

Intelligent branding by genius design

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Once upon a time a teaspoon was a teaspoon, and a citrus-squeezer, spatula or ashtray where just common utensils. You needed them, you bought them, and they served a function. Some were attractive, while others were pedestrian, but they all served their function in one way or another, which is why they were made.

This story about how brilliant design can affect a brand begins in 1921 when a man called Giovanni Alessi started crafting utensils in metal for use in drinking and eating. Soon afterwards Giovanni's son Carlo joined his father and began producing lines that became associated with the company's distinctive design.

As BrandChannel relays: "Carlo's playfully flamboyant Bombé coffee and tea set is celebrated as creating a design sensibility in Italy that can still be seen as an influence in many of the products today. It was these early designs that encouraged ordinary Italians to view their kitchen as a living art house, where the salt and pepper shaker were more than just the functional sum of their parts."

But the magic really started happening in the eighties when Carlo's grandson Alberto Alessi took over and started fusing form with function. Alberto had a magnificent vision for utensils, where form became as important, if not more important than function.

"I think that this will be the goal of design in the future (or at least, my goal for my future in the sphere of design): transforming the gadget function ascribed to objects by the consumer's society into a transitional opportunity, namely into an opportunity for consumers to improve their perception of the world," Alberto Alessi once said, in a beautiful articulation that was his dream for the Alessi brand.

At a time when Italy was becoming famous for artistry and genius in design, Alberto re-launched the Alessi brand and recreated mere utensils as 'objects d'art'. In doing this Alberto became an entrepreneur who literally helped to write the history of design by collaborating with creators and architects like Achille Castiglioni, Alessandro Mendini, Michael Graves, Philippe Starck and Richard Sapper.

"In the future most of our products will continue to be marked by a high degree of innovation and experimentation, as we believe this is the way to develop our ability to set trends, to promote our fame and to create a culture medium aimed at developing those projects we like to call super and popular," Alberto Alessi said, describing how he took what was essentially a kitchenware brand and turned it into a global phenomenon.

When Alberto Alessi talked of design, he didn't mean just any kind of artistry. "A true work of design must be able to move people, to convey feelings, to trigger memories, to surprise, to go against the grain..." he said, expressing what he meant when talked about the function of design.

"We work on expressive languages and on the expressive potential of the items... From this point of view, design is intended... to conjure up images in people's minds, which makes them a bit happier, still has tremendous potential," said Alberto Alessi who believed design should change people's lives for the better.

It is a philosophy and a way of thinking that has seen Alessi products find a home in more permanent museum collections than any other design company in the world. Today you can find Alessi products in the MOMA - the Museum of Modern Art in New York; the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam; the Triennale in Milano, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London; the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; and the National Palace Museum an art museum situated in Taipei City, Taiwan.

What is significant is that Alessi was not merely creating products, but was reinventing an industrial category as art. Through his ideas and projects what Alberto Alessi was doing was underscoring Italy as a national brand that produced design genius, and more so he was providing 'inspiration and reflection' for the future of design.

Perhaps one of the most notable collaborations was between Alberto Alessi and Alessandro Mendini who is a legend in the design world. Over many years the two would create projects that would redefine Italian design.

"The bond between such different personalities is the fact that their work was initially misunderstood, or that the scope and depth of their vision weren't immediately understood in their entirety," reads a write up for the pair's curated exhibition called "Oggetti e Progetti" which is housed at The International Design Museum in Munich. This exhibition is a retrospective of the duo's collaboration.

"This is an important point, and today it tends to be neglected on the contrary, they are both monuments of Italian design now, inextricably linked to the country where they practice their profession." There was a time when Alessi and Mendini's work wasn't valued, but today no more. Today it stands as a monument that became much bigger than themselves or the Alessi brand.

The story of Alessi is of course the story of how design genius can create something much, much more than just a mere product or a brand. How it can generate a movement that can influence a company, a country, a sector and the very thinking about what design is and the function that it serves. Alberto Alessi is a visionary, a front runner, a dreamer and an inventor who helped re-engineer the way people think of Italy, utensils, art and the function of design. With that in mind just think what intelligent design could do for your brand.

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