

University of the Air

DESIGN IN AUSTRALIA

3. Industry

VIDEO

Titles.

Studio: Boyd at desk. Australian outback type in background.

Flips or film of products as mentioned.

Studio: In set there should be export and 'Buy Australian' posters and four tables of displays of well-designed goods as referred to in script: Scandinavian, Japanese, British and Australian.

AUDIO

Theme.

Boyd: Once Australia rode on the sheep's back, and then Australia had a character recognisable abroad: a sheepy, tough, sunburnt sort of character.

Today Australia also rides on

Holdens

Falcons

the B.M.C.

Volksvagens

And she rides on refrigerators

farm implements

tools and

television sets

In short, Australia rides now with one foot on industry, and the face we present to the world is consequently more sophisticated but more ambiguous.

Now we are fully committed to an industrial race. We got off to a good start in Asia. We are being watched from further afield, and if we have not yet built a universal reputation for being the vigorous, progressive manufacturing country which we picture ourselves to be, at least we are known to have promise.

Naturally, every country likes to have a good reputation abroad. Every Australian must feel some sort of a warm glow when he hears of our few successes at the highest levels of international endeavour and learns from time to time that some Australians' reputations reach the top of the ladder in tennis, swimming, acting, singing or painting. These things are always nice to hear. Nice, but not perhaps essential.

Camera tracks away
to C.U. 'Export'
poster.

C.U. 'Made in
Australia' symbol.

But in the field of manufacture our reputation is of vital importance. Australia needs exports. It means less marmalade for every one of us if a reputation for anything less than excellence and integrity and highest value is ever associated with this label:

stab of patriotic music

Made in Australia.

It may be silly, but nevertheless is a fact of life that all the products of a country tend to be lumped together by foreign buyers. A good international reputation for a country's standards makes it easier for every manufacturer in that country, and a reputation for shoddiness of any kind takes years to dispel.

Show typical cheap
Japanese product.
Turn over.

Consider the implications that the single word 'Japan' once had when stamped on the

C.U. 'Japan'.

bottom of a product. Before the Second World War the name almost read as a confession that the product concerned was a cheap imitation of something from Britain or America, and a poor cheap imitation at that.

After that war when Australia started to enter the international field of manufacturers it had nothing whatsoever in common with Japan; except that in some quarters here a feeling was shared that copyrights, licences and even patents were rather stuffy devices which might be helpful in the Atlantic area but had little relevance away over this side of the Pacific.

It is no secret that many of our pioneer post-war manufacturers flagrantly "borrowed" designs from overseas. They seemed to feel, if they thought about it at all, that the original manufacturers of the products were too far away ever to hear about, or concern themselves about, a little bit of plagiarism down under.

Film: Factory
production line.

As newcomers to the problems of mass-production we had our work cut out in arranging production schedules and ensuring a presentable finish. We sometimes had, in fact, a rather naive

faith in the importance of a smooth finish. The last things we thought of were the initiating idea behind the product, and the shape of it, the design of it. We were quite happy to take these, either by financial agreement, or without any by-your-leave, from the old country or the rich country. We felt quite proud if we could make a presentable copy.

End film clip.

Studio: Boyd at desk.

But not for long. In the mid 1950's when Australian manufacture was first booming, the youngest profession, Industrial Design, was also doing well for the first time overseas. The idea of designing for industrial processes was gaining full recognition as an art, a source of national pride and an important factor in international trade.

Camera moves to:
Display table of
typical Swedish
glassware and
Danish woodwork,
etc..

Politicians and alert manufacturers in Europe began to notice something that most designers and their friends had known since the early 1930's: that some countries, notably Sweden and Denmark, had an international reputation for their wares which was far higher than the size or wealth of either country's industry.

Move around table.
Roving spotlight
picks out different

This reputation came partly from a long tradition of craftsmanship, but also, more importantly, from a world-wide name

items.

for modern design. In fact 'Scandinavia' and 'Contemporary' were practically synonymous, at least in interior-decorator parlance. And when at last the world welcomed the look of the 20th Century after the Second World War, Scandinavia had a head start.

Move to latest
Olivetti type-
writer.

Nevertheless, Italy made an amazing recovery from the heavy Mussolini-modern-classic style and soon established itself in the front rank.

Move to second
table: Display
of modern Japanese
goods:

Then Japan came up quickly. Japan made a direct, determined, expensive attack on the kind of wares and industrial practices that once had given it a bad name. It turned its back on plagiarism. It encouraged original design. It looked again to its own long tradition of sensitive functional design in building and peasant ware and blended this tradition into the international modern idiom of the stamping, moulding, and printing machines.

tableware,
portable T.V. sets,
transistors, etc..
Repeat technique.

In ten years or so - it took all of that - the stamp of 'Japan' on certain highly developed products became a proud and confident and respected stamp.

Finish on camera.

In the early 1950's Britain became fully engaged in the race. She promoted her

Move to third
table:

Display of recent
British products:
 crockery,
 carpets,
 fabrics, etc..

Repeat technique.

Camera returns to
Boyd at desk.

Film or flips:

 Walter Gropius
 Bauhaus building.

Victorian ornamental
product

dissolve to

own design to the world expensively in
the lavish Festival of Britain and later
in the permanent displays at the British
Design Centre at the Haymarket.

About 1960 everyone seemed to be in the
race. Design Centres promoting their
respective countries' originality and
imagination and essential national
qualities were being opened in many
countries: Norway, Holland, Canada,
Belgium, Germany, Hong Kong...

Music.

It all began less than half a century ago.

It might be said that William Morris in
his wallpaper and fabric designs was the
first industrial designer back in the
middle of the 19th Century. But the real
marriage between art and modern industry
was first arranged at Walter Gropius's
famous school, the Bauhaus, in Germany
after the First World War.

Before the Bauhaus, factory-manufactured
goods were inclined to follow blindly the
shapes of the hand-made goods they were
replacing - and often enough to load them
with more fruity moulded ornaments than
any old craftsman would have had the
desire or patience to add.

Bauhaus product.

The Bauhaus spread the brave new idea that any machine-made product should be designed to suit the manufacturing processes of its factory as well as the purpose for which it was intended. The materials used to make it should be suitable for machine manufacture as well as for use.

If these conditions were observed and some imagination and élan were exercised in the process, then that was the end of it. Satisfying, handsome, honest products would result. No need for ornament or gimmickry.

Continue flips
of Bauhaus
products.

From the Bauhaus studios came a long line of satisfying, functional, useful wares, obviously related to the machine. And today many of these can be recognised by us as grandfathers of numerous modern products in everyday use.

The Bauhaus did not invent the principles of modern design, but it focussed a diffuse European-American movement and sent a thin, strong white beam of reasonableness and goodness around the world. Sweden, the U.S.A., Britain, Japan, all profitted from it. Eventually it illuminated to some extent even the darkest corners of the factories of Australia.

End Bauhaus flips.

Music.

Studio: Boyd
leaves desk and
walks to fourth
table.

Before the Second World War there were two or three pioneer designers in Australia working at fabrics and furniture (as we'll see in a later programme) but the modern concept and profession of an Industrial Designer - trained and experienced equally in the processes of a modern factory and the timeless theories of good design - was revolutionary in the 1950's. There was no precedent for it here, and the few courses in it that were opened at technical colleges were feeling their way hesitantly.

Poster or symbol
of I.D.C.A.

But there was youthful enthusiasm. And a thin stream of well-designed and original products - like these - began to emerge from Australian factories. In 1958, the marriage of art and industry was solemnized in Australia with the formation of the I.D.C.A. - the Industrial Design Council of Australia. This was initiated by designers but was well supported by industry and government. Mr. Essington Lewis was the first chairman.

The I.D.C.A. has worked busily since then in many ways to improve design: drumming up more enthusiasm from industrialists, encouraging the better designers. It

holds congresses, seminars and exhibitions. But its two most influential moves so far are these:

First, a 'Design Index', as it is called. The Council reviews Australian-made products that are submitted and gives its blessing to the better ones in the form of a label which the product can wear wherever it goes on sale:

"Good Design".

So far some (No.) products have been so honoured.

The second major I.D.C.A. enterprise was the opening last year of the first Design Centre in Australia.

It is in Desgraves Street, Melbourne, and it is a permanent gallery of the best design from Australian industry.

Changing displays show the products which are proud to wear the Design Index label in various categories. In this display various kinds of furniture are shown, as well as electrical goods, floor coverings, fabrics, tools, hardware, ovenware, and a selection of those domestic appliances which so often bring

Picks up one
product and shows
label.

C.U. of label.

Film: Design
Centre, Melbourne.
Track around
exhibition following
couple examining
goods.

Continue film
clip.

out the most aggressive streak in
commercial designers: light-shades.

Here, conveniently collected for us and
set out as never before, we can now
examine the best in design that Australian
industry has to offer. And we can ask
ourselves questions.

Is the quantity of good design high
enough, considering the volume of our
industrial production?

Is the quality of the items approved for
'Good Design' labels high enough, in
comparison with that of other countries
with which we like to compare ourselves?

If there's not enough, good enough - why?
What obstacles are still in the way of a
full realisation of our potential in
industrial creation? What brakes still
act on Australian design?

End film clip.

Studio: Boyd.

I asked these questions to Mr. Colin Barrie,
who has been from its inception the
Director of the I.D.C.A. and is thus
probably the best qualified man in the
country to speak for both the designers
and the industrialists who are seeking
progress.

Tape:

Mr. Barrie

(pre-recorded
statement taken

Mr. Barrie (pre-recorded statement).

at the Design
Centre.

Mr. Barrie moves
around to
emphasize points
by examples among
the exhibits).

Studio: Boyd.

Now, let's for a moment suppose that the present problems of the I.D.C.A. could be solved. Suppose that every product of Australian industry warranted a 'Good Design' label. Suppose that our best designs of this moment represented our normal standard. Suppose we were selling at high profit every product that we could make, and the stamp reading 'made in Australia' was a stamp of real authority...

If all that came true, what would Australian Industrial Design be like? Would it be recognizably Australian?

Film: Montage
starting with
warship,

The irrescapable and rather ironic fact is that today practically all industrial items of good design are fairly international in character. The machines which make them and the materials and the processes are much the same the world over, so Good Design speaks in a sort of international language derived from the Bauhaus.

Nevertheless Denmark, Italy, the U.S.A. and some other countries colour it with local idioms.

Another irony is that the really heavy, serious things made by all countries are never stinted at the design stage.

There is no need for 'Good Design' labels to encourage the makers of warships, aeroplanes, or farm machinery, to hire designers who know their business. But these too are products of industrial design. Like any humble kitchen appliances, they all began life on a drawing-board. All the old Bauhaus rules apply to them: appropriate materials shaped to serve their purpose and to suit the production processes. And they attain a grace or rugged beauty of their own. The question of good versus bad design does not enter at this level.

But the danger of bad design gets more and more intense the closer you get to the family living-room. For this is the field of the hard sell, when products set out to catch the shopper's impulsive eye.

And in this field there are items which are recognizably Australian. But they will never earn 'Good Design' labels, firstly because their manufacturers would never even think of submitting them for judgement.

- planes in
flight -
- tractors -

- plane -

- dissolving to
ornate house-
hold product.
Continue montage
of Australian
'non-designed'
products. In
negative and
double exposure
so that no item
is especially
featured or seen
clearly in whole.

In these smaller, cheaper, novelty lines of industry we may see something of Australian popular taste reflected, but to be reasonable we must recognize now that there is never likely to be a fine, strong Australian artistic style in more permanent and important manufactured products.

Studio:

Now, does this mean we might as well cease seeking any individuality or originality in the things we make?

Of course it does not. Design is more than art and good taste. It is also a matter of ideas and inventions.

Australia has made it clear that she intends to compete in the world market of manufactured goods. To be taken seriously in that market she will be expected to contribute more than competence in imitation. The world is hungry for new ideas. It does not excuse a young country for not contributing. On the contrary it expects rather more in the way of new ideas from a young country like ours.

We have to produce ideas not for the sake of Australian chauvanism, and not simply to sell our goods overseas, but to keep our self-respect. Otherwise our bid as an industrialised nation may in the long run fall rather flat.

Repeat sequence
from opening:
cars, etc.

A great number of the products of our industry at this time are no more Australian than oak trees that happen to have been planted in Australian soil. They are made by Australian labour often with Australian administrative brains and often with much (if by no means only) Australian money.

They are not made to stolen or plagiarised designs. Our period of copying from abroad - during which we were in real danger of rivalling Japan's old reputation for stealing ideas - is happily past. Most of these goods are copied from foreign models legally, under licence. Some are adapted to suit Australian conditions by foreign designers who are imported for a month or two to give the 'know-how' to Australian draftsmen. They contribute to our industrial progress, to our exports, to the amount of marmalade we all enjoy with breakfast. But I think we might occasionally ask ourselves:

Do they contribute anything to the development of the Australian intelligence or the Australian civilization?

Why are we able to manufacture more things than most countries of equivalent population, and yet not be considered able to design them?

Studio:

We cannot expect too much of our infant industry, but can we not expect it to contribute fresh ideas to the international market at least in proportion to our wealth in the international picture?

Shouldn't we expect our industry to use our own talented designers instead of allowing them to drift abroad to find their due fame and fortune?

If the qualities demanded include inventiveness and ingenuity, surely we should be able to rally some strength. For ingenuity, or improvisation, is surely a notable traditional part of the Australian character, proved in the early days, in hard pioneering and in wars.

And indeed it is not dead.

In the years of Australia's new industrial revolution a number of entirely original devices have been made and are now exported to the rest of the world:

Flips: caster,
louvre.

For instance, the Shepperds caster.
And the Naco adjustable louvre.

Dissolve to
Studio: C.U. of
outback type.

Move away to
l.s. of
Studio.

Move back to:
'Made in Australia'
symbol.

End titles.

And when we consider these original Australian products, maybe we can see after all something characteristically Australian about them. There is a sort of rugged honesty about them. The spirit of their design is closer to the battleship than to the boudoir. They are not exactly boutique style.

There's a trace of the old Australian spirit of adventure to be found in all these small things, and the encouragement of more original thinking, more original design, may produce in the long run a distinctively Australian contribution to world design. Anything in this direction will increase our self-respect in the modern world and everyone's respect for the product that is:

Made in Australia.

Theme.