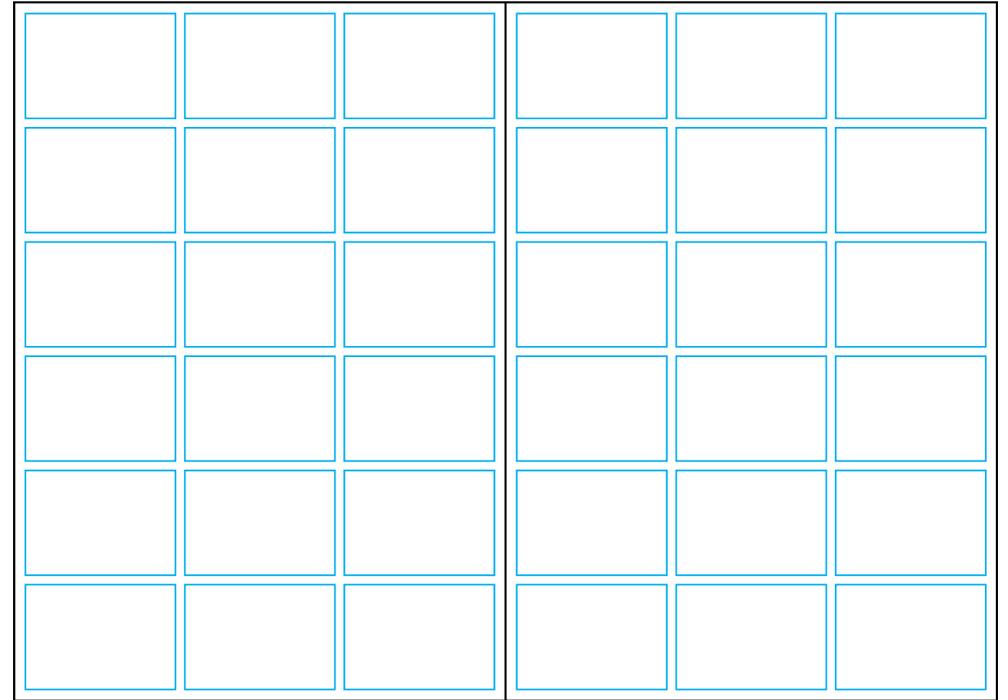


THE VIGNELLI CANON

Discipline

The attention to details requires discipline. There is no room for sloppiness, for carelessness, for procrastination. Every detail is important because the end result is the sum of all the details involved in the creative process no matter what we are doing. There are no hierarchies when it comes to quality. Quality is there or is not there, and if is not there we have lost our time. It is a commitment and a continuously painstaking effort of the creative process to which we should abide. That is Discipline and without it there is no good design, regardless of its style. Discipline is a set of self imposed rules, parameters within which we operate. It is a bag of tools that allows us to design in a consistent manner from beginning to end. Discipline is also an attitude that provides us with the capacity of controlling our creative work so that it has continuity of intent throughout rather than fragmentation. Design without discipline is anarchy, an exercise of irresponsibility.



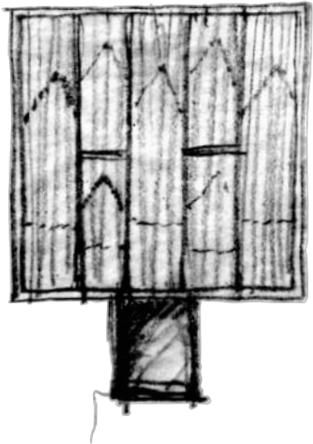
Appropriateness

The notion of appropriateness is consequent to what I have expressed. Once we search the roots of whatever we have to design we are also defining the area of possible solutions that are appropriate - specific to that particular problem. Actually, we can say that appropriateness is the search for the specific of any given problem. To define that prevents us from taking wrong directions, or alternative routes that lead to nowhere or even worse, to wrong solutions.

Appropriateness directs us to the right kind of media, the right kind of materials, the right kind of scale, the right kind of expression, color and texture. Appropriateness elicits the enthusiastic approval of the client seeing the solution to his problem. Appropriateness transcends any issue of style - there are many ways of solving a problem, many ways of doing, but the relevant thing is that, no matter what, the solution must be appropriate. I think that we have to listen to what a thing wants to be, rather than contrive it in to an arbitrary confinement. However, sometimes there may be other rules that one must follow to achieve the correct level of continuity.

At least for me, this is a relevant issue which very often determines the look of the project to be designed. This issue is one of the fundamental principles of our Canon.

During the post-modern time, the verb "to be appropriate" assumed the meaning of borrowing something and transforming it by placing it in a different context. We could say that this kind of "appropriation" when appropriate, could be done - just another way of solving a problem or expressing creativity.



Ambiguity

Rather than the negative connotation of ambiguity as a form of vagueness, I have a positive interpretation of ambiguity, intended as a plurality of meanings, or the ability of conferring to an object or a design, the possibility of being read in different ways - each one complementary to the other to enrich the subject and give more depth. We often use this device to enhance the expression of the design and we treasure the end results. However, one has to be cautious in playing with ambiguity because if not well measured it can backfire with unpleasant results. Contradiction can sometimes reinforce ambiguity, but more often it is a sign of discontinuity and lack of control. Ambiguity and contradiction can enrich a project but can equally sink the end results. Therefore, great caution is recommended in using these spices.



Design Is One

The office of the Castiglioni Architects in Milano was the first place, where at the age of 16, I went to work as a draftsman. They were active in the whole field of Design and Architecture following the Adolph Loos dictum that an Architect should be able to design everything “from the spoon to the city.” They had already designed a very iconic radio, beautiful silver flatware, camping furniture, witty stools, industrial bookshelves, nice houses and an incredible museum. Later they designed restaurants, trade shows, exhibitions, furniture and much more. They became the icons of Italian Design. I strongly recommend to all designers to investigate and study their work. I was tremendously impressed by the diversity of projects and immediately fascinated by the Architect’s possibility of working in so many different areas. I discovered that what is important is to master a design discipline to be able to design anything, because that is what is essential and needed on every project.

Design is one - it is not many different ones. The discipline of Design is one and can be applied to many different subjects, regardless of style. Design discipline is above and beyond any style. All style requires discipline in order to be expressed. Very often people think that Design is a particular style. Nothing could be more wrong! Design is a discipline, a creative process with its own rules, controlling the consistency of its output toward its objective in the most direct and expressive way.

Throughout my life I have hunted opportunities to diversify my design practice: from glass to metal, from wood to pottery to plastics, from printing to packaging, from furniture to interiors, from clothing to costumes, from exhibitions to stage design and more. Everything was, and still is, a tempting challenge to test the interaction between intuition and knowledge, between passion and curiosity, between desire and success.



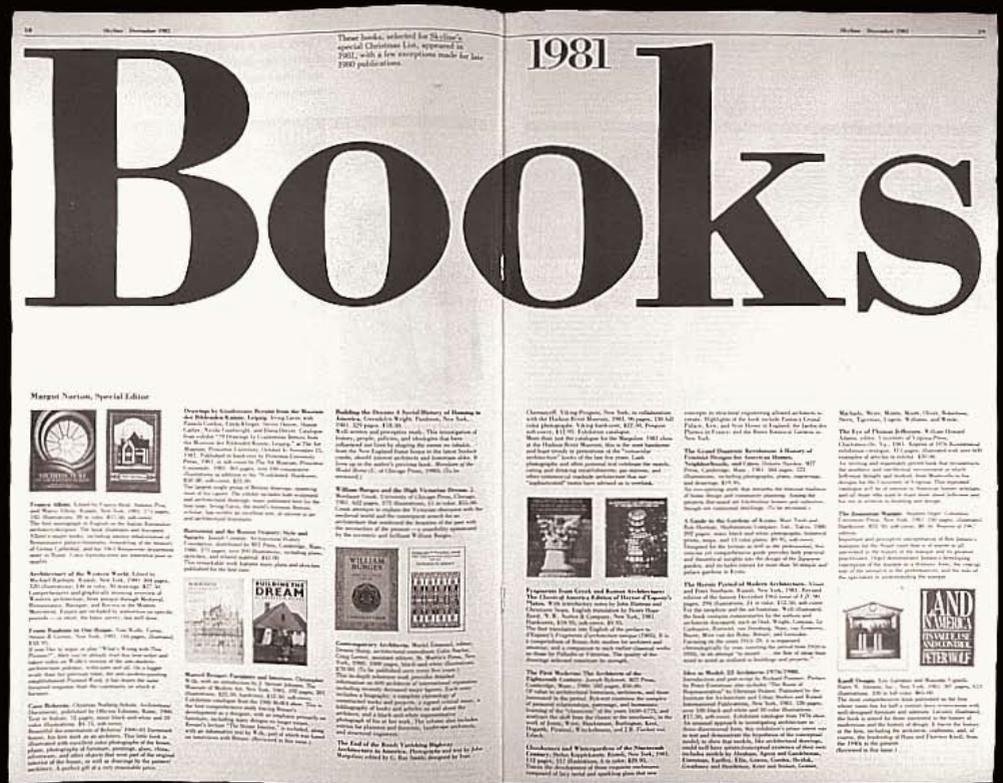
We say all the time that we like Design to be visually powerful. We cannot stand Design that is weak in concept, form, color, texture or any or all of them. We think good Design is always an expression of creative strength bringing forward clear concepts expressed in beautiful form and color, where every element expresses the content in the most forceful way.

There are infinite possibilities to achieve a powerful expression. In graphic design, for instance, difference of scale within the same page can give a very strong impact. Bold type contrasting with light type creates visually dynamic impressions. We have used this approach successfully in our graphic design.

In three dimensional design, manipulating light through different textures and materials gives infinite and effective results. Changing scale and contrasting sizes provide an impressive array of possibilities.

It is essential that a design is imbued with visual strength and unique presence to achieve its purpose. Visual strength can be achieved also by using delicate layouts or materials. Visual strength is an expression of intellectual elegance and should never be confused with just visual impact - which, most of the time, is just an expression of visual vulgarity and obtrusiveness.

Visual power is, in any event, a subject which deserves great attention to achieve effective design.



Intellectual Elegance

We often talk about Intellectual Elegance, not to be confused with the elegance of manners and mores. For me, intellectual elegance is the sublime level of intelligence which has produced all the masterpieces in the history of mankind. It is the elegance we find in Greek statues, in Renaissance paintings, in the sublime writings of Goethe, and many great creative minds. It is the elegance of Architecture of any period, the Music of all times, the clarity of Science through the ages. It is the thread that guides us to the best solution of whatever we do. It is the definitive goal of our minds - the one beyond compromises. It elevates the most humble artifact to a noble stand. Intellectual elegance is also our civic consciousness, our social responsibility, our sense of decency, our way of conceiving Design, our moral imperative. Again, it is not a design style, but the deepest meaning and the essence of Design.



Timelessness

We are definitively against any fashion of design and any design fashion. We despise the culture of obsolescence, the culture of waste, the cult of the ephemeral. We detest the demand of temporary solutions, the waste of energies and capital for the sake of novelty.

We are for a Design that lasts, that responds to people's needs and to people's wants. We are for a Design that is committed to a society that demands long lasting values. A society that earns the benefit of commodities and deserves respect and integrity.

We like the use of primary shapes and primary colors because their formal values are timeless. We like a typography that transcends subjectivity and searches for objective values, a typography that is beyond times - that doesn't follow trends, that reflects its content in an appropriate manner. We like economy of design because it avoids wasteful exercises, it respects investment and lasts longer. We strive for a Design that is centered on the message rather than visual titillation. We like Design that is clear, simple and enduring. And that is what timelessness means in Design.



Responsibility

In graphic design the issue of responsibility assumes particular importance as a form of economic awareness toward the most appropriate solution to a given problem.

Too often we see printed works produced in a lavish manner just to satisfy the ego of designers or clients. It is important that an economically appropriate solution is used and is one that takes in proper consideration all the facets of the problem.

As much as this may seem obvious it is one of the most overlooked issues by both designers and clients. Responsibility is another form of discipline. As designers, we have three levels of responsibility:

One - to ourselves, the integrity of the project and all its components.

Two - to the Client, to solve the problem in a way that is economically sound and efficient.

Three - to the public at large, the consumer, the user of the final design.

On each one of these levels we should be ready to commit ourselves to reach the most appropriate solution, the one that solves the problem without compromises for the benefit of everyone.

In the end, a design should stand by itself, without excuses, explanations, apologies.

It should represent the fulfillment of a successful process in all its beauty.

A responsible solution.

