

Book Review:

Red Dot Design Yearbook 2007/2008

edited by Peter Zec

review by R. Roger Remmington

Massimo and Lella Vignelli Distinguished Professor of Design
School of Design
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, New York USA

Awards for design excellence are plentiful these days. In the United States, the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), the leading advocacy organization for graphic designers, annually gives its Design Leadership Award and, in addition, its Medalist Award for outstanding individual achievement. Although located in New York, the Cooper-Hewitt, America's National Design Museum, is part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.. Annually it gives its prestigious National Lifetime Achievement Award to designers and design firms. For industrial designers the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) and *Business Week* magazine award each year the International Design Excellence Awards (IDEA). Awards of lesser prominence are given by other groups and major design periodicals such as *Communication Arts* and *ID magazine*.

Europe has its own major organization to acknowledge outstanding works in product and communication design. These are the esteemed Red Dot Design Awards sponsored by the Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen, a globally recognized qualification and communication center for industry, politics and society. Since 1997, located in the Ruhr area in Essen, Germany, the Red Dot Design Center is situated in a unique setting, namely in the complex of what was once the Zeche Zollverein coal mine area. The Red Dot Design Center occupies the former boiler house of the complex. It has been wonderfully restored and fitted by the British architect Lord Norman Foster of Thames

Bank to house the annual competitive exhibition of the Center as well as offices and a fine bookstore. Zeche Zollverein is included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list.

Since 1955, the Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen has been marking superior design products with its distinctive red dot. In 2000, the "Design Innovations" awards became the red dot award. Manufacturers and designers of a wide variety of industrial products can enter all year round in thirteen product groups for the coveted red dot award. A separate category exists for graphic or communication design. The number of entries in both groups grows each year.

The Red Dot Design Center is known every year for its lavish publications. Edited by Professor Peter Zec, *The Red Dot Design Yearbook 2007/2008* documents the Red Dot awards of the Center. Since 1991, Zec has been President Red Dot Design Center. Also President of the International Society of Industrial Design (ISCID), he is Professor of Business Communications at the University of Applied Sciences in Berlin.

In its twentieth year, the *2007/2008 Yearbook* is truly an impressive and unique publication. One will need to be a regular at the gym to carry this book. A heavily reinforced coffee table or bookshelf will help, too. Measuring 12" by 12" by 1 ¾", the book competes with the famous MIT Press *BAUHAUS* book by Hans Wingler from 1969 in terms of size and weight. The Yearbook weighs in at a hefty 9 pounds with 672 pages between hard covers. This year 2,548 products from 43 countries received awards. As usual the product design yearbook is accompanied by a companion volume, half its size, showing awards in communication design. Profusely illustrated and beautifully printed, both volumes feature text in German and English.

The yearbook is organized in sections, beginning with a preface by Dr. Zec in which he sets the stage for the awards by writing, "Design competitions such as the red dot award are at the centre of the international design scene, and nowhere else can one find as many ideas, solutions and possibilities gathered together in one place."

The first section pays tribute to Christopher E. Bangle and the Design Team BMW Group as the red dot: design team of the year and is followed by an article "The Art of Automobile Design," including an enlightening interview with Bangle by Astrid Sprenger.

The forty-three juried winners within thirteen groupings, considered the “red dot: best of the best” in products are next presented. Award winners include specific industrial design in furniture, home appliances, shoes, shovels, telephones, exhibition architecture, fabrics, window systems, tools, sports cars, prosthetic devices, computer workstations, navigation aids, watches, eyewear, watches, and public transport vehicles. Included in this group is one of the few American products, namely the iPod shuffle by Apple, Inc.

The designers behind the “best of the best” products are then presented followed by major product by categories such as living rooms and bedrooms, household and kitchens, leisure, sports wellness and caravaning, architecture and interior design, industry and crafts, transports, bathrooms, heatings, sanitary installations and air conditioning, life science and medicine, offices and administration, media and home electronics, computers and accessories, jewelry, fashion and luxuries and lighting and lamps.

Most impressive in this volume is the detailed documentary manner in which the complex process of evaluating design excellence is facilitated and presented. The industrial design products are organized in a thorough and useful set of groupings. The attempt to provide a balanced representation of works from different countries is also commendable although, to this writer, there seemed to be a definite lack of attention to American products.

The jury for the red dot design awards in 2007/2008 was a distinguished group of designers, managers and design administrators from Europe, America and South America, and Asia. Design expert and juror Kenneth Grange from UK felt that his job as a judge was a good opportunity of getting an exhaustive overview of international design achievements and to witness how “different countries work in design.” This same opportunity and more is available for all of us who choose to read the *Red Dot Design Yearbook 2007/2008*.