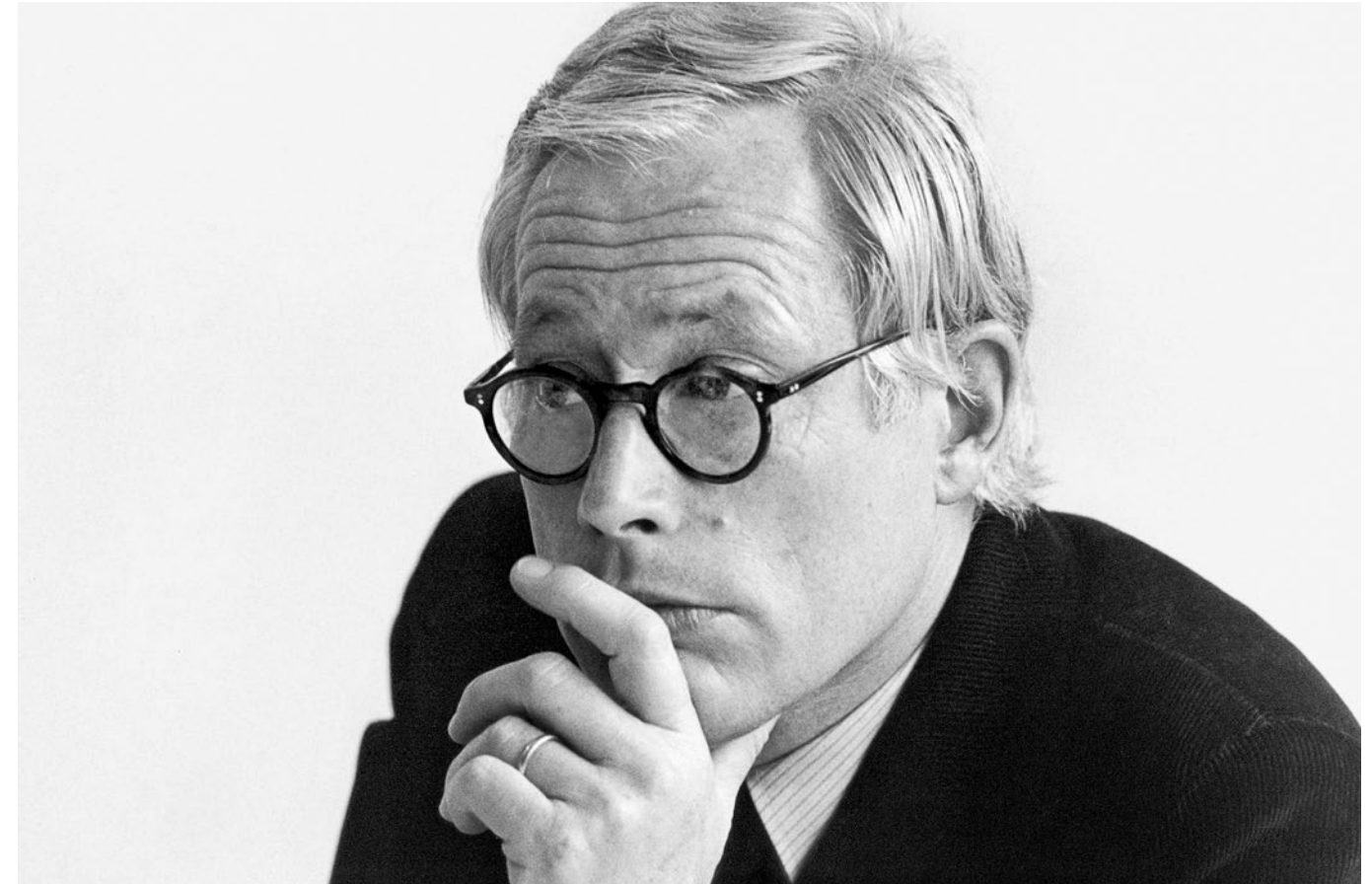
These qualities are the result of progressive and intelligent problem-solving. Functionality must be at the centre of good design.

A product must be functional in itself but it also must function as part of a wider system: the home. Vitsoë's 606 Universal Shelving System is successful due to its high functionality and its ability to adapt to any environment. Vitsoë's furniture does not shout; it performs its function in relative anonymity alongside furniture from any designer and in homes from any era. We make the effort to produce products like this for the intelligent and responsible users – not consumers – who consciously select products that they can really use. Good design must be able to coexist.

You cannot understand good design if you do not understand people; design is made for people. It must be ergonomically correct, meaning it must harmonise with a human being's strengths, dimensions, senses and understanding.

Vitsoë's direct contact with its customers has led to a deep 🇩🇪

The speech delivered
by Dieter Rams in 1976
in New York



Dieter Rams by
Abisag Tüllmann

"A product must be functional in itself but it also must function as part of a wider system: the home."





Dieter Rams at Vitsoe's first shop in Frankfurt, 1971. Photography by Ingeborg Kracht-Rams

“The design of a Vitsoe product clearly points out its purpose and its use – and facilitates them.”

understanding of people. Over the years, our understanding of how you use a shelf or an armchair has increased. We have educated and diligent people worldwide who understand how to plan systems in configurations that our customers may not necessarily have thought of at the beginning.

**Order and proportion:
only orderliness makes
a product useful**

All objects that are to be used must be subject to a clear order. The remarkable order of design at Vitsoe has the purpose of communicating the function of the object to the user. The design of a Vitsoe product clearly points out its purpose and its use – and facilitates them.

The order of the elements – their arrangement, their shape, their size and their colour – is based on a thoroughly-planned system. This system is the language of Vitsoe design.

But this order is not self-serving; and I would not call it ideology because it is a practical necessity. For design to be understood by everyone – which good design should strive to do – it should be as simple as possible.

Design at Vitsoe brings all individual elements into proportion. An often-

cited feature of the Vitsoe collection is its balance, its harmony, its belonging together. All structures, components and finishes coexist as a well-balanced and harmonious design that gives it usability.

The majority of products that we encounter in our day-to-day lives scream for attention or try to impress us with their magnificence or miniscule size. These objects try to dictate our relationships with them. Good design creates powerful long-lasting relationships with products as good design creates objects with balanced proportions; at Vitsoe we go further by trying to create objects in balanced proportion with people.

**Good design means to me:
as little design as possible**

To use design to impress, to polish things up, to make them chic, is no design at all. This is packaging.

When we concentrate on the essential elements in design, when we omit all superfluous elements, we find forms become: quiet, comfortable, understandable and, most importantly, long lasting.

Vitsoe products are in constant evolution. We do not limit our products to the manufacturing technologies available at the time of their design. Built into the language

of Vitsoe products is adaptability – adaptability for the user in the home and adaptability in design and manufacture.

We are constantly looking for new and better technical solutions for our products. As technology and production processes are always advancing, innovations are not only possible but they are necessary for a product to continue to be considered good design.

We have experienced that people are more willing than ever to change their lifestyles; that they accept innovative solutions – not fake ones – and are able to rid themselves of old and cemented habits with our products. They expect such innovative solutions, particularly from Vitsoe.

Ladies and gentlemen, our environment is changing rapidly. How will these changes affect our design concepts? Can design that claims longer-range validity be reactive to current circumstances or must it be proactive for the future?

In a room where the proportions are noticed we feel better and we think differently. A neglected and uncared-for landscape will have a different effect on our lives than one that is natural and orderly. There is a lot of work to do on the topic of our physical surroundings affecting

our psychological functions. This is the work we do at Vitsøe.

But Vitsøe only makes furniture today. There are larger questions that we need to answer about our urban environment and how it affects us as individuals and as a society.

What effects do electricity pylons, skyscrapers, highways, street lighting and car parks, for example, have on our psyche and relationships? We know that the residents of anonymous concrete blocks can become depressed as a result of their surroundings. But who is researching these things systematically? Who takes all of this really seriously?

I imagine our current situation will cause future generations to shudder at the thoughtlessness in the way in which we today fill our homes, our cities and our landscape with a chaos of assorted junk. What a fatalistic apathy we have towards the effect of such things. What atrocities we have to tolerate. Yet we are only half aware of them.

This complex situation is increasing and possibly irreversible: there are no discrete actions anymore. Everything interacts and is dependent on other things; we must think more thoroughly about

what we are doing, how we are doing it and why we are doing it.

Indeed, the collapse of the entire system may be impending.

I have spoken of our surroundings but let us look at the wider environment: the world we live in. There is an increasing and irreversible shortage of natural resources: raw materials, energy, food, and land. This must compel us to rationalise, especially in design. The times of thoughtless design, which can only flourish in times of thoughtless production for thoughtless consumption, are over. We cannot afford any more thoughtlessness.

The complexity of systems and shortage of natural resources should compel a change of individual attitudes and attitudes as a society. We learn as individuals and we learn as a group. We are beginning to understand the changes that we are only just seeing. We must take notice with increasing soberness and, hopefully, with growing alertness and rationalism.

Ladies and gentlemen, if we at Vitsøe have contributed towards intelligent, responsible design and a higher quality of objects, I believe we owe our thanks to a great

degree to the unselfish enthusiasm and the always-consequent attitude of one man: Niels Vitsøe. At the same time thanks to all the members of staff, who sense that they have done a little more than just produce another short-lived consumer product.

Good design is a reality!

Dieter Rams delivered this speech in 1976; it was not until 1983 – seven years later – that the UN would establish the Brundtland Commission to address the deterioration of the human environment and natural resources.👉



An early 620 chair, designed by Dieter Rams for Vitsøe in 1962

“We must think more thoroughly about what we are doing, how we are doing it and why we are doing it.”



A degree of stability

Mike and Jeanette are a couple whose lives are anchored by their books

With only two weeks to go until their transatlantic move, Mike and Jeanette's London living room was surprisingly serene. Fresh tea was poured into cups placed neatly on coasters, whilst candles flickered, and the couple's cats snoozed quietly on a nearby sofa. The Marylebone mansion flat they'd called home for the previous few years was soon to be vacated, but with the absence of cardboard boxes or any of the chaos associated with house moving, it felt hard to believe they would be relocating to New York in a matter of days. For Mike and Jeanette, it's a familiar procedure. The overwhelming sense of calm stems from knowing what to expect, because this wouldn't be the first time they've transported themselves and their beloved book collection across the Atlantic Ocean (and back again).

Humans generally crave a degree of stability, familiarity and routine, which is why the upheaval of packing the contents of a busy

household fills most people with dread. Jeanette, in particular, seemed very relaxed about the challenges ahead and explained that "moving around feels pretty normal to me. I emigrated to the USA from China when I was only six, which was such a huge change; it felt like a really big transition at such a young age and a very formative experience for me."

Jeanette's childhood was a time of frequent change, but amid the disruption she was able to find comfort in reading. Bashfully, she grinned and remembered, "Mum would take me to the local library every day, which was how my love of books began. Those trips gave me a sense of belonging to something, and I get a similar sense of familiarity with our Vitsoë shelving. We never have to worry about whether it's going to fit, or if it's going to work. No matter where we are, it always feels like home with all our books on there, even though the configuration might be completely different." 🍷

“I think with life being as crazy as it is – busy, hectic, sorrowful and scary sometimes, it’s nice to have the intuitive, efficient nature of something like the Vitsoe systems.”





The cat. London, 2018

Mike’s formative years were spent in the same place until his late teens. He laughed and said “My upbringing couldn’t be more different. I grew up in the same family house and stayed there until I left for university. My mom, particularly, is a creature of habit and I think I took a lot of my character from her. I rarely lose anything, and even if I suspect I might have misplaced something, it suddenly feels like the world is crumbling around me. I’m so neurotic that I’ll drive myself to near insanity trying to find it, which is a blessing and a curse.”

Differences in personality make relationships more interesting, and we’re often attracted to a partner with traits we don’t recognise in ourselves. Living together

harmoniously requires compromise and Mike and Jeanette confessed to having a few heated debates over the years about how they’ve designed their home. One had been eager to set up a workstation in the living room, while the other made it clear the space should only be used for dining and relaxing. Aside from the squabbles, there is one thing they have always agreed on, which was making sure they had easy access to their ever-expanding, substantial book collection – which takes pride of place, regardless of where they are living.

Mike took a quick glance around the room and explained how, “We keep everything else in our lives quite minimal, and the only thing we really allow ourselves to indulge in is our book collection. We’ve been

lucky enough to visit a lot of art institutions, book donors and foundations whilst travelling around Europe – I find it inspiring that people would amass a certain collection of things and then pass them on for other people to enjoy.” Jeanette laughed and said, “Remember we can’t take them with us when we die!”, to which Mike replied, jokingly, “You can bury me with the books! But really, on a serious note, we’d like to donate them somewhere, to a library or an institution.”

Whilst neither seemed concerned with the transient nature of their lifestyle, Mike described what helps them anchor themselves in a new environment and said, “I think with life being as crazy as it is – busy, hectic, sorrowful and scary sometimes, it’s nice to have the intuitive, efficient nature of something like the Vitsø systems. The one thing I find very beautiful about the shelving is the consistency it provides. We’re able to install it ourselves and feel confident knowing that it acts exactly the same wherever we live.

We know we can rely on it because it works, no matter where we decide to move to (unless of course, we suddenly decide to forget living in the city and decamp to a mud hut!). But really, it’s as simple as knowing that a book won’t slip off the edge because of the lip, or the ease of swapping out a shelf or two to accommodate a new need, or even the fact that the drawers don’t slam shut when you close them. It always works the way you expect it to. It’s one less thing to worry about.”

Jeanette nodded in agreement and talked about how the Vitsø planners “Treat you exactly the same if you’re buying one shelf or filling an entire apartment with 606 – and that speaks volumes about the company. Over the years we’ve come to make friends with the people at Vitsø and feel like we’re part of a community of like-minded people; we know that whether we’re in London or New York, we can go to them for advice about how to re-install our system. The planners are always happy to work through as many iterations as it

takes because they really do care about people enjoying their living spaces. It feels like it’s a company that encourages thoughtfulness.” In the meantime, their careers in the global design world mean there will inevitably be much more travel to come, and both are clear amid the demands of the ‘settling in phase’ they always want to create a home that feels warm, welcoming and considered.👉

“It always feels like home with all our books.”



Vitsoë's Lily Worledge and Mark Adams expose the depth of thinking and care needed to create a chair that lasts, expands and contracts

Take a seat, or two



We can learn a lot about our ever-changing world by looking at a chair. A manufactured object – arguably one of the most difficult pieces of furniture to perfect – it symbolises the life and times of its designer, as well as providing valuable insight into the culture and lifestyles of those who use it.

A 30-year old Dieter Rams designed the 620 Chair Programme in 1962, just two years after the 606 Universal Shelving System made its debut. Using a combination of traditional upholstery techniques and, what was then, pioneering materials, Rams created a chair without compromise, engineered to outlive its owner.

Granted copyright following court action in 1973, the surprisingly comfortable 620 has remained a popular choice for the discerning customer who understands the meaning of true value and enjoys the freedom to easily adapt the seating programme whenever their needs change. What appears at first glance to be a relatively simple design belies the intelligent and comprehensive design and manufacturing process.

In order to help uncover the innovation, convenience and quality that lies beneath the surface of the 620's perfectly plumped seat cushions, Leanne Cloudsdale asked Vitsoë's Lily Worledge and Mark Adams to take a seat and explain:

Upholstered furniture on sale today seems, for the most part, to be manufactured almost entirely from dense foam. How does the 620 Chair Programme differ?

Lily: 620 was designed in 1962 when the context of furniture footprints was very different from today. People were thinking about living with less and using their homes more efficiently. Does anyone really need a sofa with arms that take up 2ft of floor space? It doesn't seem practical.

In terms of the production, we use coil spring units – which are made by one of the last remaining traditional spring factories in the UK – over which there is moulded

coir seat pad. Coir is made from shredded coconut husk and has been used for centuries; for 620 it's combined with natural rubber to create a comfortable, long-lasting seat that fits snugly in the CNC-cut birch-plywood base. Most modern chairs and sofas would use cut foam for this which degrades over time, but rubberised coir is extremely resilient and keeps its original shape – over a lifetime there would never be any need to replace it. It's the same material being used to house and store spent nuclear-fuel rods, which really emphasises how durable it is.

I think the upholstery we use for 620 is really quite unusual on the market. It is full grain leather that

hasn't been corrected in any way, which means you're getting covers with natural features such as scars, scratches and wrinkles that are finished with natural oils and waxes. It can be a bit of a surprise to customers who expect something really uniform. But it adds character and allows us to utilise as much of the hide as possible, reducing waste.

Many people associate contemporary oversized proportions (such as wide arm rests) with a perceived sensation of comfort. Does such a compact chair achieve this?

Mark: Dieter wanted to achieve the comfort of a fully upholstered ←



Lily Worledge, who is responsible for Vitsoe's chair production, in detailed conversation with Mark Adams, Vitsoe's managing director

"...some of the best customer feedback that I've read recently is customers ordering replacement parts for chairs they've had for 40 years."

“It’s not obvious at first that it’s a kit of parts, Lego for grownups. There’s no such thing as a three-seater 620 sofa, it’s three chairs joined together, which could easily become a ten-seater if you want.”



Rubberised coir (coconut husk) is used for its resilience and longevity.



chair (whether that’s a button-back or a club chair) with a visually lightweight frame. He talked about how Niels Vitsoe’s experience in the bed industry helped inform the design, and resulted in the use of coil springs in the construction.

There’s one phrase that always comes to mind, which is that everything about Vitsoe offers you breathing space. I’m always saying, “don’t squeeze it right up to the skirting board, or the curtains, or whatever. Just give it breathing space and it will all look and feel so much better.” This is another thing that 620 gives you, because it’s not being greedy about the space it takes up.

In terms of comfort, whenever I visit any of our shops, or when I’m here at our building in Leamington, I annoy everyone by plumping up the cushions. I do this because I know from experience that the very first time a sceptic sits on 620 is when we sell it. You can see their reaction

within seconds as they settle in and say, “Oh, this is so much better than I expected.”

As our lives change, so do the demands on our homes. What does Vitsoe’s well-known adaptability offer with this chair?

Mark: It’s not obvious at first sight that it’s a kit of parts, Lego for grownups. There’s no such thing as a three-seater 620 sofa, it’s three chairs joined together, which could easily become a ten-seater if you want.

Lily: 620 arrives in easily manageable boxes, you could carry a four-seat 620 sofa to a fourth-floor walk-up apartment in New York City piece by piece without a problem. No need to hire specialist equipment or pay someone to remove the windows to fit it all in. It all adds up.

Mark: We once saw a hired external lift outside one of the really slim

houses in Amsterdam, taking a sofa up to the fifth floor. The street had been partially closed and the window had been removed – it was an entire operation. It was hard not to shout, “You should have bought 620! You could have got it in by opening the door and without closing the street!”

The 620 Chair Programme is assembled using a simple manual tool. How important is this ‘connection’ for how we feel about the furniture?

Mark: People are craving that down-to-earth simplicity and a sense of being engaged with the product. I remember years ago a well-known architect customer of ours turned down my offer to install his Vitsoe furniture. He said, “I want the pleasure of doing it all myself.” Ever more, products are intentionally made in such a way that you can’t interact with them whatsoever, but with 620 you can unbolt arms and add seats ➡

together. You can make a multi-seater sofa when you want to. These virtues are so unusual for a chair – verging on unique.

You talk about Vitsø furniture being an investment, rather than a cost – how is this so with 620?

Mark: I'll always remember Niels Vitsø saying to me, "Mark, you have to realise that the trouble with Dieter Rams' design is that you don't see where all of the cost goes." And this is especially true about 620, and it's the reason we always have a cut-away (cross section of the chair seat) for customers, so they can see exactly what goes into the making of each chair.

That's the Vitsø virtue – all of the cost is in there and it's hidden, but it's the reason why your chair will still be going strong and will remain in good condition for 40, 50 or more years. We've got customers coming back now, ordering new upholstery after 50 years and being so excited that they can not only buy it but fit it themselves in their own home.

Lily: I think some of the best customer feedback that I've read recently is customers ordering replacement parts for chairs they've had for 40 years. One particular comment that springs to mind was from a customer who bought new feet for their chair. They explained how being able to make this one small change after all those years had made them so happy and they didn't expect it. They seemed even

more elated than customers who have just bought a brand new 620! Buying a sofa that you can't change or adapt should be more of a hard sell. How does anyone know what they will want in 40 years' time? 620 allows you to change and adapt, safe in the knowledge that all of the parts you need are never going to become obsolete. That's why it's such a good investment – it's all about the long-term thinking.

Mark: Even after owning a 620 on castors for years, some customers might not realise they can easily swap those out for a swivel base. So, you could order a swivel from us for around £300, turn your chair onto its back, unscrew four castors, use four little screws to screw in the new base unit and suddenly you've got a swivel chair! You can make this change five, ten or 40 years after you've bought it – it's bonkers! This is the reason why it's such great value.

So, are we buying more than just a chair?

Lily: The relationship customers have with Vitsø gives them the feeling of control. Every component of 620 can be replaced if needed.

I think it's because the design comes from a time when people were encouraged (or expected) to have more ownership over their products and feel that if something was broken, they could take it apart, replace the broken element and fix it. These days products are being designed in such a way that you're actively prevented from being able to do that, but with 620 and 606, the assembly is honest, we're not trying to hide anything.

Mark: Wherever you live in the world, you buy directly from Vitsø – there is no middleman. We don't go via dealers, so our margin is smaller. You are buying from the manufacturer and dealing with experts who know all about it.

I'm sure Alfred Wainwright said that the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District are like a relationship with a really good friend. You can go without visiting them for many years and as soon as you see them again, you can just pick up the conversation where you left off. I would argue that's what you can do with Vitsø.

Leanne Cloudsdale is a design journalist and communications consultant.👉



“Wherever you live in the world, you buy directly from Vitsø – there is no middleman.”

Greenberg's upstate New
York home by Toshiko Mori.
Photograph by Paul Warchol

Bob Greenberg talks about how
his past informs the future

Singular vision



Bob Greenberg likes to feel connected. Entering the glass-walled office at the New York headquarters of his international design innovation company R/GA, he gently closed the sliding door behind him as his team continued their work in the vast open-plan space beyond.

A self-confessed technology lover, he has been invited to curate the 16th installation in the ‘Selects’ series at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York, in which designers, artists, architects and public figures guest curate an exhibition, choosing objects from the museum’s collection. For his presentation, Greenberg has brought together 42 items to illustrate how he thinks design and technology have shaped modern human life.

In his trademark black beret, he pulled up a chair and gesticulated towards the main windows where snowflakes were falling onto the streets outside. It’s 40 years since the release of Superman, the feature film whose iconic title sequence catapulted Greenberg into the limelight and kick-started a lifelong career in ground-breaking motion graphics. When asked how his childhood defined his character, Greenberg chuckled, “I’m just a Jewish bloke from the suburbs of Chicago. I think we were middle class – I never wanted for anything, particularly.

“Dyslexia, on the other hand, had a tremendous impact on my life. I had a terrible time and really struggled with it. My parents thought I was slow with lots of learning disabilities and at school, I was taken out of

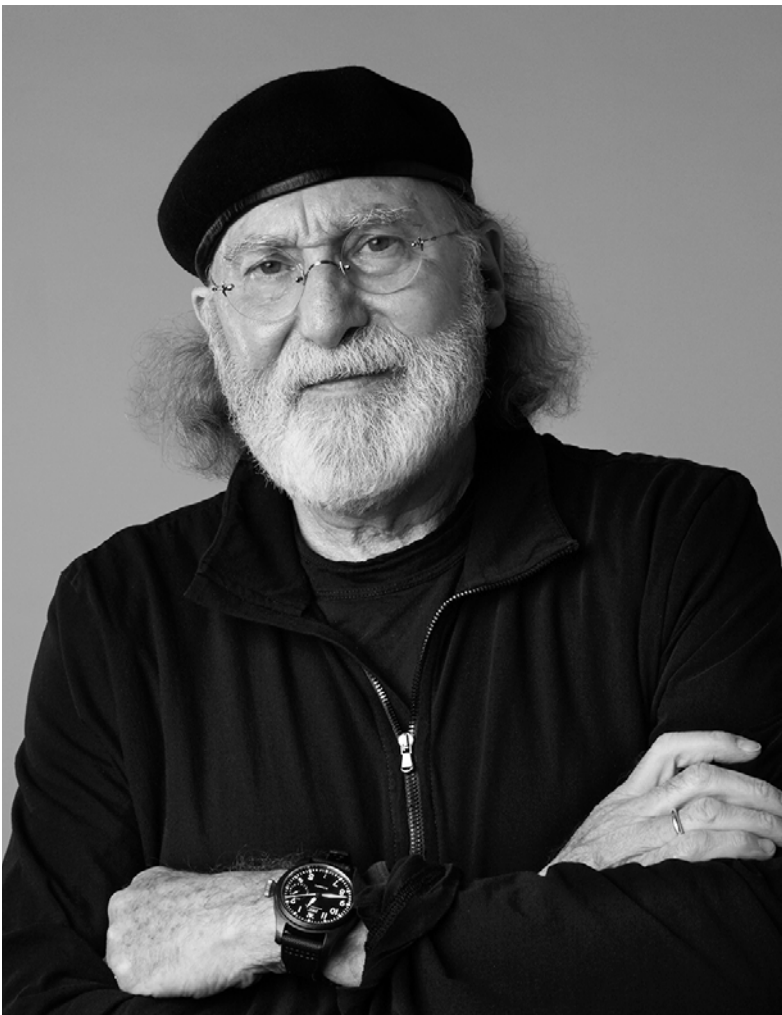
mainstream classes and put into the remedial groups instead – we were treated like we were stupid. Dyslexia affects people differently, it can be a difficulty in reading, the inability to add without a calculator, struggling with locations or issues with speech. I didn’t find out I had it until I was 35 when I wound up going to see a psychoanalyst. By sheer luck, his expertise was dyslexia, so that’s when I learned I had it and was told I was actually doing very well. I don’t know if it’s maybe better, or less good to overcome it yourself. Nowadays it’s more recognised. There are special tests and people have help with the aid of computers.”

Greenberg told us that many designers at R/GA have mild cases of dyslexia, especially those working in user-experience. He pointed out that pattern recognition can be used in place of more familiar methods of problem-solving. Aged 70 and looking back at the obstacles he has overcome he concluded, “It’s actually been a great benefit to me.” It certainly hasn’t held him back. R/GA now has more than 2,000 employees in offices around the world.

As a teenager, JD Salinger’s ‘The Catcher in the Rye’ was a significant influence on Greenberg: “It was quite helpful when I started working in Hollywood because the general theme there is phoniness. Part of the problem is cultural, and part of it has to do with the entertainment industry in general. It’s a business where actors are desperate to get the job and producers are desperate to have a successful movie. It’s a place where people that have issues, and the

ones that are okay with being phony, tend to gravitate towards. I guess the best example of that character type would be President Trump, but anyway...it became an interesting book to me and I found myself re-reading it a lot. It was partly connected to how I was sailing through life with a reductionist vocabulary, not unlike Hemingway, who I later became a major fan of. As a dyslexic, his writing is much easier for me to deal with because it’s clean – which leads to advertising copy, which leads to print posters and also to product design. It’s all about simplicity, and to me, it felt like a natural fit.”

“...humans work better when they are forced to be experimental.”



Dyslexia may have led him towards authors who demonstrated a neutral and restrained attitude in their prose. Plain writing leaves space for the reader’s imagination. A reductionist approach allows a broader group of people to understand and appreciate something.

By the age of 16 Greenberg became interested in the household products designed by Dieter Rams. Transfixed by the shape, functionality and use of colour, he remembered one particular Braun item fondly, “I collected his things because I thought they were beautiful, but you know, it’s weird when a kid buys a hairdryer just for

the buttons, but I was in love with them! I’m pretty sure my mom thought it was strange.”

Young Bob was a Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson enthusiast too, especially admiring the mid-century glass houses. Fast forward to 2018 and it has become clear that his appreciation for good design was more than an adolescent phase, it has become his obsession. Determined to make his own glass house, he commissioned Japanese architect Toshiko Mori to create a home on a secluded spot at the edge of dense woodland in upstate New York.

“We have four small single-story houses and a garage that are all connected,” Greenberg said of his system of buildings on one plot. “The main house is glass all around, which sadly meant that works of art, photography or oil paintings would be damaged if they were left on display.” The search to find resilient but beautiful objects that could withstand the sun’s rays led him to acquire one of the largest collections of Chinese Buddhist sculptures from the Qi and Wei dynasties: “Dug up from the earth after thousands of years and they still look magnificent. They are timeless pieces, largely unaffected by the elements.” ➡



Braun HLD 4 hairdryers at the Cooper Hewitt

Bob Greenberg's 'Selects' exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt, New York. Courtesy of R/GA



The struggle to balance a love of physical objects with the desire for simplicity led Greenberg to recall a meeting with a revered British minimalist architect who told him that most clients had to rent storage for their belongings. "It's actually very difficult to be a minimalist," Greenberg conceded. "Our houses aren't very big. Three are 1000 sqft, and one is 1200 sqft, which means we've had to think very carefully about everything we put inside them."

"Building an extremely minimalist, connected house like ours is even more complex than you would expect because you see everything – because it's so hard to do, you appreciate it more. Innovating and pushing everything to the edge is a

lot of work. But for me, breaking new ground is always the fun part."

He understands that to make things that will be remembered, an element of risk-taking is required. Not one to let the constraints of present technologies deter him, his knowledge of innovations of the past leads him to break new ground.

"The Superman titles are a good example of how humans work better when they are forced to be experimental. The technology that had to be developed was the same as Kubrick was using for 2001: A Space Odyssey, but because we didn't know that, we had to do it all on our own. It involved inventing new film stocks, lenses, computers to assist that had never been used before for animation cameras or optical printers. I remember when we were putting it together in London; Richard, my brother, and Stuart Bell finished it around 5 in the morning. Stuart caught the Concorde because it was the only way it could be integrated into the film – they didn't have another minute!"

Embracing advances in technology is something Greenberg explores in his exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt. Perplexed at why the older generations view it as a threat, he considered the wider implications: "I think the big problem is that when people find themselves out of work and feeling not relevant today, they end up quite angry. That's what I feel very sad about.

"As a society, we have to find ways of training people before they get displaced by technology. It won't be long before there are driverless trucks and driverless cars. Everybody wants the developments to stop, they complain they are tired of it, but it's going to be exponential, and we've not even started talking about what's going to happen with robotics! There are robots that can fold towels coming out of Japan and people chuckle at it. It's not going to be such a chuckle when it replaces someone's job.

"But all of this is great for older people who are immobile and need to turn off the lights, change the TV channel or turn up the heat. The sophistication is incredible, and the products are relatively inexpensive – it's the future, and I'm all for it."

An appreciation for objects, some of which have remained relevant for hundreds of years, has enabled Greenberg to better understand the future. His celebration of industrial design, architecture, and sculpture inform how he makes the digital world that pervades modern culture feel more human.

Greenberg's selection for the Cooper Hewitt exhibition is presented in four groupings, one of which is Dieter Rams's ten principles for good design. Here Greenberg has chosen 11 objects that he considers best embody these principles including usefulness, honesty and unobtrusiveness, such as Rams'

HLD 4 No. 4416 Hair Dryers (1970), ET55 Calculator (1980) and AB 21/s Alarm Clock (1978).

'Selects' runs from February 23 to September 9, 2018, in the Nancy and Edwin Marks Collection Gallery at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, New York. If you're unable to make it, Greenberg has created an app to guide you through the exhibition by sharing audio tours from Bob and other design experts speaking about objects that hold a special meaning to them.

With the sun going down and lights coming on in the main office, we suddenly became aware of the time. As the signal came from his team, he thanked us for the welcome digression with a smile and was absorbed back into the hubbub of the R/GA offices. His singular vision was needed elsewhere.👋

An exhibition of treasured possessions examines how emotional attachment ensures that man-made objects last as long as possible

A sense of belongings

In this era of ever-greater disposability, precisely what is it that prevents treasured items from being discarded long ago?

This exhibition at Vitsø’s London shop calls upon long-standing relationships with its eclectic customers and friends to examine that question via treasured

possessions, which have been used, repaired and cherished for many years.

The stories attached to these objects illustrate a sense of endearment that reduces their inevitable impact on the world’s environment and resources by being loved for as long as possible...



Sheet-press iron

“The iron was bought by my grandparents in the late 1950s. It sat in their farm kitchen and was used weekly for pressing all the bed linen and tablecloths. Sometime in the 1970s it became redundant, probably the fashion for easy-care cotton/poly bedding and it no longer being fashionable to use tablecloths did away with its use.

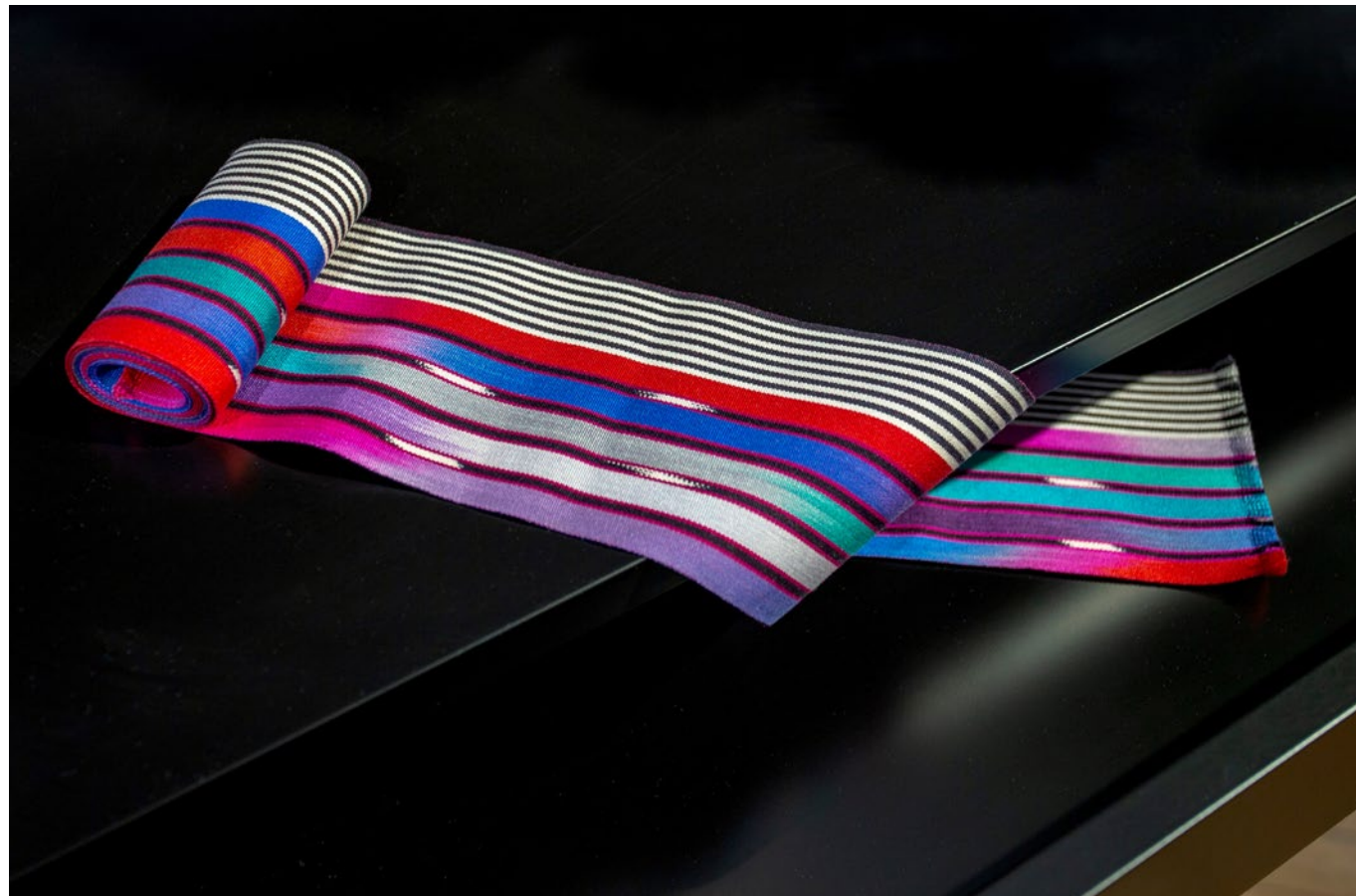
“When my mum was studying textiles at the RCA in the mid-1980s she rescued it from storage and started using it to heat-fix the printing pigments she was using to create painted fabric wall hangings. It was initially in her studio. Marriage and family then changed the volume of laundered bedlinen and it moved into the house. It has

always sat in the same place in our home for the past twenty-plus years and been used weekly to press the bed linen.

“I now use the press to heat-fix hand-painted denim pieces that I produce. The fabric cover on the bed of the press has been replaced many times as, with persistent use, it has become burnt or stained.

“The spring lifting the top plate has weakened, so we have a kindling stick to hold the top plate open when needed. The cable has been replaced and probably needs replacing again, but otherwise it’s still serving us very well.”

Odette Moncur, textile designer ➡



Ikat-weave sash

"I bought this ikat-weave sash by Mary Restieaux in the late 1980s when I was gallery manager at the British Crafts Centre in Earlham Street. I bought it for my mother and then it passed on to me.

"I have cherished it while repeatedly wearing it. Its longevity is due to the quality of the fabric which keeps its shape and colour. Its visual appearance sits outside of fashion, and how I wear it is down to styling.

"It has so many associations, not least my ongoing relationship with Mary Restieaux, who I have worked with for many years, helping identify new and emerging talent in the field of weave.

"The sash symbolises my desire to continue to encourage a high level of craft skill and design in the UK such as is demonstrated in this early piece."

*Vanessa Swann MBE,
arts business consultant*

"Its longevity is due to the quality of the fabric which keeps its shape and colour."

"...this hat seemed to represent Korean aesthetics: seemingly simple and minimal but extraordinarily refined."

Horsehair hat

"I bought this hat in an antique market in Seoul. It is made of horsehair in the traditional style. I love the transparency and delicacy of the structure. "I often bring back objects from places I have visited – I am drawn to something that has a place in that culture – and this hat seemed to represent Korean aesthetics: seemingly simple and minimal but extraordinarily refined. "The hat itself is quite fragile but if an object is beautiful, people respond to that and want to keep it safe."

*Caroline Broadhead,
jewellery designer* ←



Japanese knife

“We found the knife maker Massamoto in Japan on our third attempt – boy, it was worth it. Gleaming racks of steel...I drooled. They helped me find this Shirogami #1 Gyuto, which fits my hand and stature perfectly.

“I prefer the western handle, but it means the saya, or sheath, doesn’t have a pin to secure the knife. I have modified it with a cloth soaked in camellia oil. Now the blade stays put.

“This is my home knife – I use it almost every day. Because the steel rusts, it has to be maintained and kept in the saya.

“The young man at Massamoto showed me how to sharpen it on a whetstone. The joy of learning a new skill and honing that skill has stuck with me ever since. Although, I have not yet managed to sharpen it as well as that young man in Japan.”

Will Leigh, chef

“This is my home knife – I use it almost every day.”



Ingenious toasting fork

“The fork was made by my great-grandfather as part of his apprenticeship at an engineering firm somewhere in south London. I’m not sure exactly when it was made but I would assume in the early 1900s.

“The fork was made out of spare parts at the firm. You can see this most clearly in the handle made of different sized bolts and washers. The fork was used by my grandmother and her siblings to make toast over the fire and my mother and her brother did the same as children, too.

“I’m not sure exactly when it was made but I would assume in the early 1900s.”

“It took pride of place next to the hearth at each home my grandparents had and the story of its creation was told to us on every visit. When my grandmother passed away a couple of years ago this was the single item I asked my mother and uncle for as a memento. It was the item I felt most connected with. It now lives with us in London to make toast again in the future.”

Stephen Mann, fashion consultant



Tweed jacket

“In 1964 an American pilot I had met in San Francisco the previous year drove and ferried across to Harris. At 10pm all the islanders were there on the quay to greet us. A schoolhouse was our dorm, and we rented bicycles the next day. “On Sunday we went to the local church, with a Gaelic service. To our surprise a woman invited us to share her Sunday lunch. I asked her where we could find some handwoven tweed. The next day we visited

the weaver, and I bought this brown houndstooth, and green for my mother. “In 1966 I had the material made-up by a tailor in Lamb’s Conduit Street. Now 52 years later, the tweed holds up but I have replaced the pockets many times. “I hope this jacket will see me out. It’s charged with memories of places people, and events.”

*Richard Paice,
cobbler turned philanthropist*



“I hope this jacket will see me out. It’s charged with memories of places people, and events.”



Brogues

“These lovely English brogues were the first ‘proper’ shoes I bought with my first ‘proper’ salary, so they hold a particularly strong significance. They now have a rich patina and are in remarkably good condition. They underwent a super service at Church’s about six years ago, and recently they have been re-soled.

“My choice back in 1987 was influenced by a wonderful teacher, friend and typographer,

Raymond Roberts. His advice: spend a bit more on something of higher quality as it will last longer. How right he was. Ray, who was a modernist and a great Dieter Rams admirer, died last year at the good old age of 92. I think he would be pleased to know the shoes are still going strong, and very happy to see them displayed here on these shelves.”

*Tony Chambers,
editor and creative consultant 🖐*

“They now have a rich patina and are in remarkably good condition.”

From punk to Bauhaus

Film-maker Gary Hustwit connects the dots between his DIY aesthetic and Dieter Rams



Gathering footage at the exhibition, Dieter Rams, Modular World

Think of Vitsoë's revered designer, Dieter Rams, and a punk rock sensibility might not spring to mind, but for American film-maker Gary Hustwit the connection is clear. While the world awaits the release of his crowd-funded documentary on Rams, Hustwit reveals what it is that makes him tick.

Hustwit is adamant there are parallels between the safety-pin aesthetic and Rams's design ethos. "I don't actually feel like I can separate the two," he asserted. "In my daily life, when I think about punk, it's not really about any particular style of music – it's more a state of mind. It's about pursuing the projects that you want to work on, and doing it on your own terms. Making 'The Design Trilogy' films independently and not doing any of it for a big corporation...that's all part of the connecting thread. You create the world you want to live in.

"I first became interested in design because of the Bauhaus. Learning about the cross-disciplinary practices, the work, and the context felt so liberating. I didn't look at the form; I looked at the ideas behind it. Just because a [Walter] Gropius building has clean lines doesn't mean it wasn't totally radical, messy and revolutionary. This is what draws me to someone like Dieter's work, it's the act of disruption or evolution."

Hustwit's own evolution was unusual, with early influences shaping his inquiring mind, free of boundaries: "I had an interesting education. My parents and their friends formed a hippy school with a teacher they all knew. From sixth grade I was in a super creative, unconventional situation that didn't deviate from humanities, language, drama, poetry, art and music. I had a creative grandmother and started skateboarding and surfing when I was around 15. So the type of schooling, and the sense of rebelling against the conservative city I was living in, were certainly part of what makes me who I am today."

Like many of his contemporaries, he discovered design via emerging technologies, which democratised many creative pursuits – including film-making. "Putting my finger on why I started to make films about design goes back to my teens," he revealed. "All my friends were in bands, so we decided to put on a show. We rented out a ballroom, hired a sound system and made some flyers – which was my first encounter with graphic design. 🍷"

“A friend got the very first Apple Macintosh, the 128K. Suddenly, with the Mac, typography became a ‘thing’ and meant we could make covers for mixtapes. I started playing around with rudimentary print programs, and even though I couldn’t draw, I could make random things look legitimate on the computer. Suddenly my ideas looked believable. It’s all about the DIY aesthetic. That’s really what stuck with me.”

A self-confessed master of many trades, Hustwit’s career started in the music industry with a long stretch at Californian independent record label SST, which was founded by Greg Ginn of Black Flag fame. He then moved to New York during the dot.com bubble and started his own publishing company and DVD label. At every stage of his working life, he has been unable to resist the urge to share his knowledge. Building communities is his passion. Almost everything he’s been involved in “has been as a direct result of the shock and disbelief that something doesn’t already exist,” he explained. “I can have an idea in my head, and for the sake of myself, my friends and other people, I want to see it out there in the world, and by any means necessary, I will make sure it happens.”

His sleeves-rolled-up approach to film-making stems not from the need to evangelise good taste, but a lifelong love of discovery. An insatiable curiosity has led him to become something of a cultural explorer, propelled by a motivation to uncover moments when pioneering people and their ideas have changed the world. “The chances of me discovering a new

land mass in the South Pacific is very slim, but making the connection between an obscure designer, musician, architect or photographer – and how their work relates to modern life – is what drives me,” he shrugged modestly. “Digging around for facts and pulling them together in a format that people can find interesting is a big draw.”

It was while making his design trilogy of documentaries – comprising ‘Helvetica’, ‘Objectified’, and ‘Urbanized’ – that Hustwit’s knowledge and personal connections within the global design community continued to grow. In the years following their release, he found himself in the ideal position to shed light on the increasingly prescient influence of Dieter Rams and his designs for Vitsoe and Braun. Hustwit’s direct relationship with Rams has led to a philosophical understanding of his work, which is all too often celebrated for its aesthetics alone.

During filming the pair bonded over a love of music and teen rebellion: punk rock for Hustwit; jazz for Rams. Both genres terrified parents as their children were drawn to smoky basements by young crowds hungry for change.

Laughing, Hustwit admitted that the conversations with Rams not only turned to the unexpected similarities between Miles Davis and Nirvana, but also to the mastery of a craft as a worthy vocation. “Looking back, there are moments that Rams felt that he and his team really did achieve something,” he remembered. “The fact that we are still talking about and obsessing

over utilitarian objects as though they are works of art is probably a testament to that. These days he feels absolutely sure of himself, his ideas and his work.”

“He’s still actively thinking about his designs for Vitsoe, but really, a lot of his thoughts are about crystallising his ideology and philosophy. It’s like samurai sword making – spending years, decades, trying to create the perfect product. I think this is something that has been lost today. Rams feels a slight sense of regret about being involved in the field of industrial design because the whole thing has gone slightly bonkers. He feels he played some role in creating that lust for new technology. In the 1950s, that wasn’t what he was trying to do. He wanted to create better things for people that would last a long time, and that’s rare today.”

Gary Hustwit’s documentary ‘Rams’ premiered in autumn 2018, with more dates continually being announced at hustwit.com/events 🖐



Photography by Jessica Edwards and Gary Hustwit



Luke Geissbuhler filming The Strong collection at Vitsoe’s New York shop



Hustwit’s 606 Universal Shelving System



Digging in the archives at Vitsoe and Braun, Hustwit found unreleased images for his film

A childhood trip to the library sparked Tony Brook's career in graphic design

The nature of books

Tony Brook was remarkably perky for a Sunday morning, considering he finished the previous evening a little later than usual with magCulture founder Jeremy Leslie and an impromptu bottle of rum. "I used to laugh at my dad for having a hangover after one bottle of beer – but nowadays that's me," he explained. "I've had some breakfast and the sun is shining, so I think I'm on the mend."

His mother passed on another family trait. When Brook was just a toddler, she took him on a trip to Sowerby Bridge library in Halifax, UK, where he was given his own membership card and free rein to explore the shelves. "It was such a fantastic thing to give a child," Brook recalled fondly. "I can remember looking up at the bookcases and pulling books out at random. 🏹"





"We'd go there once a week and when we got home she'd read them aloud to me. It's because of her encouragement that I was reading fluently by the time I was four, which was great in one respect, but it spoilt school for me: everyone was just learning the alphabet and I was sat there bored-stupid."

Fast-forward a few years and Brook was spending his pocket money on second-hand Penguin paperbacks (two pence at the time). With a wry smile, Brook remembered his selection process, "the spines all looked the same really, but the covers were different, so I'd pick them based on that. That's how I developed quite an eclectic reading habit – by judging a book by its cover!"

He blushed when he explained how he met his wife, Patricia Finegan, on the tube at Oxford Circus in London. The pair got talking amid the rush-hour crush, with Brook anxiously trying to conceal the fact that he'd been nose-deep in a book:

"I was really self-conscious and worried she'd think I was boring. Not only was I reading a book, but it was one about fucking cricket! Which was even worse!"

"Books have always been important to me, I love the physical nature of them, the smell, the touch, the feel. When I didn't have two kids and a mortgage I collected limited editions or signed books. Even using the word 'collection' makes it sound like something pretentious and grand.

It's really not. My rarest ones – which makes me sound like a character from Lord of the Rings – aren't even on display. They're upstairs in the bedroom, stuffed in a cupboard. I only look at them a few times a year, but each time I do, they give me an enormous amount of satisfaction.

"I have all of these books and really they're like one huge family. The idea of losing one, or letting one go, is not something I feel comfortable about. My emotional connection with them goes much deeper."

The couple decided to invest in furniture after years of spending money on cheaper items that became more costly. Frustrated by chairs that were uncomfortable ➡





and eventually collapsed, or work tables at the wrong height that caused back pain, they reconsidered their options.

Pointing to his Eames chair, Brook snubbed those who think good design is for show: “Yes, you get the people who’ll come into our studio and say ‘oohh, you’re all designer-y’, but we’ve wasted cash on shit furniture for too long – it was time to take the common-sense approach.

“Vitsø and Eames aren’t popular because they make things that look nice (although that helps), it’s because they’re well-designed and built to last. If I could spend less and get the same quality, I would! But you can’t – the alternative isn’t there, unfortunately.

“With some things, you get what you pay for. It’s the same with us: our books are more expensive than our direct competition, and people still buy them. Why? Because they are better researched and better designed. We release a book when it’s ready, not to fit in with the publishing fairs.”

Brook and Finegan started their design agency Spin Studio in London 20 years ago and now work with clients across the world, both digitally and in print. In 2010, they established Unit Editions with Adrian Shaughnessy to produce books on subjects in design that are either neglected or ignored by mainstream publishers. They’ve moved their office (and shelves) eight times during the life of Spin, with the latest spot being a purpose-built studio at the bottom of their south-west London garden.

For Brook, there’s no debate on print versus digital. He sees the value in each medium. “Pixels are lightweight, they’re ideal for functional things like dictionaries, or learning tools,” he explained. “Let’s just imagine that all of the things you’ve fact-checked, or referenced online were pieces of print. If everything you’d ever looked at was suddenly physical, that wouldn’t be a better world, would it?

“On the other hand, books are fantastic pieces of technology: they’ll never run out of battery; if you drop them, they won’t smash; and they look good and smell nice. But if you’re going to cut down a tree, you’d better make something beautiful out of it. 80% of what you see at book fairs should have just been pixels.”

Gazing up at his library, Brook concluded that there are only two reasons to keep a book, “one is because you haven’t read it yet, and the other is because you’ve read it and feel something for it, and want to keep it to refer to later. With all the design or art books...they’re not there to inspire; they’re there to explain.

“All those years of collecting books means I can take one down and say, ‘well, it’s kinda like this, and it folds like that.’ Being useful in that way also makes something precious, makes you want to treasure it. That book has earned the right to be around you, it’s earned the right to not be in the bin; it’s earned the right to be saved, to be sat there on your shelf.”👉



Spin Studio, London

“Books have always been important to me, I love the physical nature of them, the smell, the touch, the feel.”

Flexible working



Dance-circus company Motionhouse shares Vitsoe's home in Royal Leamington Spa

By Jana Scholze

How are Vitsoe and Motionhouse alike? To define both by their industry would confine the reality of their influence. Vitsoe's managing director, Mark Adams, often emphasises that the business is better understood as a way of thinking, or an attitude, as it rejects the general practices of the furniture industry and its familiar business models. The dance company Motionhouse is limited similarly by conventions that shape the expectation of an audience. Its understanding of dance embraces movement in the widest sense, includes equipment and narrative, and uses indoor as well as outdoor spaces – 'Torque' pairs dance with JCB diggers. Louise Richards, one of its founders, explains: "For some

time, we used the title 'Dance Theatre' to highlight the performative aspect. But soon the awareness of actively applying circus skills and the importance of drawing on ideas of that trick-based practice led us to the term 'Dance-Circus'."

Motionhouse has always resided in Royal Leamington Spa and operated globally from this UK base. The company's ability to participate in a local community and operate at a global scale was a significant example to Vitsoe that this spa town in the heart of England offered the right credentials for the company's new home – the home that Vitsoe and Motionhouse now share.

A chance introduction some five years ago revealed many similar interests and values, which fostered a mutual fascination for the other's work. As the conversation advanced the idea of sharing Vitsoe's new space developed – an adventure not without risk. Richards argues: "Most things in life are experiments. Our two practices are different but very close at heart. The energy and passion that went into this building is contagious. Importantly, the Vitsoe building is Motionhouse's first home for the creation of work." The word 'home' affirms that the move is by no means understood as a clever letting but an invitation to jointly create this "place of making," as Richards put it. To allow this to happen, Vitsoe conceived a building that provides openness, transparency, and serendipity.

The fundamental idea behind encouraging interaction was not only to allow impromptu meetings, but to encourage the movement of ➡



The building in which this exhibition was fabricated off-site.

Finished components, 25m in length – were transported to arrive daily on a regular basis. Two cranes, computer-controlled, collided, erected the structure. Apart from temporary scaffolding, no other means to reach the roof, no other means were needed.

The entire structure was assembled in 23 weeks, in the middle of winter.

everyone within the space. The daily routines are a direct response to the health implications of a sedentary lifestyle. Long periods of sitting are avoided by work processes that promote activity rather than focussing on efficiency. The assembly of furniture takes place at the south end of the building, close to the entrance; the place to eat and meet for conversation is more than 100 metres away at the north end. Items from the Vitsø archive are displayed by the dining area while central in the building is Motionhouse’s rehearsal space, adding a physical and emotive dimension to this vibrant atmosphere. But these spatial arrangements can change with the demands of both companies – the building is built with adaptability in mind.

The idea to create an inspirational cohabited space was realised by Motionhouse securing Arts Council England capital funding. Most importantly, this award provided financial support for the equipment to adapt the space – such as cushioned flooring and lighting grids.

Mutual respect has built an important base from which to understand and support each other’s needs. For this joint venture, Motionhouse and Vitsø are aware that issues will arise and must be solved together. Richards mentioned: “We hadn’t realised how noisy we are when we exercise and rehearse which can become an issue when someone wants to have a quiet meeting with a client in another part of the open space. When we tried to solve it and discussed various methods, we realised that the most effective

way to overcome such issues is close dialogue. Schedules have a certain flexibility and both sides are willing to adapt.”

Dialogue will be instrumental to realise this shared space that rethinks the relationship between business and art. A shared stubbornness towards industry norms is in both companies’ DNA. Their alternative positions derive from a suspicion of conventions and desire to develop social, political, cultural and economic values.

Vitsø’s ‘No sale’ campaigns have marked publicly the principles behind its philosophy that promotes living better with less that lasts longer. This humanist approach opposes the neoliberalist idea that success is defined by growth of production and profits. The partnership with Motionhouse could

reinforce Vitsø’s resolve as its dance performances are inspired by observations of our world and show concerns for its citizens.

Motionhouse was one of the first to move performances into public spaces extending accessibility and demonstrating civic responsibility. Both companies have found new practices in their field by following their shared belief that human needs must be considered above all else. Doing this together presents a radical but optimistic proposal.

Jana Scholze is a curator specialising in contemporary design as curatorial practice and theory. After more than a decade at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Scholze is now associate professor and course director of the MA Curating Contemporary Design programme at Kingston School of Art in London.👉



Motionhouse, Vitsø and guests together at lunch

“Our two practices are different but very close at heart. The energy and passion that went into this building is contagious.”

Motionhouse co-founder and director Louise Richards at Vitsø

Thank you

Dieter Rams
Mike and Jeanette
Lily Worledge
Mark Adams
Bob Greenberg
Odette Moncur
Vanessa Swann MBE
Caroline Broadhead
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Stephen Mann
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