

## Press Release

Frankfurt/Main, 30.04.2021

### **Dieter Rams A Look Back and Ahead**

**16 April until 8 August 2021**

In the second half of the 20th century, the German industrial designer Dieter Rams designed more than 350 products for the Braun and Vitsœ companies. Many people, all across the world, use them and they still exert a great influence on younger designers today. Rams has, however, not only been interested in the actual form of the objects that are used on a daily basis, he has also considered the significance that products have on people and society in his many lectures and publications.

At a time when the safeguarding of resources and the protection of the environment have become essential social challenges, Rams' work is more relevant than ever. It establishes an approach to design that he describes with the creed: 'Less, but better.' Already in the 1970s, Rams consistently advocated for objects to be designed in such a way that they enabled the longest possible cycles of use. What is referred to today as the 'aesthetics of use', he had already practised and embodied with his teams many decades ago: 'Good design is environmentally friendly. Design makes an important contribution to the conservation of the environment. It includes the conservation of resources as well as the reduction of physical and visual pollution in product design.'

For Dieter Rams this much is certain: 'Design is a process and industrial design involves teamwork with many participants. It is only through international dialogue and cooperation that we will be able to shape our world sensibly in the future.' His plea for the future is: 'Less and less products in which their manufacture or usage results in resources being wasted and the environment degraded. Fewer and fewer of those products that, though they stimulate a desire to buy, are then hardly usable, and are soon put aside, thrown away and replaced by new ones. Less and less of those products that are nothing more than fashionable for a while, becoming obsolete at the end of that particular trend. Fewer and fewer of such products that soon become defective, wear out and age prematurely. However, more and more products that really are and do what buyers and users expect from them! Relief, enhancement, intensification of life.'

For Dieter Rams, design is not only the formal shaping of the material environment, it also defines the life of each person and life in its entirety. Design can support social togetherness, but it can harm it too. It is for this reason that the following question is becoming increasingly urgent: how should our world be designed in the future so that it can still survive? Aided by about thirty objects selected by Dieter Rams, as well as one hundred photographs, reproductions and texts, he attempts to provide answers to this question in the exhibition.

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Dieter Rams (\*20 May 1932 in Wiesbaden)

After an apprenticeship as a carpenter, he went on to study architecture and interior design at the Werkkunstschule Wiesbaden, graduating in 1953. It was here that the founding director Hans Soeder adopted ideas from the Bauhaus teaching model. After working for two years in the Frankfurt architectural practice of Otto Apel (known today as ABB), Dieter Rams accepted a position with Max Braun in July 1955. The young heirs Erwin and Artur Braun transformed the traditional company into a socially responsible and modern enterprise during that time and sought a new product language. The new product concept should not be striking, but natural and restrained. After working together with the art historian Fritz Eichler, the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, and with the former Bauhaus students Wilhelm Wagenfeld and Herbert Hirche, the design team surrounding Dieter Rams progressed to become the innovative hub of Braun's engagement with design. This was in no small part due to the very close and early cooperation with the technicians and the subsequent constructive design process.

As the head of the design department in the early sixties, Dieter Rams worked together with Gerd A. Müller, Reinhold Weiss, Richard Fischer, Robert Oberheim, and Dietrich Lubs to develop a unique product language that combined a high level of usability with visual longevity, intuitive operation and outstanding aesthetics. From hi-fi equipment to electric shavers, the team created a common design approach, that of the characteristic 'Braun design'. This gained worldwide recognition and became a model for other companies and a younger generation of designers. During his time at Braun, Dieter Rams always argued against unnecessary mass consumption and the destruction of the environment through too many products. Rams' work at Braun formed the basis and the Petri dish for the further development of his understanding of design.

As early as the 1960s, trips to Great Britain, the USA, Canada, Mexico, and Japan were part of Dieter Rams' business routine. It was Japan in particular, with its corporate links and deeply rooted culture, that opened up new horizons and experiences for him. His friendship with the most important industrial designer in Japan at the time, Kenji Ekuan (1929-2015), left an impression on him too.

Dieter Rams' work for Vitsœ began almost at the same time as his work for Braun. The design process at the company of Vitsœ was a far more personal and direct one than that at Braun. Together with the Danish entrepreneur Nils Vitsœ, new system furniture was developed. It was still important to Dieter Rams to design objects that were functional, aesthetic, inconspicuous as well as technically and visually lasting. This aspect is demonstrated, among other things, by his 606 shelving system, which Vitsœ still distributes worldwide from Great Britain. Such an extensive product cycle in furniture could otherwise only be found in the bentwood and tubular steel chairs by Thonet or in designs by Ray and Charles Eames.

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### Design and technology

In order to always design from a position of functionality, working jointly with technicians was a standard and important prerequisite. Dieter Rams often sought the technical solutions himself. Numerous patents and utility model applications of the Braun company in his name attest to this. As an inventor, Dieter Rams received the most mentions in relation to the development of the F1 mactron pocket lighter (1971).

In the 1970s, Dieter Rams developed his ten principles for good design that stem from his own design practice and a consistently critical reflection on his professional field: real innovation, usability, aesthetics, understandability, honesty, understatement, consistency, longevity and environmental friendliness. To this day, his final credo is 'Good design is as little design as possible', or 'Less, but better', a motto for change that may become crucial in achieving a better life for everyone and our environment.

Formal criteria can also be observed in his products. As a latent architect, Dieter Rams often engaged with right angles, cubes and cuboid shapes. An additional characteristic of his practice was that his objects were always designed from all angles—even the typically hidden rear side. The principle of connectivity was also a distinctive attribute of Rams. The previously mentioned Shelving System 606, for example, can be flexibly integrated and expanded with different elements. They are able to be individually adapted to the needs of the user too. Since the late 1950s, Braun's audio systems have also consisted of modules that can be combined by various means. The distinctive aspect here is that the individual elements always provide a harmonious overall form.

Colour played an important role in his design features, and this was not simply a question of black, white, and light grey. Colours functioned as signs for usability, while their aesthetic value was of even greater significance. By employing colours sparingly, the outcome Rams accomplished was great. He repeatedly used the complementary contrasting colours of red and green. Occasionally just a red dot was applied. There is almost no Braun appliance by Dieter Rams that would not feature this minimalist colour scheme. This facet is also seen in the device typography that was very light and restrained, consequently becoming a typical Braun element.

Dieter Rams considered that which is found in daily life to be special, and that the value lay in improving it and, if possible, reducing it too. As a consequence, intuitive operating guidance was an essential element for Dieter Rams and Braun. Operating instructions became almost redundant. 'Back to the pure, to the simple!' is the motto found at the end of his ten principles—a motto for new beginnings.

Outside of his design practice, Dieter Rams has shown an enduring commitment to better design. He taught industrial design at the HfBK Hamburg from 1981 to 1997, was President of the German Design Council from 1988 to 1998, and has been a member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin since 1999. In 1992, together with his wife, he founded the Dieter and Ingeborg Rams Foundation, which is dedicated to promoting design with its own projects. As a result,

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he has received numerous honours, including the Honorary Royal Designer of the Royal Society of Arts, an honorary doctorate from the Royal College of Arts in London, the World Design Medal of the Industrial Designers Society of America, the Design Award of the Federal Republic of Germany for his life's work, and the Designer Award of the Raymond Loewy Foundation. Dieter Rams is a recipient of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

As early as 1959, the MoMA in New York included the first Braun products in its permanent collection. Works by the designer can be found in almost all design museums in the world today. In 1980, the International Design Center Berlin held its first large exhibition, followed by others in Milan, London, Amsterdam, Fort Lauderdale, Lisbon, Kyoto, and Moscow and most recently at vitra in Weil am Rhein. In 2008, the Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt am Main and the Suntory Museum Osaka presented the extensive exhibition Less and More. The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams. It was shown until 2012 in six museums in Asia, Europe, and the USA, and drew more than 400,000 visitors in a total period of 86 exhibition weeks. In addition to the exhibition, the Dieter Rams Style Room is located on the first floor of the Museum Angewandte Kunst, which, since 2017, has been presenting content-related and biographical contexts of Rams' design approach through changing exhibits.

### Curator

Prof. Dr Klaus Klemp in cooperation with Dieter Rams

### Organiser of the Exhibition

Dieter and Ingeborg Rams Foundation, Kronberg im Taunus. Foundation management: Britte Siepenkothen

Phaidon published the book Dieter Rams Werkverzeichnis by Prof. Dr Klaus Klemp, with a foreword by Dieter Rams. The 344-page publication is available in bookshops for 49.95 EUR. It is priced at 45 EUR at the museum ticket desk.

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Prof. Matthias Wagner K

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### **Opening hours**

Tue 12 noon – 6 pm, Wed 12 noon – 8 pm, Thur–Sun 10 am – 6 pm

### **Admission**

12 EUR, reduced 6 EUR

The reduced admission price applies school and university students, persons with disabilities and their escorts and unemployed persons. Valid identification required.

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### **Press downloads**

[www.museumangewandtekunst.de](http://www.museumangewandtekunst.de)