

The Designer Raymond Loewy **”Never leave well enough alone”**

Raymond Loewy (1893-1986), a brilliant designer and, without doubt, the most versatile ambassador of this discipline, became a design legend in his own lifetime. He was the most influential protagonist of industrial design that North America has ever known and has had a significant impact on the tastes and lifestyles of several generations. Loewy’s design philosophy still has an influence on the industrial design world today.

Loewy was the first person to understand design as a marketing factor: ”if you have two products which do not differ in terms of price, function and quality, it is the product’s attractive external appearance which wins the race.” Raymond Loewy used these pragmatic words to outline his perception of design and this was certainly the secret of his success.

Between 1925 and 1980, he had a decisive impact on the everyday American culture. Loewy, whose trademark was streamlined design, gave the ”American way of life” its own identity. Industry assigned him the task of creating new designs and cosmetic corrections to all kinds of products ranging from automobiles to toothpaste tubes, office furniture, ocean liners, lipsticks and coffee cups.

Many of the products that Loewy designed are still familiar to us today. These include the ”Studebaker”, a symbol of American cars and the ”Frigidaire”, the legendary refrigerator. Loewy created the trademarks of this century’s technical progress. For example, the Shell logo, the Coca Cola bottle, the Exxon and BP symbols all carry his signature. Raymond Loewy also designed the packet of the famous American cigarette brand, ”Lucky Strike” and this is the one that is still used today. In 1941 George Washington Hill, the manager and creative brains behind the American Tobacco Company, assigned Loewy the task of designing a new packet for Lucky Strike. At that time the Lucky packet was still green and the famous round brand symbol, the unmistakable ”bull’s eye” was only visible on one side of the packet.

Loewy surprised and convinced his client with a simple but brilliant stroke of genius. He changed the green to white and put the ”bull’s eye” on both sides of the packet. This meant that the front and back had the same design and the trademark was always visible. No matter how the packet was placed, the symbol could always be seen and recognized.

For Loewy it was not design alone that was definitive. He believed that the job of a designer was more complex than that. He investigated the market as well as inquiring into the wishes and needs of the customer. In addition to design, he gave equal rights to the requirements for user friendliness, ease of use, production costs and retail price.

”He streamlines the sales curves” wrote the American news journal ”Time” in 1949, following his streamline design. ”Design Management” and ”Design Consulting” had already become a major component of his philosophy in the forties.

"Never leave well enough alone" was how Raymond Loewy phrased it in 1951 in his autobiography. When in 1953 this book was launched in Germany with the title "Never leave well enough alone" it became a best-seller. This caused news journals such as "Time" and "Spiegel" to devote a title story to Raymond Loewy and his "campaign against bad taste".

Loewy, whose streamline styling advanced to become the consumer drive behind the Western world, described himself as an "apostle of simplicity and restraint". Yet at the same time he self-assuredly said "I can say of myself that I have made the mundane side of the 20th century more beautiful".

Loewy's principle of creating beauty through function and simplicity is still in tune with the requirements of industrial production today. His work still influences designer and consumer decisions.

In 1991 the "Raymond Loewy Foundation" was set up in Hamburg in memory of Raymond Loewy and every year it bestows the Lucky Strike Designer Award, the recipient of which receives Euro 50 000. The foundation sets itself the aim of being a forum for design in Germany but also of critically discussing design as an instrument of marketing and encouraging young designers with the Lucky Strike Junior Designer Award.

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