Tom Peters On Managing Design
Do YouReallyKnow Your Colors?
Interface Carpets the Earth Green
Management Guru Tom Peters on Design

Since the phenomenal success of “In Search of Excellence” in 1982, Tom Peters has been considered the preeminent authority on business management. Here he talks with Peter Lawrence, chairman of Corporate Design Foundation, about the role design can play in business today.

You are best known as a guru of corporate management, so maybe I should start by asking what design encompasses for you?

Literally, everything. I once contributed a little piece called “Design Is...” for a book, in which I wrote down 100 things, listing everything from easy-to-fill-out airhills to baseballs, which I consider fabulous turnons. Design ranges from the physical layout of a room to the makeup artists who present Larry King to the public. It’s Winston Churchill’s “spontaneous” witty remarks, all of which he had carefully written out the night before on small scraps of paper and carried around with him. Another huge part of design is usability, which Don Norman discusses so well in his book, “The Design of Everyday Things.”

Is design purely practical?

Not really. I saw an article in Fortune recently where Steve Jobs is quoted saying “design is the soul of a manmade creation.” There’s a part of that I’m attracted to. I also loved Rose Tremain’s passage on music in her novel “Music and Silence,” which I think is just as true about design. [Reading from book] She writes, “...of course, we really do not know where music comes from, or why, or when the first note of it was heard, and we shall never know. It is the human soul speaking without words, but it seems to cure pain.” For me, design is elusive, it’s soul, it’s abstract, and it’s all of the opposites of those things.

Design as the “soul” of a product is a switch from Six Sigma methods aimed at zero product defects, which was the corporate mantra of the ‘90s. Why should business buy into that?

Because as most products work in the Six Sigma quality sense in ways that were unimaginable a few years ago, this thing called design — and I refuse to call it the “soft side” — has become central to enterprise strategy. The success of Six Sigma has turned quality into a “commodity,” so much so that it is no longer the determining factor for which brand to buy. That’s why we are so turned on by the iMac and Beetle. Design is “la difference.”

In a world loaded with stuff that looks like all the
other stuff and performs like all the other stuff, it is a way to stand out.

Is design more important for marketing products than services?

No. Paradoxically, I believe that design is more important for services. Harvard marketing expert Ted Levitt pointed out years ago that if your product is tangible (planes, boats, cars, pens, knives), you need to distinguish yourself from the herd by emphasizing intangibles — i.e., service. If your product is intangible (banking, travel, etc.), distinguish yourself from the masses by emphasizing the tangible — e.g., wit, design. FedEx, for example, stands out on the tangibles — strong branding, clean trucks, easy-to-use forms. To me a business system, like FedEx's, that works transparently on the surface and offers brilliant simplicity is as much about design as an iMac or a Beetle. If you're a service business, it's important to specifically work on the tangibles.

Does the design industry recognize this fact?

Well, I found it interesting that when ID Magazine published its Top 40 list of organizations that make effective use of design, half of them were service companies. There were as many FedExs, Bloomburgs and New York Yankees on the list as there were Gillettes, Caterpillas and Apples.

Designers often claim that corporate executives think differently from them. Assuming there is some truth to that, why do you think it is?

Because we are literalists. We're trained as engineers. We have MBAs. Because we still believe that business is a reductionist activity, rather than a holistic activity.

Do you believe the reductionist approach still works for business? Does it hamper creativity and leaps-of-faith solutions?

I tend to agree with Henry Mintzberg who wrote "The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning," my favorite business book of the last 15 years. Basically, Mintzberg says that there is obviously a role for planning — you have to meet your budget; I have to meet mine. But he argues the fundamental notion is completely reductionist, yet the reality is about leaps and intuitive thinking. After you've reviewed the evidence, you have to trust your intuition.

In his autobiography, ex-Apple CEO John Sculley offered one of the nicest quotes I've ever read on this. He wrote, "I have never seen an effective marketing decision made based on the data." He wasn't making an anti-data comment. He meant that you should collect data by the ton, so that your subconscious is informed by the data. Then you do whatever you ought to do. Certainly design falls into that realm. You can't reduce design choices to a few general principles, but you can inform your intuition.

Can design play a role in modeling the future?

A huge role. In the forward I wrote for Michael Schrage's book, "Serious Play: How the World's Best Companies Simulate to Innovate," I talk about how Michael has operationalized the points that Bob Waterman and I covered in "In Search of Excellence" — e.g., that the No.1 trait of excellent companies is a bias for action. That action is being manifested in the design of prototypes. Michael's premise is that "the reaction to the prototype is innovation." In other words, when you have real things to play with, you have something to talk about.

Is that arriving at the solution through the process of elimination?

Years ago a guy at Cadbury introduced me to the phrase "Ready. Fire. Aim." — which I've always loved. As a young Navy midshipman, I learned that was what the military does. You fire to the left, you fire to the right, then you figure out how to hit the ship broadside.

What mistakes have you seen managers make in terms of understanding and using design?

Mistake No.1 is treating design as a veneer issue rather than a soul issue. The dumbest mistake is viewing design as something you do at the end of the process to "tidy up" the mess, as opposed to understanding that it's a "day one" issue and part of everything.

Infi nitely, I read a comment in a book, can't remember which, that there's nothing distinctive about the Kodak identity except Kodak yellow. There's some truth to that. Kodak yellow, Shell yellow, Time red, Coke red. The physical manifestation of a brand is shockingly important, if it is consistent with what's going on inside.

To what extent is the design of the workplace important?

I think space design is arguably the most powerful organizational, culture-shaping tool. In "In Search of Excellence," we included just one graph. It was an exponential curve from Tom Allen at MIT showing the effect of location on communication. It showed that if team members are situated within 30 feet of each other, they communicate like crazy. More than that and it might as well be 3,000 miles.

I witnessed this first-hand years ago when we did some consulting for a little unit of Pitney Bowes, which had done some fabulously cool things. A secret to their success was that when a little restaurant near their headquarters went out of business, the division rented it for $2000 a month and put a team there. For all kinds of reasons, like distance from the corporate headquarters, like shabby surroundings, like proximity to one another, it was enormously powerful.

Are traditional corporate settings suited to the way we work today?

I have been appalled by the sterility of corporate settings. The real world of enterprise, whether it's serving customers or developing products, is about risks and blood and passion and life and human beings. It makes no sense to me that the places where we are supposed to do productive work are incredibly impersonal.

Do you think the corporate managers overseeing design have to have an artistic sense?

No, but they need to appreciate the importance of design. Years ago the powers that be at my former employer, McKinsey & Co., spent a year and a half redoing the typeface, the letterhead and so on. I thought they were crazy, until I realized that I was crazy for not seeing they were right. Among them, they had probably zero artistic skill, but they understood that a well-designed identity was the essence of who they were, just as IBM has since the early Tom Watson, Jr. days.

How can non-designers hone their design awareness?

I think 99% of us appreciate design on a personal level. Why else do we agonize over what color car to buy and what style reflects who we are? But we turn it off when we come to the office. In working with people on this, including myself, I found the only practical exercise is to carry a notebook and pay attention to stuff that turns you on or turns you off — and don't worry about why. You'll begin to find that your preferences go from the deep soul aesthetic stuff to [Don] Norman's "usability" features.
Located midway between New York City and Niagara Falls is one of the state's most popular tourist destinations — the Corning Museum of Glass (CMoG). Created in 1951 to mark Corning Glass Works' (now Corning Inc.) 100th anniversary, the museum — now a not-for-profit educational institution — has become the repository of one of the world’s most comprehensive and finest collections of glass.

Currently CMoG is putting the finishing touches on a six-year, $62 million renovation that has transformed a 68,000-square-foot amalgam of period structures built in 1951 and 1981 into a contemporary light-filled 117,400 square foot facility. In addition to designing two new buildings for CMoG, architects Smith-Miller+Hawkinson managed to blend disparate old and new architectural styles while highlighting the most interesting aspects of each.

But it wasn't just the buildings that were updated and expanded. The renovation called for a complete rethinking of CMoG's artifacts and exhibits, and the addition of a new Glass Innovation Center, devoted to scientific advances in glassmaking. Ambitious in content and scope, the Innovation Center is unlike anything done before. Rob Cassetti, CMoG’s director of education and creative services, observes, “This project is an experiment. It looks ahead five to ten years and guesses, ‘This is where museums may be going.’”

To oversee exhibit design, CMoG picked Ralph Appelbaum Associates (RAA), one of the world’s foremost museum designers. But Cassetti admits that Corning “did a couple of rounds with other exhibit designers” before settling on RAA. “We tended to find that our level of enthusiasm for the subject usually outpaced the designer’s. If interest started to fade out in the beginning, it was a warning sign that it wouldn’t be there at the end.”

Corning, which had assembled a cross-disciplinary team that included everyone from poets to artists in its effort to bring depth and richness to the museum content, wanted to make sure that the exhibit designer shared this goal. “When we went to Appelbaum’s office, they were working on the American Museum of Natural History and had a paleontologist on the staff. They were working on a Motown exhibit and had a cultural historian on the team. That sold us right away,” says Cassetti. “We believed they would make the content part of the design process, not just decoration.”

Cassetti attributes the success of the building to the early involvement of RAA with its architects and structural engineers. “There was what might be seen as a healthy tension among them. As the client, I saw a good collaboration.”

Part of that may be because RAA considered the design challenge from the perspective of how a museum visitor would respond to the space, not just the exhibits but also the transparency of the building itself.

“Having come to exhibit design from architecture, I am always surprised at how black-box museum galleries are institutionalized,” contends Jack Pascarosa, RAA’s lead designer on the museum. “There’s almost an assumption that all of the exhibits will be housed in a darkened void. RAA has been questioning the
neutrality and separation of the gallery spaces for some time. In this project, explorations of glass run through the entire museum, in exhibits and architecture alike. No matter which part of the experience you’re passing through, there’s always a reinforcement of the properties of glass. What’s interesting is the flow of that exploration. You never get the feeling that you’re shut up in a container.”

Indeed, visitors to the museum can’t help but develop a greater appreciation for the physical properties of glass. Even the new entrance features a glass curtain wall where visitors walk through “fractures” in the glass skin. Inside, they cross over a glass rampway and are invited to watch a video program inside a “glass bottle” theater. The idea is to get visitors to look at glass rather than merely through it.

At the same time, designers were careful not to overwork this concept. Cassetti stresses, “The other side of the coin is that glass doesn’t solve every problem. You can get carried away with the novelty of the thing. We used glass in ways that made sense. As an example, we used it as a flooring material when we wanted to talk about the strengthening of glass. It’s not a throwaway gimmick. It is part of the interpretation.”

Striking a balance between education and entertainment was critical in the Innovation Center. An overriding goal was to help visitors appreciate the wonders of glass and realize what it could contribute to the future.

“To achieve that, we take people on a path that goes from the familiar to the unfamiliar,” Cassetti explains. “We show the link between a window pane and the screen of your laptop computer, between a magnifying glass and an optical fiber cable, between the casserole in your kitchen and the nose cone of a missile.”

Some 30 exhibits explaining that evolution are organized in three galleries: “Windows” looks at glass as a building material; “Optics” addresses its light conducting properties; and “Vessels” investigates its possibilities as a container. RAA conceived the galleries as open exhibition spaces that appear to “float” above the retail shops on the level below. “Ralph believes that commerce motivates invention,” says Cassetti.

“The man was intrigued with the idea of the activity of the museum shops providing a context (and soundtrack) for the invention stories told in the Innovation galleries above.” This connection may elude many visitors, but it reflects the range of thinking that went into the design.

Even though CMG’s permanent collection of objects includes 30,000 pieces spanning 3,500 years, it lacked a number of important industrial artifacts. The design team felt that the design direction had to be dictated not so much by what the museum already owned as by what it hoped to become. "Appelbaum facilitated the refinement of the exhibit content and identification of the significant "wow!" artifacts that would make the exhibits come to life," says Cassetti.

Open Plan
The entry lobby opens onto layered spaces so visitors can see the range of museum experiences from the moment they walk in the front door. One flight up is the Innovation Center; a flight down leads to the retail shop, restaurants, a public auditorium and access to outdoor spaces.

Hot Events
Rob Cassetti designed this logo for 2300° (the temperature at which glass melts and flows), a monthly program featuring guest glass artists, live music and other entertainment.

Art and History Galleries
Designed by architect Gunnar Birkerts in 1981, the Art and History building’s original aluminum-clad glass exterior was left intact, but RAA opened up the interior to display the dark maze-like feeling.

CMG
Museum Logo and Avenue Typface
CMG's founder Arthur Houghton Jr. drew the original "hot spot" O on a cocktail napkin in 1950. Two years ago, Cassetti and his wife J. A, a graphic designer, turned it into CMG's logo by combining it with Avenue, used for exhibit signage. A modern sans-serif typeface, Avenue is highly legible on a variety of surfaces.

Back to the Original
The new Sculpture gallery is housed in the original 1951 steel-frame and glass building designed by Wallace K. Harrison. When renovating the space, architects Smith-Miller & Hawkinson stripped away decades of architectural changes and found a steel frame ceiling, which suited the contemporary sculptures to well they decided to leave it exposed.
CMoG's not-for-profit educational status helped to gain outside cooperation in that effort, Cassetti admits. "That broke the logjam in terms of where Appelbaum was taking us. Now we could talk to the Smithsonian, NASA, the people who put together the Hubble telescope. We began to amass this amazing collection of industrial artifacts that the museum had never had before."

At times, however, that meant the design had to move forward without confirmation that the museum could actually acquire the artifact. "Most of the staff were hunting for were things where we needed a whole case dedicated to it or the effect of the exhibit was hanging on getting that artifact," Cassetti says.

One was a 14' x 18' piece of glass, the largest that can be shipped on the highway. "Appelbaum's design called for hanging it from the ceiling. It was the eleventh hour before we could pull it off. We broke a couple before we could get a good one."

Another important piece was the twin of the Hubble telescope. "The case was designed, the mount was in, but we had no clue if we could get the thing or not," Cassetti recalls. In the end, Cassetti says they took the exhibit design to the supplier to make their appeal. "You know, we kind of said, here's the 'garage' where we're going to park your 'car.' It would look funny without the car in it."

On more than one occasion, the museum went to the Steuben factory next door to enlist the help of glass artists who were familiar with dealing with bizarre glass technical challenges, says Cassetti, who himself was a glass designer at Steuben before joining CMoG's staff. One problem the artists helped to solve was how to hang a 200-inch Pyrex® mirror blank, which represented Corning's first and flawed attempt at casting a telescope mirror in 1934.

On display at CMoG since 1952, the disc — essentially 20 tons of fractured glass — needed to be remounted and moved, a problem that confounded engineers. Steuben designer, Peter Drobny, and his colleagues applied their expertise to the task. Today, a concrete base situated in the retail shop supports the slingshaped mount for the disc, which rises up through the floor of the Optics gallery above. Though this solution was devised for practical reasons, it also addresses Appelbaum's idea of having different elements of the museum inform one another, Cassetti adds.

Cassetti cites this as just one example of the "times when we went to engineers and scientists who told us it couldn't be done, so we said we'll do it ourselves. In the end, we created our own mini R&D staff to invent these things that the design called for."

Tenacity and creative problem solving have been essential during the long process, Cassetti emphasizes. "It's one thing to propose ambitious things early on, but you need a strong and committed team when..."
you’re trying to execute it.”

Cassetti adds that the one thing he learned over the past six years is that “ultimately, you must take the risk. If you’re not willing to live on that edge of risk, the design can’t go as far. And it must be a collaboration between client and designer. You both give each other permission to take that next step further out toward the edge.”

One problem solved by the design team was mundane, however vexing. It involved the public’s desire to see a live glassblowing demonstration. From the museum’s beginning, people stopped in at the Steuben factory next door to watch real glassmakers at their jobs. “When they saw it, they loved it,” says Cassetti.

“Trouble was, it’s a real factory so when the workers went to lunch or took a break, there was nothing to see, and people went away extremely disappointed.” The new Hot Glass Show remedies that situation. By building a theater-style setting in front of the factory, people can watch a glassblowing demonstration, with close-up views shown on live video during every step of the process, including inside the 2300° reheating furnace which is equipped with the same kind of window glass used on the NASA Space Shuttle.

Currently the final phase of the renovation is underway in the art and history galleries housed in a building originally designed by Gunnar Birkerts in 1981. “The new design opens up the building interior, which was something of a dark maze,” says Cassetti. “RAA realized that it was physically exhausting to move from dark spaces to bright back-lit cases, then to dark again. They evened out the light level, carefully darkening the perimeter and brightening the core. It has made an amazing difference.”

Today David Whitehouse, CMoG’s executive director, claims with great pride, “I don’t think there’s another museum like this, with this marriage of art and history, science and technology.”

Indeed, even though CMoG is off-the-beaten track in a town with a population that still numbers roughly 14,000, nearly half a million people visit the museum each year. This has proved gratifying to Corning Inc., which is still the principal benefactor for the not-for-profit institution.

The museum, which started out in 1951 with about 2,000 objects, has far exceeded initial expectations. Not only has it raised appreciation for the contributions of the entire glass industry, it has had a major impact on the economy and quality of life in Corning where the Fortune 300 company likes to call itself “the biggest company in the smallest town in America.” In an era of shrinking museum endowments and rising operational costs, corporate benefactors like Corning may be the vanguard for a new hybrid-type of cultural institution, one that celebrates an industry as much as the arts.

**Egg Theater**
The Vessels gallery features a dark glassed oval “bottle” (formed by doubly-curved glass pieces) suspended from the ceiling. Nicknamed “the Egg,” the 40-foot walk-in container is actually a 17x34 video theater that seats up to 40 people.

**Signage Schematic**
CMoG’s exhibit signage is constructed out of five layers of glass laminated with graphics in between layers and held in place with neoprene pads and steel plates.

**Owens Bottle Exhibit**
450 bottles of beer – a day to make by hand in 1900 and now just six minutes – illustrates advances in manufacturing. Information panels and a video monitor are hung from multi-layered glass in front, and a schematic of the Owens bottling machine is etched into the floor.

**Fiberglass Archway**
Visitors enter the Vessels gallery through an 80-foot diameter fiberglass shell, made by the same people who build sailboats. Each gallery exposes visitors to the myriad uses of glass – from Pyrex baking dishes (tower at left) to the nose cone of a missile.

**Hot Glass Show**
A performance area was built onto the Steuben factory so spectators could watch a live glassblowing demonstration. Video monitors give spectators a close-up view of every step, including inside the 2300° furnace, thanks to a window made of the same glass used in the Space Shuttle.
Color Awareness

Color – which plays a role in every type of design – is arguably the most subliminally persuasive tool in a designer’s tool kit. It speaks volumes, sometimes with a whisper, sometimes with a shout. It is emotional, visceral, personal, trendy, cultural, symbolic, and easily altered by proximity to other colors. It can cheer you up, calm you down, make you sick, tire you out or increase your productivity. The same color is perceived differently depending on your age, mood and mental health. Savvy packaging designers use color to suggest product attributes like cleanliness, flavor and freshness, and global marketers tread carefully around cultural color biases. That’s not to say that designers need to “color within the lines.” Color is at the vanguard of fashion; consumers clamor for the new and exciting. That said, it’s still important to remember that color sensitivity goes beyond aesthetics. There’s more to using color than meets the eye. This color quiz was prepared with the help of Thome/Guide-Clark, San Francisco-based color consultants who work with automotive, textile, furniture and product designers to identify colors that work on many levels.

1. Among adults, what color is free of cultural bias and liked worldwide?
   - 

2. What is the first hue recognized by infants?
   - 

3. What color is the first to disappear from a child’s crayon box?
   - 

4. What are two colors elderly people tend to favor?
   - 

5. What color car is outlawed by Brazil and Ecuador because of its high incidence of traffic accidents?
   - 

6. What color are stop signs in China?
   - 

7. What color goes by 100 different names in the Eskimo language?
   - 

8. What food color is most popular among adults in Western nations?
   - 

9. What color puts people in a bad mood if looked at too long?
   - 

10. What two colors were the first to be given names in primitive cultures?
    - 

11. On signage, which color combination below is the most visible?
    - 

12. For printed materials, which combination is the most legible?
    - 

13. What color has a calming effect on people?
    - 

14. In a color/I.Q. experiment, children tested 12 points higher when the ceiling was what color?
    - 

15. Patients with throat problems gravitate toward what color?
    - 

16. What color has proven so effective in reducing anxiety that it has been used as a deterrent to suicide?
    - 

17. What color did the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) choose to represent Nuclear Hazard?
    - 

18. What color is the most restful on the eyes?
    - 

19. Name a popular color for cleaning products?
    - 

20. What color do traditional brides wear in China?
    - 

See if you can answer the questions below, using the choices shown. In some cases, you’ll be selecting more than one color, or a combination of colors.
Blue. According to several studies, adults prefer blue, followed by red, green, purple, yellow and orange. Nearly 50% of those asked in an American Roper Organization survey named blue as their favorite color, followed by red.

Yellow. At first, newborns only perceive differences between light and dark, but then their eyes are drawn to the most luminous color in the spectrum — yellow.

Red. Children, even toddlers, universally favor red. A physiologically energizing color, red stimulates and excites.

Blues and greens. Eye lenses yellow (along with everything else) with advancing age, which may explain why elderly people gravitate toward hues of shorter wavelengths, and sometimes feel starved for blue.

Brown. Adults in Western nations find brown particularly appetizing because it suggests a strong flavor and is associated with meats, breads and sauces. Except for desserts and candy, blue is the least appetizing since virtually no natural foods (except blueberries) are that color.

Yellow. Yellow, especially bright lemon yellow, is the most luminous color in the spectrum and, hence, the most fatiguing color if viewed for long periods of time. (Conversely, it’s the most cheerful if seen at a glance.) Anecdotal studies have shown that couples fight more in lemon yellow kitchens and babies cry more in lemon yellow rooms. On the other hand, bright yellow makes school buses very visible.

White. To help them describe the nuances of ice and snow, Arctic Eskimos have over 100 words for white. Similarly, aboriginal hunters in Africa’s Kafirani have many words for green and brown, and fishermen in Brittany, France, have an unusual number of names to describe the blue-gray hues of the Atlantic.

Black and white. Researchers have found that the most primitive languages distinguish only white and black (light and dark). If a third color is named, it is inevitably red.

Black type on a yellow background. The strong color contrast and the fact that yellow is the first color the eye sees makes this combination ideal for warning signs. But since yellow tires the eyes, a little goes a long way.

Black type on a white background. It is easy to read and not as tiring on the eyes as yellow. The least legible combination is red type on a blue background.

Pink. Interestingly, while red is the most energizing color, passive pink has a calming, sedating effect. The California children’s probation department found that violent children have fewer outbursts when placed in a passive pink room. Many hospitals and correctional institutions have painted some rooms pink for the same reason.

Blue. Through color experiments, researchers have found that children tested in rooms with blue ceilings tend to score as much as 12 points higher on their IQ tests.

Green. Color therapists believe, and an international scientific meeting in New York in 1988 affirmed, that human skin acts like a prism, converting spectral colors to chemical reactions within the body. In a damaged body, the wavelengths of light absorbed by the ailing organ are distorted as well. One study showed that people with a particular deficiency share the same color deficiency, and gravitate toward room areas of a particular color. People with throat problems commonly are drawn to green.

Blue. Blue has been shown to relax the human nervous system. In London, the Blackfriar Bridge was painted blue in an effort to reduce the high incidence of suicides. It apparently worked.

Purple. In 1971, OSHA mandated a color system to indicate industrial hazard points. Purple Orchid 80100 was chosen to indicate nuclear hazard. (Purple is also the hardest color for the eye to discriminate.)

Less Is More at Interface

Interface Inc. – the world's largest manufacturer of commercial floor coverings – is proving that minimizing its ecological impact on the environment not only stimulates innovative design, it boosts the company's bottom line.

Does the end justify the means? Does producing beautiful, high-quality carpets compensate for emitting toxic pollutants, gobbling fossil fuels and dumping tons of waste into landfills to do it?

In 1994, after reading Paul Hawken's book, "The Ecology of Commerce," Interface CEO Ray C. Anderson concluded with much anguish that it did not. Although the company Anderson founded in 1973 had become the world's largest maker of commercial floor coverings, he made what he calls a "mid-course correction," vowing to turn Interface into "the first fully sustainable industrial enterprise."

This was no small undertaking since Interface nylon carpets and paneling fabrics are spun out of petrochemicals, then fastened in fiberglass and PVC, two known carcinogens. Interface factories, by the company's own calculation, were spewing out 10,447 tons of solid waste, 605.3 million gallons of contaminated water, 704 tons of toxic gases and 62,800 tons of carbon dioxide a year. Interface was also contributing a hefty share of the 920 million square yards of used carpets discarded in U.S. landfills annually.

Anderson reflects, "For the first 21 years of the company's existence, I never gave one thought to what we were taking from the earth or doing to it, except to be sure we were in [environmental] compliance and keeping ourselves 'clean' in a regulatory sense."

Anderson's determination to go far beyond that meant literally reinventing the carpet-making business, and being responsible for the product at every stage of its life cycle. It presented not only an engineering and manufacturing challenge, but required a complete rethinking of how products are designed and marketed.

David Oakey, exclusive design consultant for Interface's carpet tile line, admits "I was a non-believer when Ray Anderson started talking about making the company sustainable. It was a billion-dollar company that took

Interface's fine art marketing approach appeals to the aesthetic sensibilities of its designer/architect customers and positions its products as works of art in themselves.

Ray C. Anderson, Chairman and CEO, Interface, Inc.

Joyce LaValle, Senior Vice President of Marketing and Communications, Interface Americas

Ray Anderson heads one of the world's largest producers of commercial floor coverings and is co-chair of the President's Council on Sustainable Development.

With Interface for 18 years, Joyce LaValle is currently in charge of Interface Americas' marketing, communications and corporate identity functions.

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Product Preview Catalog

Designed by the Valentine Group in New York, Interface’s lavish product catalogs showcase its carpet selections in edgy high-fashion style. Not intended to be a substitute for seeing actual samples, the 12" x 12" printed promotions are meant to serve as dramatic teasers, allowing customers to preview products and narrow their choices before requesting physical swatches.

Square Images

Interface plays on the catalog’s name, “Square Feet,” and reinforces the idea of interchangeable carpet tiles by creating a cover montage out of photographs featured inside the book.

Contemporary Typography

A lively advertising tone of voice and provocative use of typography reinforce the sophisticated look of Interface’s printed materials.

Color Palette

Major photographs show each Interface carpet style on the floor with the full color palette and product specs typically shown on the facing page.

Swatch Still Life

Knowing that decorators frequently juxtapose different colors, surfaces, textures, shapes and objects to see how they work together, Interface treated these objects as art and turned them into framed still life images.

Arresting Images

Interface distinguished itself from other commercial carpet companies by aligning its visual identity with the fashion and fine arts world. Products are photographed in a sophisticated and compelling manner to grab the viewer’s attention.

Magazine

Issued as a supplement to the first catalog, this visual magazine features urban youth in dreamlike rustic settings and industrial chic softened by elegant interface carpets.

Vich’s House of Style

Along with previews of carpet samples, product specifications and order forms, the website carries over the fashion mood of the print catalog with a featurette called “Vich’s House of Style.”

most of its raw material from petroleum, I didn’t know how to do it, except maybe make products from wool or cotton. I kind of waited for experts to tell us, but that didn’t happen.”

What did happen was that Oakley gathered together a group of people from different parts of the company to brainstorm about how to become sustainable. The group broke their objectives down into four steps, beginning with what could be done immediately. “We concluded we were very wasteful when making a product, so first we could start designing products with less fiber,” Oakley says. The second step was to find ways to eliminate waste better in the manufacturing process by designing the product in different ways. The third was to determine what materials could be recycled, and finally how to take the industrial waste and put it back into the loop.

“We suddenly came to the conclusion that we have been designing the product badly in the first place,” Oakley admits. “The product wasn’t designed to stay in the loop. It was designed with so many different layers of material that it cost too much energy to separate. If recycling requires a lot of expensive energy, you’re defeating the purpose of doing it. We concluded that if we designed the product differently, we could create a ‘zipped’ product that could be dismantled easily.”

Oakley’s effort to reduce fiber usage inadvertently led to two of the most innovative brands Interface has produced in recent years—Wabi and Solenium. “What happened with Wabi,” Oakley relates, “is I was working with the manufacturing people and asking if they could make the pile lower and lower. One technician, who was getting kind of upset, said to me, ‘If you want to make the pile that low, why don’t you just turn the carpet upside down?’ We did and it looked great. Customers love it. Wabi has a very simple, minimal look that fits today’s trend, which is more toward hard finishes and away from textiles.”

The idea for Solenium, now being introduced as its
own carpet line, came about just as serendipitously. Joyce LaValle, senior vice president of marketing for Interface Americas, recalls that during a conversation about the success of Wabi, someone lamented that it was too bad carpets couldn’t be made out of recycled pop bottles just like Teratex, a paneling fabric made by the Interface Interior Fabric Group. “Teratex has been incredibly successful,” reports LaValle. That led the group to ask itself, “why not?” And Solenium was born. Woven on a jacquard loom, Solenium has the functionality of vinyl and the warm look and feel of fabric. “It is aimed at educational and health care markets where you couldn’t use carpet in the past because it was too difficult to clean,” says LaValle. A unique product, Solenium has the potential to give Interface entry into markets that were once virtually out of reach. 

In addition to designing entirely new types of floor covering, Interface has been looking for ways to enhance the flexibility and appeal of its standard higher-priced carpets. One way has been to play up a characteristic inherent to carpet tile – its seams. Taking a cue from Japanese tatami mats, Oakey turned tile seams into an advantage by showing how tile pieces could be “quarter-turned” when laid down to create various patterns. New designs also invite covering only a portion of a room to create an area rug-like effect or to interchange some tiles with another pattern or color to create an entirely different look. “The tiles themselves are very practical,” LaValle claims. “They are laid with releasable adhesive, and are easier to put down and produce less scrap than broadloom. If a tile gets damaged or stained, you can remove it and replace it.”

The design of products is only part of Interface’s sustainability effort. An equally vexing concern is the marketing of the carpets. Customers, of course, want to see and touch actual swatches before buying. That means commercial carpet makers must assemble and distribute thousands of samples, at considerable cost, to architects, decorators and designers, who then evaluate the samples and make their decisions. A good sample program can make the difference between a carpet maker and a carpet vendor.
Sustainability isn’t an overnight process, LaValle emphasizes. “Everything is about shipping away to get there. One thing we did as a company in the beginning was catalog everything that we did that was bad. These things became targets. For instance, we have 200 or so [emission] stacks of some sort or another at our mills. Over the past six years, we have eliminated 45 of them. We still have 155 to go. That’s what I mean by shipping away.”

The company has chipped at other areas as well. A change in tufting methods has allowed it to eliminate about a fourth of the nylon in every carpet tile. Old fibers are “combed” for recycling rather than melted. Certain yarns are substituted with hemp and flax. Photovoltaic panels are used to generate power for its facility in California. Processing water is treated for golf-course irrigation. Improvements, big and small, are made wherever possible.

“It is a huge undertaking to become sustainable,” says Oakey. “You can make a 100% recycled product, but if you don’t manufacture it in a sustainable way, you haven’t become sustainable. The question is how much energy did it take to make it? How much waste resulted from the process? How much energy was used to get it to you?”

Interface’s commitment to sustainability is more than cosmetic or an effort to win public relations “brownie” points. CEO Ray Anderson aims for nothing less than reengineering the modern corporation. He is currently the co-chair of the President’s Council on Sustainable Development and makes some 150 talks a year around the country on eco-sensitivity. Interface’s own financial performance in recent years refutes the argument that sustainability draws from the bottom line. Stock prices, profits and annual sales have all risen phenomenally since the company adopted its sustainability program in 1994. Between 1994 and 1999, it has also managed to reduce emissions and solid wastes by 30% and 50%, respectively, and realize savings of more than $75 million to date.

From a design perspective, “sustainability has been our driver,” says LaValle. “Frankly that has made us more creative and forced us ‘to push the envelope,’ to think outside the box. Through that, we have found many better ways to do things that actually, in the end, are also cost-reductive.”

Promotions
Interface’s active marketing program is calculated to gain maximum exposure for its products while using the least amount of energy and natural resources. Printed promotions allow the company to target its sample kits only to potential buyers and encourage customers to log on to its website, where they can peruse all the carpet styles and order swatches on the spot.

Annual Report
Interface’s award-winning annual report, designed by VSA Partners, presents a compelling case for adopting a program of sustainability.

Old Swatch Book
Interface is discontinuing its old carpet books that weigh in at 3 lb., 8.5 oz. and include more swatches than the customer wants to see. Costly to mail, they also could not be recycled after use.

New Sample Book
Housed in a videocassette-type box, new sample books include a loose swatch of the requested style that the customer can feed and smaller glued-down swatches of other colors. The entire folder weighs just 1 lb., 2.2 oz. and comes with a return mailing label.

User Education
To help customers appreciate the advantages of carpet tile, Interface produces brochures that show how tiles can be mixed and matched, quartered or accented by playing up the seam. The lenticular cover emphasizes the word “seam.”

We’re developing new styles that celebrate tile as a design element. It gives us the freedom to make larger patterns, that, when installed, create an even larger random pattern.
Steve Sandstrom
Principal, Sandstrom Design
Formerly a designer with Nike, Steve Sandstrom now heads a 15-person graphic design agency in Portland, Oregon, that handles a wide variety of design projects for national accounts.

During the ’80s, bottled mineral waters became the rage. In the ’90s, specialty coffees caught on. In the mid-’90s, tea master Steve Smith decided it was high time for tea to take its rightful place in this triumvirate, but that meant giving the drink a complete image overhaul.

As a food category, tea was stale. It lacked the hipness of, say, a cappuccino, and was mostly thought of as a drink for blue-haired ladies, sick people and the aging hippie granola crowd. Smith knew he could do for tea what Starbucks did for coffee if only he could get people to try his innovative blends. At first, Smith and his business partner, Steve Lee — both previously associated with Stash Tea — toyed with the idea of opening an upscale tea salon in Portland, Oregon, decorated around a “Marco Polo meets Merlin the Magician” theme. But with the growing popularity of bottled teas, they set their sights on developing a premium brand product instead.

Question was, what to call it? How to get people to see tea as youthful and fun? And how to differentiate their product from the standard off-the-shelf brands?

Smith turned to his friend, Steve Sandoz, creative director at Wieden & Kennedy, for help. Sandoz, in turn, brought in designer Steve Sandstrom to collaborate on coming up with a brand identity.

Smith laid out his “Marco meets Merlin” idea and explained how tea was the most ancient beverage in the world besides water. “We wanted a brand that looked like it wasn’t from here and it wasn’t from now,” Smith says.

In response to Smith’s request, Sandoz invented the name “Tazo,” which sounded to him kind of ancient and exotic. “When I tried to come up with a real name,” Sandoz explains, “I recognized that any recognizable word carried meaning with it that would elicit some kind of reaction from people. But if I made up a name, it could mean anything I wanted. Tazo sounded a little like tea, but not exactly.”

After concocting the name, Sandoz says he immediately wrote out “ten really stupid definitions for it, and once I did that, I was convinced we should make up a

THE REINCARNATION OF TEA

Tazo 12 oz. 12 fl. oz. single serve, 12 fl. oz. (ea.) 1, a reju
naissance daze from tee, tico and uninventive drinks thought to have magical properties among the ancient Babylonian, Egyptian, Ottoman, Etruscan and hebrews. These drinks were known as the ‘Gum on the Wall’ — name of the whirling masting dance of the chariote of ancient Egypt.”
history. When you think of other tea companies saying they had been making tea for the last 20, 30 years, well, Tazo could say we've been making it for the last 7,000. We could appropriate all of recorded history!"

Sandstrom tested the name and zany concept out on Sandstrom, who knew immediately what Sandstrom had in mind. He quickly came back with a rendering of the name based on Exocet (an Emigre typeface designed by Jonathan Barnbrook) that was vaguely reminiscent of old Celtic and alchemy symbols. "The cross-like lower case "i" and the cross in the "O" made the characters look more like symbols than letters," says Sandstrom. "You don't know what time period it's from -- it could be from a thousand years ago. I knew the face was something I could manipulate enough to look old and not necessarily feel European or Asian. Like tea, the logos would feel universal."

At first, Sandstrom framed the mark in a rectangular box that looked as if it had been stamped from a woodcut. The next day, he made the logo look even more like a symbol by turning the "O" into a circle and placing the letters around the "i," creating what the company now calls "the Tazo Wheel."

Meanwhile, Sandstrom had come up with the tagline "The Reinarnation of Tea" to aptly express Smith's goal of bringing about a rebirth of tea in America. With that, the identity elements fell into place. "We had antiquity, multiculturalism and history," says Sandstrom. "They also had the makings of a great story line for the next 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' or for Tazo's romanticized tea lore. Sandstrom had once lived in India and traveled extensively through Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka and Nepal and still had vivid memories of those years. "That helped me to put myself in those places and create characters that seem fairly believable," he says. In Tazo's catalog, marketing materials, website and, to a limited extent, on the packaging, Sandstrom spins amusing yarns about the origin of Tazo, weaving in the names of real places and things so that the stories border just on the edge of possibility. One story about the Tazo logo claims it was unearthed during an archeological dig. A sepia-toned photograph of a rock slab carved with mysterious hieroglyphs (actually a jumble of characters including Hindi, Cyrillic, Japanese and Arabic) backs up this account. The accompanying text relates that it is "the Tazo Stone, ancient repository of most Tazo formulas" uncovered from a "cave on the shores of the Red Sea during an abnormally low tide following a lunar eclipse and earthquake in 1897." Interwoven among these spoofs is useful (and factual) information about how tea is grown, blended and brewed. This mixture of fun with fact keeps people reading, even the vertical production credits, one of which says it was done by "Mukhar & Ravi, Advertising, Design and Dentistry, Patna, India."

"I think most packaging is maybe too functional," says Sandstrom. "There's no romance to it. Or if there is romance, it's done in such a traditional "ad-y" way, with the compelling aspect being "buy this thing now." The notion that we came up with is that Tazo as a brand should appear as if it really doesn't understand traditional Western marketing and should even be bad at it. We felt that would be not only charming, but different from anything else out there. It would make Tazo seem more exotic and foreign, just like we didn't get it."

Sandstrom was so intent on achieving this effect that he says, "I've done some stuff for Tazo where I've written a piece of copy and then I've translated it into another language and then translated it back into English to make it more awkward. I think there is something about that awkwardness, that it is not slick, that makes it more interesting."

Still, that's not to say that Sandstrom and Sandstrom don't understand the difference between charmingly awkward and uncomfortably amateurish. The text and design are decidedly sophisticated, appealing and upscale, but the look is purposely low-tech, printed on kraft paper with muted, earthy colors.

Packaging for Tazo products also continue the brand's unique tone of voice and give customers an emotional connection to the product. "Sandstrom didn't

Embroided Symbol
Tazo's brand design vocabulary is consistently expressed on all of its packaging and promotional materials. Key elements include: Tazo Wheel, hieroglyphic characters made up of various languages, Tazo logo, signature earth color, color tab seal and signature typeface called Tazo Bold (a combination of Nicholas Costin and Garamond No. 3).

Self-Dispensing Boxes
Tazo filterbag tea packages are printed in the same color to provide a clean, uniform appearance in cafe dispensing displays and on retail shelves. The color-coded tabs provide a visual clue to the flavor inside.

Poster
To reinforce the impression that Tazo is produced in an exotic locale, the brand's promotional posters are made to look as if they were done by someone unfamiliar with slick American advertising.

Embroaded Symbol
Tazo filterbag tea packages are printed in the same color to provide a clean, uniform appearance in cafe dispensing displays and on retail shelves. The color-coded tabs provide a visual clue to the flavor inside.

Stacked Logo
The rectangular Tazo logo works well in horizontal and vertical formats. Here, it serves as a closure tab on the plastic sack for its ice tea filterbags.

Individual Filterbags
Along with intriguing product names, the flavor blend filterbags inside are quickly identified by color-coded packets.

Luxury Packaging
The elegant look of Tazo's flat tin container for full leaf teas proved a mixed blessing. Customers loved it as a gift item, but perceived it to be "too nice for everyday consumption."

Tazo Catalog
Tazo earned its Tazo Stone spoof onto the cover of its catalog. The actual Stone, made by Sandstrom Design, is prominently on display at Tazo's headquarters.
want the filterbag tea products to go out with traditional names," says Sandstrom. "So instead of English Breakfast, he called it Awake." Others he called Om, Zen, Passion, Refresh, Calm, Mambo — evocative (trademarked) names that become an enchanting part of the Tazo experience.

All of this helped to intrigue customers into reconsidering what tea was all about and to convince them that Tazo was no ordinary tea. "It is one thing to make a good product, but people have got to find out about it. The way you do that is by packaging it well," says Sandstrom. The appeal of Tazo's packaging encouraged some retailers to buy the entire filterbag line without even trying them all. Today Tazo's 80 or so products — full leaf, filterbag, iced tea, bottled ready-to-drink and juice blends and Chai — are sold in more than 5,000 upscale restaurants, cafes, resorts, specialty and natural food stores in the U.S., Canada and abroad. The company itself was recently acquired by Starbucks.

Packaging and the brand message have helped Tazo to open doors at high-end establishments and to enhance the product's appeal in target markets. Some products have even sold well in places like home accessory stores where food items are rarely found. Its presence in such stores is obviously driven by the elegant style of the packaging, which makes it a popular gift item.

But Tazo has been careful to ensure the package design is appropriate for the market. Smith says, "We don't want people to look at the packaging and say 'Ooh, that looks expensive.' We want it to project good value. It's important to strike a balance so the packaging doesn't look too precious."

Great packaging also is no assurance of long-term success, Smith adds. "Ultimately, you can have the greatest packaging in the world and it can only sell your product once. [With Tazo,] we want to deliver on the promise of making you smile, making you intrigued, and giving you a fulfilling cup of tea."

**Bottle Shapes**

Tazo's search for a unique bottle shape had to consider the restrictions of filling and labeling machinery. The new profile has a straight surface in the center to accommodate labeling equipment.

**Leveraging the Brand**

Since the introduction of the first Tazo products six years ago, the line has grown to include some 80 tea and tea-related products. Consistent application of Tazo's graphic vocabulary helps customers to associate the new product with Tazo and to build greater visibility for the overall brand across several market segments.

**Consistent Branding**

From the hieroglyphic design on the screw cap to the logo embossed on the glass, Tazo thoroughly brands its bottled tea and juice blend products.

**Imported Look**

Package colors identify whether the tazo tea is herbal, green or black, while the closure (which looks a bit like an import inspection seal) reveals batch number and color code of flavor.

**Logo Apparel**

T-shirts imprinted with Tazo's hip-looking logo are sold in its tea catalog.