

Is Design Good?

One night in the recent past, I encountered a Smart car in a Santa Fe pizza shop parking lot. I saw one in New York a few weeks later. It's an eye-catching design, all the more so because once a consumer learns the logo and knows "smart" means energy wise, liking it is instinctual—good because it's good, and good because it's good for you. Design is increasingly being asked to do both of these things, be good for one and for many. But the ramifications can be hard to sort out.

Back in 1950, the year of collector Jack Krietzburg's first Buick (Automotive Hall of Famer Denise McCluggage gives us the stories of seven Santa Fe car collectors on page 58), the notion of conserving energy didn't cross anyone's mind.

Postwar affluence meant hitting the open road with a full tank and several packs of smokes. The 1950 Buick is still a terrific design, but it ain't mileage-efficient. And so what? Sometimes the two categories of "good for me" and "good for us" are easy to distinguish and choose between; other times, the notion that good design has to go to bed with social consciousness seems superfluous to loving design in a single bed. Yet one wouldn't be out of line to ask any designer today to visualize a context of smaller and cleaner—or to urge the rest of us to keep envisioning a world in which good looks and deeds are more congruent.

On another note, two old friends of mine called me skeptical, on successive days in May. I didn't know how to take that. But on reflection, it turns out this is probably the editorial sine qua non, the reason for being of any magazine that asks its writers to turn out challenging journalism.

In that spirit, I'm thrilled in this issue that our excellent writers asking questions about good design and the new size of the American dream include Nancy Zimmerman on the Bioneers. Keiko Ohnuma—formerly of Honolulu; now Corrales, New Mexico—writes about adobe Airstreams in a garden off Highway 14. And Erika Wanenmacher's art project this issue blows me away, because it is about just what we've been talking about—how making art can reflect the urge to repair.

For anyone who wonders about design in its U.S. capital of Manhattan, well, my old neighborhood is full of \$8 million condo lofts (check out 40bond.com, website of the only Herzog & de Meuron residential building in New York) that telegraph features (green glass imported from Italy) but fail to be interesting for their real design qualities. Skeptical? If when reading an ad you see the word "prewar" applied to a building south of 14th Street, chances are it's pre-World War I. And I could really live without the John Varvatos store in the old CBGB.

Ellen Berkovitch
Editor



JANINE LEHMANN

Jewels for the King
Queen in all of us...



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