# Principles of Good Design – article by John Woods

On Tuesday (17ᵗʰ May 2022) I was returning some a piece of equipment we used at W&WW when there was a program on Radio 4 that was discussing style and design (Mary Portas: On Style @ 11:30). One person they were discussing was Dieter Rams. I had not really heard of him before, though some of the things they were discussing sounded familiar.
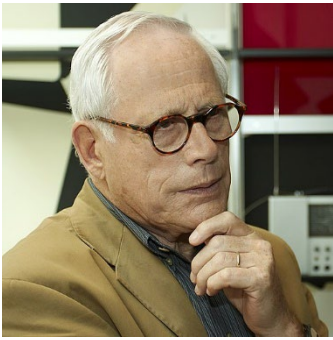
A search on the internet revealed a bit more information:

Dieter Rams was born in Wiesbaden Germany in 1932 (he turned 90 this month). In his working life he worked at Braun as Head of Design and oversaw the design of hundreds of innovative products.

Even if you don't immediately recognize his name, you will have almost certainly used one of the radios, clocks, lighters, juicers, or other products he designed.

He is famous not only for this vast array of well-formed products, but for his remarkably prescient ideas about the correct function of design.

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These ideas are summed up in his 'ten principles' of good design:

Good design is innovative, useful, and aesthetic. Good design should be make a product easily understood. Good design is unobtrusive, honest, durable, thorough, and concerned with the environment. Most of all, good design is as little design as possible.

Dieter Rams: 10 Principles of Good Design

1. *Good design is innovative*
   The possibilities for innovation are not, by any means, exhausted. Technological development is always offering new opportunities for innovative design. But innovative design always develops in tandem with innovative technology, and can never be an end in itself.

2. *Good design makes a product useful*
   A product is bought to be used. It has to satisfy certain criteria, not only functional, but also psychological and aesthetic. Good design emphasises the usefulness of a product whilst disregarding anything that could possibly detract from it.

3. *Good design is aesthetic*
   The aesthetic quality of a product is integral to its usefulness because products we use every day affect our person and our well-being. But only well-executed objects can be beautiful.

4. *Good design makes a product understandable*
   It clarifies the products structure. Better still, it can make the product talk. At best, it is self-explanatory.

5. *Good design is unobtrusive*
   Products fulfilling a purpose are like tools. They are neither decorative objects nor works of art. Their design should therefore be both neutral and restrained, to leave room for the users self-expression.

6. *Good design is honest*
   It does not make a product more innovative, powerful or valuable than it really is. It does not attempt to manipulate the consumer with promises that cannot be kept.

7. *Good design is long-lasting*
   It avoids being fashionable and therefore never appears antiquated. Unlike fashionable design, it lasts many years - even in today's throwaway society.

8. *Good design is thorough down to the last detail*
   Nothing must be arbitrary or left to chance. Care and accuracy in the design process show respect towards the consumer.

9. *Good design is environmentally friendly*
   Design makes an important contribution to the preservation of the environment. It conserves resources and minimises physical and visual pollution throughout the lifecycle of the product.

10. *Good design is as little design as possible*
    Less, but better - because it concentrates on the essential aspects, and the products are not burdened with non-essentials. Back to purity, back to simplicity.

It was the last 'principle' that caught my attention – **Good Design is as little as possible. Less, but better.**

I had heard something similar years ago. At an AWGB Seminar, Ray Key was giving a critique on a piece. It was a small item. Ray stated that the finish was not good enough. On a small item every detail must be perfect. With a small item you have to look at it closely, and you see all the detail. For larger items you view the overall piece, small imperfections can go unnoticed.

On a similar vein, but for different reasons:

Colin Chapman, founder of Lotus cars; when designing his racing cars, he would 'Add Less'.

The car should run out of fuel as it was going over the finishing line. The engine and clutch didn't need to last for years, they only had to last the duration of that race. Etc.

More:
https://designmuseum.org/designers/dieter-rams
https://www.vitsoe.com/gb/about/dieter-rams