

# *Things Curated* *Things Revisited*

A visual journey  
by Henry Wilson

## **collect**

verb

1 he collected the rubbish | she collects figurines: gather, **accu-  
mulate**, **assemble**; amass, stockpile, pile up, heap up, store (up),  
hoard, **save**; **mass**, **accrue**

## **affect 1**

verb

1 this development may have affected the judge's decision: have an  
effect on, influence, **act on**, **work on**, have an impact on, impact;  
change, **alter**, modify, **transform**, form, shape, sway, bias.



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## **Abstract**

This research and project addresses the role inspiration plays on a designer and what they may eventually produce. Through examining various areas of humanity and the built environment, observations have been made which may directly or indirectly relate to new products. In a way this has become a kind of detective work into how and what we see as designers. Several outcomes have been reached, and various paths explored. Each endeavoring to unravel the role of inspiration and the eventual lead it takes into innovation.

“Because the context in which we operate influences what we talk about, think about and do.” Ed Annink; Bright minds, beautiful ideas



## Introduction

Acquiring images and objects of virtue.

At the Zurich university of the Arts, the first lecturer and later director Franco Clivo, would give his students two Swiss Francs to buy an object they considered remarkable for any particular reason. These items were then brought in for critique by a class and are said to reveal ‘often astonishing insights’.

These insights and the overall behavior of collecting and analyzing has been a self-projected passion of mine for several years now. And like the afore mentioned students, I find it of value to dive into this accumulated source when addressing design problems and projects.

Over the past five years I have been acquiring and constantly filtering objects of perceived value, which has now developed to become the central tenant of this project and thesis. It is a personal and humble journey, it is how I think I am inspired and it owes much to the romantic gestalt of Zen and existentialism, this translates to a philosophical theory of approach, based more on feeling and intuition rather than rational analysis. I believe that history and subliminal storage of experience have much to do with my design process and this ‘intuitive’ approach. That, coupled with my previous education in fine woodwork and traditional joinery has enabled me to view my world with a curious eye for connections and interesting material choices.

I have an idiosyncratic but I hope an open mind, wherever I go I wait for things to speak to me, if their story is of interest or they have visual or other sensory appeal I try to acquire them, or otherwise I record them in drawings or photographs. The process can be playful or profound; the analysis that accompanies this is my focus in this discussion. It can be confusing but the constant thread is that the objects insist that they are important and intuitively relevant. The how and the why of this is central I believe to the age old question of what is at the root of the creative process, I think this curiosity is an important step for any designer.

Below is a quote from the book ‘hidden forms’ by Franco Clivo. Here he sums up what this design curiosity is for him. It happens to encapsulate my own thoughts on the matter and gives my collecting passion some historical context.

‘I am not alone in my passion for anonymous products. Charles Eames and Achille Castiglioni, two of my great role models in my design and my thinking, also surrounded themselves with such objects. I was even fortunate enough to see castiglioni’s collection several times. Looking, understanding, comprehending, reducing to the essential, questioning, and storing the values gathered in a network of memory with cross references so they can be called up and used for my own work, I have profited from this conscious and unconscious thinking. In that sense, collecting these objects was like a constant continuation of my training after my studies.’

Like predecessors before me my own collection of images and objects is growing. When I show and explain these to others, particularly designers, they are surprised and often pleased by an added level of meaning and a stirring of curiosity. This arrest and engagement is what I believe is often missing in product design. Pragmatic solutions are not enough, there must be questions asked and mysterious needs satisfied. The better the dialogue the more profound the outcome will be. It would be exciting to see this conversation extend to the consumer through an enlightening process where objects demand a level of engagement that makes it difficult to ignore material choices and characteristics, and where the ingenuity and traditional forms combine, to begin a journey where nothing is taken for granted.

## **Project Goal**

The goal in this project is to better understand my own design approach in the hope of uncovering different methods of sustainable thinking, and how these might be applied to commercial products. One way I believe this story can be told is through collective, enlightening graphic information and developing a way to reach designers on a systematic visual level. It is my intention to create a method for analyzing ‘inspiration’ through a library of images and objects of my finding. Then relating it to the techniques of inspiration I uncover and building my own outcomes. I will also address questions which arose from the process of analysing these objects. Further elements of design discovery and sustainability will also be addressed, such as; the role of nostalgia, Morality of Appropriation, Empowerment thought constraint and rules, and the longing for simplicity. These topics are organic and were born from the material I have collected.

Throughout this project I attempt to analyse why these elements occur, and how to harness the energy for the good of humanity. As this is a design project I have made physical objects and a website to accompany and test and ultimately share many of the questions (and solutions) that arose from the analysis. This may help designers (especially in the case of the website) to see sustainable solutions in a new light, reeducating people about historical solutions to relevant modern problems or finding and adapting solutions from other fields to suit new contexts and problems.

Nendo / Oki Sato – ‘there are so many small astonishing moments and experiences in our everyday lives and environments but we most often do not recognize them or appreciate them fully. Even when we do recognize them we seem to forget what we have seen. It is these small moments that make our days so interesting, so rich. That’s why we want to experience the everyday pleasures by collecting and reshaping them into something that’s playful, beautiful, and easy to understand.’



<http://www.nendo.jp/en/concept/>

It is these small but important elements Nendo talks of which I believe will be the motivating factors in design for the next decades and beyond. Designers and consumers need to look on the same level to reach common goals and try to achieve harmony in consumption and sustainability.

## **The process of creation (inspiration)**

In this section I analyse a design journey. The central tenet of this being, what is my process for designing? What is the role inspiration can have on design? How can inspiration be shared and built on by design minds as a group? What techniques can be developed, to better understand how the designer can better understand this often-mystical technique of creation? Even honed, to reveal deeper meaning and relevance to their work.

The process of creation is conflicted, however it is of relevance to us all. There is a story that the mini-cosmos of creation is with us every day in all that we do. Designers live with the enigma of how their brains work more than most others, and are constantly developing strategies, rituals, and tricks to excite the creative process.

These tricks develop and grow from experience and constant reflection; it comes down to stimulus and inspiration. What gives it, how to use it and how to get more of it...?

The most common stimulus is to be confronted by the creations of others and await what is most often referred to as inspiration. The mechanism of this process is mysterious and the term carries with it notions that are non-material, unexplainable, and even spiritual. My personal view is that those of us who are sensitive to visual stimuli are subject to minor or major epiphanies of this sort regularly.

There have been books and studies done on how to design, even how to see. These offer exercises for designers to give them ideas and new thought. All of this is relevant but difficult to digest for people like myself, stimulated by ingenuity and everyday scenarios.

It is my view that books like 'understanding design' by Kees Dorst and 'idea searching' by David Bramston are of little creative use, they tend not to excite or stimulate me to design and question what exists. Through my research and designing I have found rich sources of information I would like to build on and share with designers across disciplines and around the world. I see the Internet as a valuable platform for this interaction.

## Chapter 1.

### \_The role of nostalgia

Whilst looking through my image data I was struck by how many of the interesting methods captured were of a bygone era. This led me to delve deeper into a topic I had never given much thought but related strongly to my inspiration tracks. Nostalgia, commonly referred to as a design dirty word, a feel good state pro-portioning false claims. In this section I will explain its effect on my design process.

I have been impressed in my study of nostalgia by the number of papers and articles written on the effect of it and its place and role in the human gamete of emotion. The above quote from Nendo / Oki Sato [<http://www.nendo.jp/en/concept/>] reflects about the forgetfulness of detail of the rich past of our daily actions and suggests that nostalgia might be a mechanism of the brain that assists in storing experience by linking it to emotion for the purpose of memory and deeper reflection long after the event.

Naturally then, it is assumed that there is some kind of psychological dimension to this memory. The contentment and security of a feeling of connectedness to the past, the euphoria associated with transcendental themes, perhaps even a minor form of religious ecstasy. Loyola psychologist, Fred Bryan in writing of nostalgia quotes “more importantly it can give you a sense of being rooted, a sense of meaning and purpose instead of being blown around by the winds of life”

There may be a real and practical benefit to the lonely human estate in this emotional connect; the nostalgic experience could be the key to the wellbeing that accompanies the creative process. Repeated reminders of the codified pleasures of recognising ingenuity and beauty both in nature and the works of man are likened to the mysterious pleasure of a sweet musical theme.

Psychologist Tim Wildschut adds, (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200605/nostalgia-sweet-remembrance>) “People who are disposed to experience nostalgia also tend to see their past as positive adding support to the idea of the nostalgic prone personality. Previous research has shown that naturally nostalgic people have a higher self-esteem and are less prone to depression. They cope with problems more effectively and are more likely than not to receive social support after experiencing stress, not surprisingly they’re well rooted folks who see their families more often.”

Since the findings of the powerful psychological effects nostalgia can have on people. I felt it was relevant to further examine this design ‘dirty’ word. It became clear from the research shown in this section, it can be key concept in the creative process. And particularly the formative role it has had in the twentieth

century. In part two I will show how designers have adopted and interpreted nostalgia to inform their design process.

### Social relevance, history and false nostalgia

It now becomes evident there is a sub category of nostalgia, one that does not follow the dictionary definition of the word. (a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations) We should call this “false nostalgia” a term to be used when describing the recollection of an event or time we have never actually experienced. It is based on a collective knowledge of glamorous, attractive and “aspirational” ideas that have set the agenda for certain periods of fashion both intellectual and material particularly in the arts. This information has been utilised ruthlessly by marketers over the years and may have been part of the profound change that catapulted advertising into the forefront of human endeavor during the birth of consumerism in the early fifties, changes that were as profound as any of the lifestyle influences of the twentieth century.

The value of an idea can be summed up by a fictional character quotation of this era ‘Don Draper’ [<http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0031457/quotes>] “nostalgia is a twinge in the heart more powerful than memory alone” what could we ask be more powerful than one’s own memory?

The quickly realized genius of this concept, which harnessed the forces of fantasy to commercialism, was universally embraced and led to decades of consumerism. The evolution has now progressed to the stage where objects no longer resonate without their own “supplied spin.” We have lost the habit of our own nostalgia, we are no longer connected to things that fulfill our own desires or natural tropisms, in short we have become “material autistics” [definition – a mental condition where fantasy dominates over reality, a symptom of schizophrenia and other disorders].

It is interesting to speculate that these powerful social forces combined with an increasing materialism and a denial of the spiritual and philosophical has led to the suffocating plethora of devalued objects which surround us today.



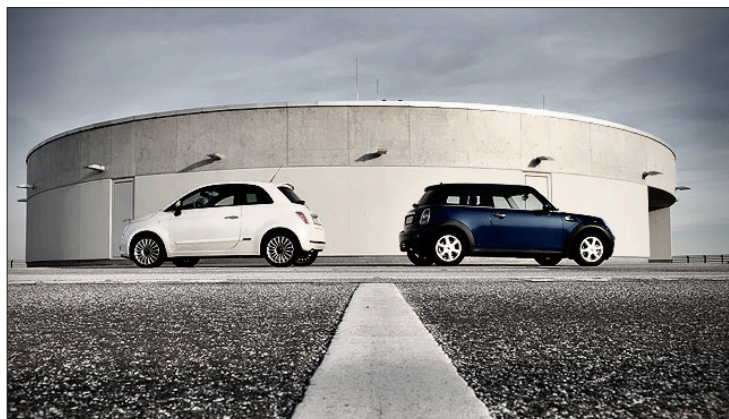
Fig 1a, 1b

Examples of responsible or misleading uses of nostalgia in design can be seen around us every day. Witness the two lamps shown designed by Dick Van Hoff and Ilsa Crawford, both modern objects redolent of earlier times using well known technology and sound material choice to give a non challenging, cozy, homey feeling.

Shown here (Fig 1c) is another example of an unknown designer using the nostalgic power of times past to ‘stylize’ yet another lamp. In this case it is a reproduction of French factory task lamp. Unlike Dick van Hoff and Ilsa Crawford this lamp has an iPod dock and radio built into the base, with a totally unrelated form for the stem and shade. It is likely this product will skip heirloom status and move directly to rubbish. Clearly it is easy to trace the linear progression of nostalgia-based inspiration in these two examples. It is the intention of these designers to use the materials and archetypal forms to give the consumer a feeling of connectedness. Weather that be responsible, in the case of Ilsa and Dick, or misleading in the case of the ‘retro’ iPod lamp.



(Fig 1c) To sum up the good use of nostalgia and ‘connection’ to the past. It can be a comment on materials lost, or simply a friendly feel good effect we get from seeing familiar materials harmonizing to form a resolved story of use. However it is interpreted it should be considered as another way of promoting sustainable behavior, by utilizing the nostalgia phenomena on the user. Suggesting that they may keep (in the case of Ilsa and Dick) this hefty, well-made product around for a while in the hope it will stay out of the landfill, and form a place in the users collection of beloved objects.



(Fig 2) Automobile design is another case in point, for instance the Mini (BMW) and the Fiat 500 (Fig 2) both examples of period choices that are applicable to modern circumstances. Plenty of nostalgic association but appropriate to modern urban life, small, economical and environmentally sound. This is a car curiously more suitable to today’s environment than that of its conception. However both these cars are slightly larger than their predecessors.

Nostalgia is not always used for best purposes, sometimes it is not an obvious choice for the times, another example from the motoring industry sees the indulgent and tacky choices for the ‘throw back’ models of the Pontiac GTO and the Ford Mustang, selfish presentations from a time when resources were perceived to be unlimited and there was less embarrassment with proclamations of excess and wastefulness.



Fig 3a, 3b

These are two quite radical scales of how nostalgia and design relate. Between these two examples lies countless more. Interpretations of nostalgia, are always going to be subjective in their relevance to modern times, it is my belief that designers can utilize these powerful emotive elements and work them into modern objects in a thoughtful and relevant way. Whether giving the consumer a historical ‘feeling of rootedness’ or simply using materials with a sound and traceable lineage. Products that use nostalgia responsibly (as with the lamps shown above) have the power to shape a more sustainable behavior pattern within the user.

This Sustainability pattern is also related to the simplicity of design and construction. As we grow further detached from the logic of our objects construction, so too do we grow alienated from more personal connections, which come with true understanding. Witness in these three images (Fig 4a, b, c) the construction progression of the simple steam iron from basic hotplate heated in a fire, to complex computerized machine. It is understandable to feel little respect for something you have no understanding of.



(Fig 4a, b, c)

## Chapter 2

The longing for simplicity is sustainable

There is a collective thought amongst designers and design theorists, that one way to tackle dwindling resources and curb mindless consumerism is to simply make fewer, better things. If you look back at the previous section it shows the powerful effect nostalgia can have on consumers, often put to poorly made products for the purpose of ‘cheap thrills’. In this section I will address the next element of that argument by explaining the role selective minimalism can play on a consumer.



(Fig 5a)

The codified, short burst, of disarming sweet emotion accompanying inspiration creates a longing for simplicity to make sure that nothing can get in the way of this desirable state. Note the aesthetic values and lives of religious visionaries and the solitary bare sustenance of some creators in all fields. The image of Ghandi's personal belongings (Fig 5a) brings home the point in an illustratively sparse way.

A designer operating in the early twenty-first century must question the staggering number of things they are helping to create, some of which can be devalued to the status of pollutants. The

logjam of colorful visual stimuli, the repetitive “pressed out” nature of objects, the notion of built in obsolescence, the responsibility of care and disposal lead to thoughts of re-evaluation and minimalism.

Some thoughts by Leo Babauth taken from [<http://mnmlist.com/about/>]

The minimalist life:

- It's one that is stripped of the unnecessary, to make room for that which gives you joy.
- It's a removal of clutter in all its forms, leaving you with peace and freedom and lightness.
- A minimalist eschews the mindset of more, of acquiring and consuming and shopping, of bigger is better, of the burden of stuff.
- A minimalist instead embraces the beauty of less, the aesthetic of sparseness, and a life of contentedness in what we need and what makes us truly happy.
- A minimalist realizes that acquiring stuff doesn't make us happy. That earning more and having more are meaningless. That filling your life with busy-ness and freneticism isn't desirable, but something to be avoided.
- A minimalist values quality, not quantity, in all forms.

Now it is prescient to re-evaluate our lifestyle because for the first time there are two important reasons for doing so. There is an international recognition of diminishing resources and pollution. There is also what I call the “holograph

phenomenon”. We can now give substance without possession through the digital world. A well-decorated mind can now become a space to live in. We can reach out for sophisticated imagery and bring it in over the Internet. A few years ago we could not conceive of a life without our music [stacks of CDs] or our books [everywhere and restricting access] now physical possession could be a thing of the past, relevant flip side to sustainability argument is what objects are important to us and what objects are valuable? This ‘value’ an object has will then help to dictate its place within the fabric of the users life. Often creating a meaningful bond and as a byproduct, sustainable behavior.

‘Schemer’ [<http://artofmanliness.com/2009/10/11/go-small-or-go-home-in-praise-of-minimalism/>]

“The great men I knew didn’t care about having much, but what they did possess had value. Whether by connection to a time, place or person, the things in their life meant something. An old pocket watch, a beautifully engraved humidior, a good pair of work boots that had lasted a lifetime – well crafted . . . quality. And though they had value the possessions of these men were held onto loosely, they seemed to understand that life was like a handful of sand, the tighter you squeeze the less you can hold.”

“At the end of my life what will my children and their children find as they search through my belongings? Boxes upon boxes of useless items once trendy and exciting now just a burden to be thrown out, or a few heartfelt belongings to be passed down through the generations? Not things to be held captive, but meaningful items to be used and enjoyed and eventually passed on to someone else.”

It is interesting to speculate on what these ‘heirloom’ products of the future might be. Could we ever conceive of a world with a hand-me-down mobile phone or computer? I am skeptical, but ever hopeful. What I am sure of is quality and purpose, with these two attributes; products can see past the fads and the fashions and confidently place themselves in any time and with any user. A user merely ‘looking after’ an object for a lifetime or a product wearing in and not out.

### **Chapter 3**

Empowerment through constraint and rules (how things don’t work)

I have exercised an eclectic brief thus far in the mosaic of thoughts I have about the creative process. The idea of a cerebral database, of important images, some speculation as to why these images resonate in a minor or major way, the role of emotion (nostalgia) as an aid to storage, the purity of the process and the need for simplicity to maintain an uncluttered focus on what is important.

Now it is time to look at framework and rules as an energizing process. Historically some of the greatest human endeavors have arisen out of the most restricted formats, it is almost as though these limitations paradoxically set free the imagination, examples are, Haiku poetry, baroque religious music, ecclesiastical painting, renaissance architecture to mention but a few. It is only in the late 19th century we see concepts of artistic freedom arise and a conscious will to challenge authority and set ones own standards and pathways. The whole process became more difficult and challenging without reference.

The 20th century became the age of the curator seeking threads of meaning in what sometimes appears to be random motion. The responsibilities of the modern creator become larger as it is incumbent upon the artist to create the philosophy as well as the object. We must therefore put the potent factor of philosophy and creation into the mix of design authorship. Show how objects can hold and distribute the messages of the designer through to a wider audience, even through mass production.

This can only happen through the understanding of the designer. Once the mystery is removed from the creation of objects the consumer will understand and bond more easily with the objects around them. I touched on this connectedness in the introduction of this research and in the iron example (fig 4) but I think it is worth mentioning its importance again.



(fig 5a, b)



Some of the restricted formats I have given myself as design exercises, are to address the objects around me, ones that I use everyday and those, which I feel, are unclear. It is remarkable just how many things have followed a single line of development, dictated by previous examples. For instance the bench top oven is a box with two heating elements,

thermostat and timer. But when you take it apart it becomes so much more. Countless pieces, springs and other superfluous elements (fig 5a, b), I would love to strip back and clarify these objects showing the consumer what it really is they are buying.

### The morality of appropriation

This is the gnawing anxiety that confronts all designers. Where do the coordinates of inspiration and intellectual property sit on the graph of creative morality? This is a relevant consideration when the aims of this study may challenge and





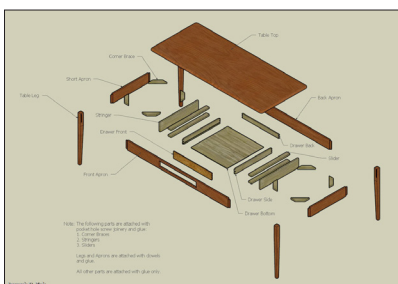
stretch conventional proprietary values and may seem to license and validate plagiarism. In science and medicine there has been a long-standing tradition of freedom of information only recently under challenge from commercial imperatives. The work of others is absorbed, appropriately acknowledged and embellished without complaint; indeed the use of one's ideas by others could give pleasure. There are many examples of this in the world of design but there are moral inhibitors because of a failure to acknowledge the communal nature of the creative processes and the use of judgment criteria based on notions of originality.

(fig 6a, b)

How do you feel about this example? (Fig 6a, b) Two chairs, seemingly the same in all but style and material. One is by an unknown designer circa 1860; the other is from Dutch contemporary designer Piet Hein Eek. There can be little doubt as to which came first. I believe Hein Eek's intentions to be honorable and an acceptable interpretation of an existing idea.

In our world however the term "derivative" could be used to devalue this thoughtful reinterpretation of an interesting concept with modern materials and a simple style that makes it graceful and timeless.

Charles and Ray Eames used the newly amassed knowledge of the plywood aircraft industry during and after the Second World War to innovate the world of furniture (fig 7a,b next page). By realising the benefits of this new technology and its place within a new context, they were able to introduce it to everyday products such as culturally relevant, strong, flexible, lightweight furniture (Fig 7c next page). Much of which is still around today. Their creative process was a similar one of recognition and adaptation; although it seems less obvious it is really just another angle. It is interesting to think that the application of a technique or idea is where the true 'innovation' lies. It is the designers role to recognize these elements existing all around them and bring them to new, relevant situations.

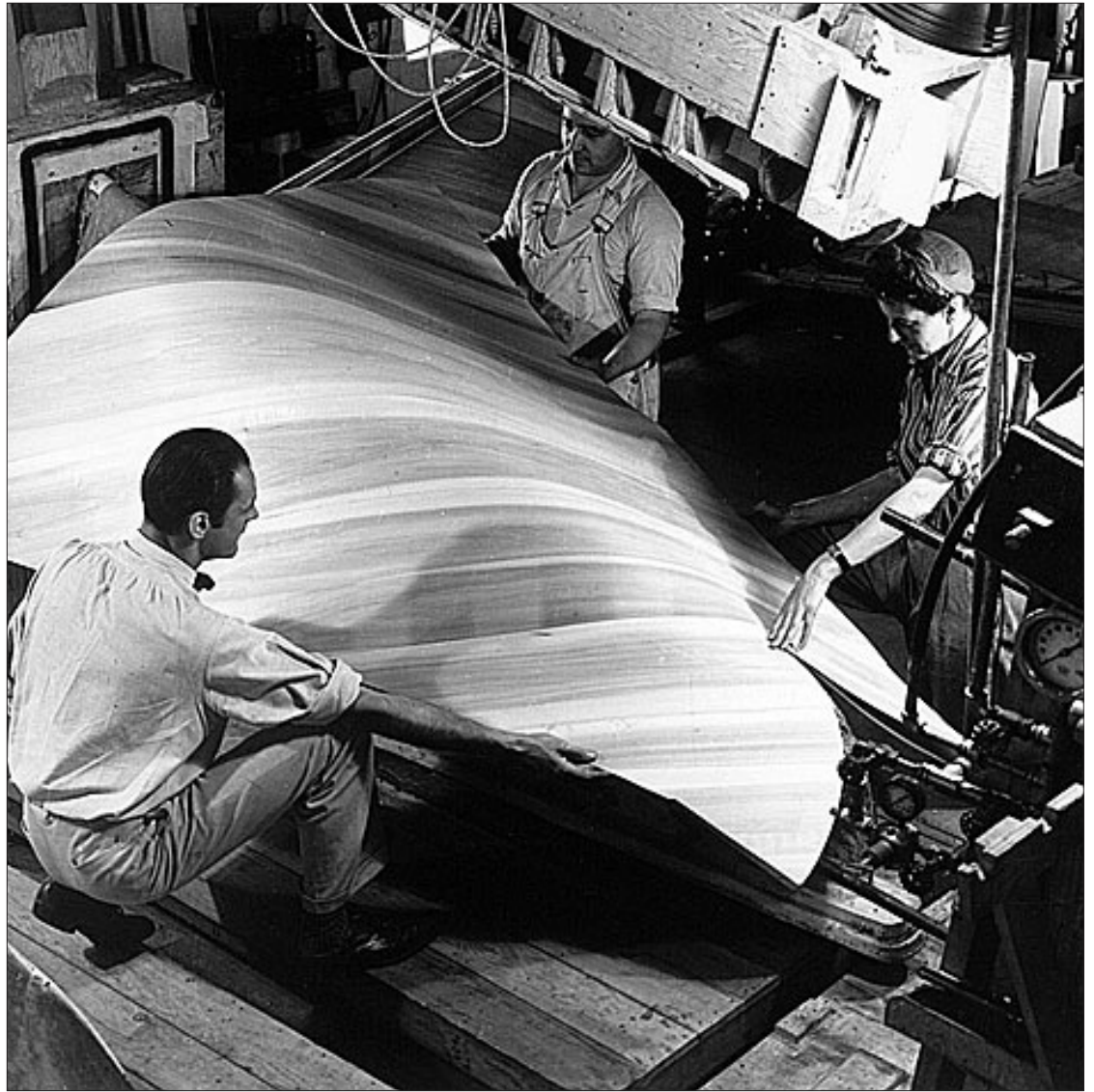


(Fig 8a)

Sometimes adaptations of traditional methods create objects that fail to correctly fit a new context or misinterpret a fundamental principal giving a false message to consumers. Shown here (Fig 8a) is a traditional mortise and tenon joint table (something any woodworker views with an almost spiritual

(fig 7a)





(fig 7b)



(fig 7c)



(Fig 8b)

reverence as a solution blending technique and material relevance) this form shaping joint has been replaced by IKEA with an insubstantial metal bracket (Fig 8b) in the quest for convenience and packability. It is a poor solution which ignores tension and leverage requirements. The archetypal table is what it is because of the natural evolution of the mortise and tenon joint. Its shape is dictated by the method of making. It is what Enzo Mauri would call, an essential form.

IKEA is in a powerful position of communication; it is trying to be too much to too many people, attempting to hit price points in sacrifice of quality. If you look at the modern bent wood furniture in their range its quality and ethos is much better suited than that of the period farm furniture. These latter pieces were never meant to be flat packed and cookie cut. By forcing them into this mould you are perpetuating this false information to the consumer.

## Chapter 4

### \_Searching for why.

This chapter is about the method for collecting and dissecting of images into understandable categories. In order to gain further insight to the elements which make them attractive to designers. The goal of this is to give these images a framework of reference so they can be easily viewed and used as informative sources by myself and other interested designers.

Grounded Theory has been a useful research method for me in collecting and analyzing my visual research data. It was 'developed' by Glaser & Strauss in the 1960s. It differs from typical research formulations, which usually rely on information review. Whether that is literature or case studies, which then lead to the shaping of a hypothesis or concept. This hypothesis is then put to the test by real world experiments.

Grounded Theory however, inspects the actualities in the real world and addresses this information with no preconceived hypothesis. Data collection in this case was of over 500 collected images from sources ranging from flea markets, museums, travel, to Internet image databases. Analysis of this kind of data in quantitative research was my first impulse which left me with a charm less series of pie charts and bland data that sabotaged the whole concept. Whereas Grounded Theory analysis enabled me to search out the concepts behind the actualities by looking for codes, then concepts and finally categories. These are explained in the following section.

Goal - The goal of this method was to try and better understand what it was I was looking at and what meaning it had to me on a personal level. Why had I chosen these images and objects? Were the categories explainable to others?

Method - I realized quite quickly that with any collection it is essential to exercise good curatorial and house keeping skills. The way we look and reflect on these images is as important as the images themselves. It was clearly necessary to ask harder questions that came closer to the selective criteria for the objects that were chosen.

Grouping - I came up with an eclectic and idiosyncratic list of headings which I felt best represented starting points for what I hope would be an inspirational journey, after considerable reflection I selected the following categories.

Initial Analysis Results and categories with example illustrations



-Clever use of material;  
This could be a situation where materials have been put to a specific and uniquely fitting Use. (For example this industrial wheels cog teeth are made from wood so if any stress is exerted in the system it will break here first).

(Fig 9a)



-DIY  
People solving problems as they arise in everyday situations. (This glass door has no handle, someone has fitted a rope. This is a clear message; you will never push a door with a rope hanging from it.

(Fig 9b)



-Detailing

Details, which become pivotal in making messages for objects. (The pants shown here a rubber coated around the cuff so water won't wick up your leg on a wet day)

(Fig 9c)



-Heft and Solidarity;

Difficult to explain this as it became more of an instinctual area of collection (for me this badminton post sums it up, it is strong heavy and mobile) for the dictionary heft means to feel and understand the weight of something in your hand.

(Fig 9d)



-Multi use;

Objects which do more than one thing. (Here is a spanner with a wrench to attack any bolt)

(Fig 9e)



-Clarity of message, form or material;  
How does the object explain what it does without words. (The fat separator illustrates this beautifully; fat floats to the top of you stock and you can drain from the bottom)

(Fig 9f)



-Joinery;  
How do the pieces fit together? (This spider weaves its web within a joint for strength)

(Fig 9g)



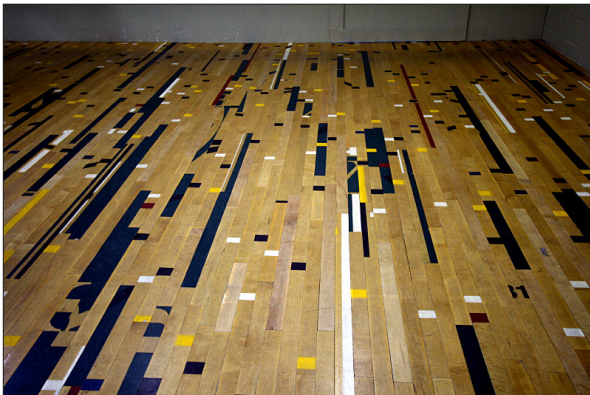
-Nostalgia +;  
Nostalgia used in a responsible way.

(Fig 9h)



-Nostalgia -;  
Nostalgia used in an irresponsible way

(Fig 9i)



-Use of Colour;  
Does colour play a significant role. (This old gymnasium floor has been put back at random to hint at its past life)

(Fig 9j)



-Positive Tropism;  
Does the object have some kind of magical lure, unexplainable like a moth to a flame. (To me the medicine ball has this charm, it begs to be touched)

(Fig 9k)



-Function shaped;  
Has the function of the object directly shaped its aesthetics?  
(This antique hearing aid tells us exactly what it does)

(Fig 9l)





-Space, dwelling interior;  
Places to inhabit. (If a boat can keep water out on the ocean it can keep you dry on land as well).

(Fig 9m)



-Hidden story of use;  
Is there more to this object, a story that needs to be told to explain its use. (Scoop has a hollow cavity in the handle filled with an anti-freeze solution keeping the scoop head at a temperature slightly above freezing point).

(Fig 9n)



-Collapsibility;  
Does the object transform? (In this case the camping shelf is like a tent structure)

(Fig 9o)

Some images fall into two or more categories and therefore create interesting points of cross-reference, a place where inspiration tracks collide. This developed into an idea for a website which would run in parallel to my object making. I will explain how the design process for this evolved in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### \_Design Strategies

Enzo Mauri says that the designer is the guardian of a collective knowledge and that the project often “involves the slight adjustment of details, because the structural functionality of objects has been regulated by ancient use.”

Pg 110 'Super Normal' sensations of the Ordinary. Nato Fukasawa & Jasper Morrison

In this chapter I will visualise the outcomes from my research. Showing developments of ideas into experiments and illustrating how these thoughts have been used in developing new objects. These experiments are further dissected and explained so as to reveal the importance they had in my overall approach. I will address; an online data base, in the form of an interactive website for the images I have collected, the role of nostalgia and experiments carried out. I will also analyze the role camping as a metaphor for domestic life, had on my designs and design 'updates'.

### \_Website.

The meeting of these 'inspiration tracks' caused a mini revelation and I suddenly became aware that there needed to be a way to share and 'open source' this massed knowledge, and findings to a larger audience. Most importantly one of designers and design researchers. I have a passion to form a community of similar thinkers and begin to get other designers interested in their surroundings, stimulating the process of inspiration and contribution to the content.

I began talks with graphic designers and mentors about the possibility of a website proposal to accompany my project and try to map some of the paths that these images were taking. Several ways to do this have come up, and have opened new, innovative and exciting leads in possible ways of understanding how designers might think through images. Going some of the way to the question of a systematic organized inspiration as a tool for design research.

This website has developed to a major component in the project and thesis alike. Many of the images throughout the thesis can be followed online and will better explain and document the ongoing fascination with visual stimuli as inspiration.

It is interesting to speculate that 'open sourcing' this kind of knowledge will enable ideas to build on each other in much the same way as they do in the fields of medicine and the sciences. By trying to clarify inspiration, a designer can use it as a problem-solving tool. To be truly innovative designers must have access to all this knowledge and not be scared of retribution through experimentation and adaptation.

‘...The perfect shape deals with everything that contributes to its production, which is infinite; that basically means all the knowledge in the real world and in the potential world. We cannot forget that every invention contains the history that leads us to it, like man’s process of knowledge.’ Enzo Mauri Apartmento Issue 4 Pg 43

Enzo Mauri often talks of the ‘essential’, perfect shape being one of absolute necessity. Born from the richness of everyday. In this quote he alludes to this thought of a common body of human knowledge. And in much the same way as I think about the website being a tool for this.

After categorizing all the images I then embarked on the task of pulling out ones which had particular relevance to themes which I was interested in, Positive tropism, Self reliance, Nostalgia, clever use of materials etc. However as I mentioned before collisions started to emerge and images started to cross paths linking up to create a web. However interesting this was for me it was clear, it was an objective view and one that would be hard to explain to other users.

This necessity made me reconsider the grouping categories. I printed out an initial album of 50 images and analysed the function down to a specific verb for each action or suggestion in the photograph.

These new themes are: wedge, lever, catch / scoop, swing, slide, contain/separation, split, twist, observation / story telling, new use / re-use, protect, hang, reflect, pattern

With this framework it became easier to assign images to categories and have overlaps which made more sense. It also opens up the format of the website to enable users to contribute to the content. This I see as crucial aspect for growth and development.

To view a demo of the website go to this link [www.thingscurated.com](http://www.thingscurated.com) and play the QuickTime video, or wait till the website is live later in 2010 / 2011.

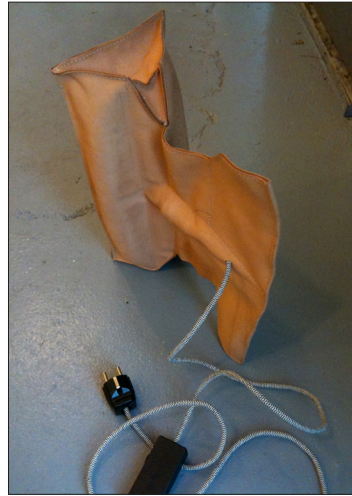
## Nostalgia Experiments

In order to try and learn more of the theoretical research into the phenomena of nostalgia I decided to experiment with physical models of some of the issues interesting me. These were; material choices and old techniques, positive tropism, and false nostalgia / association.

### Case 1; new forms, familiar techniques

Through my research I became interested in the technique of working leather. In particular naturally vegetable tanned leather. Which has historical context in sad-

dle making and other industrial uses such as belt drives and shock absorption. It has been replaced in the industrial fields by rubber and plastics. Another quality I found interesting is its transformability into compounded shapes by application of steam and heat. In this plasticized state it becomes a truly remarkable material with many of the same properties as petroleum plastics.



(Fig 10a, b)

I wanted to experiment with this elasticity and try and reintroduce this forgotten material and method into something as mundane as a household lamp. In the hope I may invoke curiosity in the viewer. Also questioning why we constantly turn to plastics for three-dimensional shapes. (Fig 10a, b)

Case 2; Positive tropism, ball doorstop

One of my early, grounded theory categories was ‘positive tropism’ this was something that continues to interest me. It is the curious effect certain objects; forms and materials have on the human interaction.

Positive tropism is an obsolete name for the automatic orientation of an organism toward a source of stimulation. For example a moth to flame, plant to sun. And the repeated stroking of certain surfaces. For example a river stone, fur, leather, moss.

Why do certain materials hold a feeling of ‘Positive tropism’ is it some kind of primitive response not understood but felt, somehow part of the mystery of being a living organism?

Tropisms are typically associated with plants (although not necessarily restricted to them). Where an organism is capable of directed physical movement or activity in response to a specific stimulus it is more likely to be regarded by behaviorists as a ‘taxis’ (directional response) or a ‘kinensis’ (non-directional response).

In English, the word tropism is occasionally used in a disparaging way to indicate an action done without cognitive thought: However, “tropism” in this sense has a proper, although non-scientific, meaning as an innate tendency, natural inclination, or propensity to act in a certain manner.

I felt the humble, original; leather medicine ball (fig 9k) had this quality. To me this is an intriguing, strangely alluring object. I wanted to change as little as possible to make this a functional item for the home. A doorstop seemed a fitting and amusing place to situate such an object.



(Fig 9k)



In my interpretation, one panel of the ball has been inverted to form an inward facing wedge, which will ‘hug’ the door edge. Exercise has been pushed aside in recent times as have much of the traditional equipment, maybe its fitting this, ‘dumb’ solid, but beautiful object finds a new life at the edge of the door.

(Fig 11a)



Case 3; the bag experiment.

During an Image finding research trip to a Berlin flea market, I happened across what I suspected to be a German military backpack from WWII (Fig12a). The first thing that struck me was the material. The bags exterior was made entirely of raw cow hide (fur left on) this is an unusual choice for a backpack of this age, but even more so of this military origin. I felt it must have been for some practical purpose and continued to research the provenance when I took it home.

(Fig 12a)

After some digging around I found it did come from military origins, and on

closer examinations revealed further clues to its specific use. I came to the conclusion it was a two-part transmission case, which was worn on the back. It could be separated to exclude coding papers and the bulk of the machine, both being useless without each other. The fur was left intact as a natural water repellent.



The new backpack (Fig 12b, c) is an experimentation in construction methods, material choice, and ‘nostalgic’ clues. I have tried to both encapsulate and abstract the form of the back pack reworking the construction method as one continuous piece stitching, this makes it easy to produce and improves water tightness. I have also incorporated historical features such as natural padded shoulder strap and the wooden connector rod whilst augmenting the shape of the backpack structure to better suit the ergonomics of modern use. Each of the side pockets can be interchanged and attach using the once universal one-inch connecting

(Fig 12b,c)

diamond. This feature also helps to influence the nostalgic elements of the design, whilst the form and material choice (an old inflatable air bed) almost pervert the concept of a camping backpack.

## Camping as a metaphor

Through constantly reviewing my visual research, I became aware that many of my most interesting images were coming from the camping world. I began to think about this, and it raised some questions. Could there be a place for this design language in a domestic setting? Perhaps there is relevance because of our ever more nomadic lives, or possibly due to the clever and extreme use of material, often pushing the limits set in other areas of design. It may also be partly the role of nostalgia, what better use of the term. Camping seems so nostalgic; it's almost by definition. Well for me anyway.

However it seemed much of modern camping equipment missed the mark in such an important way, quality. Ideas and concepts seem fitting but often quality ends up being fleeting and just for once a year or even once a lifetime events then relinquished, broken in a pile.

What if 'inspiration' is taken from the camping world to create new products for a new context? Many of the human connections I felt were lacking from modern domestic objects can still be found in camping equipment. For instance, camping equipment needs to be adaptable, flexible in use, clear in purpose and easy to transport. All elements required for our modern lifestyles. In my belief these ideas can be reworked and still be true to their camping heritage, even responsibly evoking the nostalgic element as a way of attracting and fusing the user.



(Fig 13a)

### Case 1; the outdoor heater

In Australia, outdoor heaters are widely used both in commercial, and residential environments. Because the seasons are relatively temperate and people enjoy spending the bulk of their time outdoors, these gas heaters become common sight for 2-3 months of the year. In my mind they are over complicated, heavy and visually dominating not to mention expensive.

At a camping store I came across a camping equivalent. It was refreshingly unfussy and practical. Comprising of a gas burning 'element', hose and gas bottle (Fig 13a). The heating element attached to the bottle to form a stand and the assembled unit stood about waist height.

In my design I extend the reach of the burning element to enable it to tower over the environment also preventing accidental contact with the heater. Wheels have been added to improve mobil-



(Fig 13b)

ity. And user interaction has been encouraged by making the post attachment universal. Now, any strong appropriately sized beam can be used as the extension arm. (Fig 13b)

Case 2; Trivet Lid

Another area of interest from camping that I felt had relevance to modern domestic life was cooking. As living spaces become more compact, people desire greater flexibility from kitchen utensils. This is often addressed in a clumsy, gimmicky way often creating products of poor quality.

For centuries humanity has been cooking and traveling in the natural environment and many interesting solutions have been used to combat these very same modern needs. All they need is application to a new environment.

The example I chose to work with was the Dutch cooking oven, a large cast iron pot you can cook with directly on the fire. The lid is removable and can be used as a serving trivet. This duality of use and economy of materials struck me as a relevant idea for domestic use.

In my first examples I endeavored to remake the entire unit, pot, lid, handle etc. Trying to cram as many updates as possible into the overall design. This resulted in an unclear confusing object. I was concerned that the validity of my trivet innovation would not reach my audience and be lost by my lack of knowledge in producing quality cookware.

This led me to see if I could simply add my new requirements to an existing product of which I knew to be of good quality and readily available. The Le Creuset pot has been made in France since 1925 and is a great example of a 'design classic'. The construction is cast iron covered with silica enamel. It can be used on any heating surface, and is extraordinarily durable, often becoming an 'heirloom' type product, being either passed down from generation to generation or, at least held onto for a lifetime. The company has changed little in the design of their classic casserole pot (a best seller) from its conception in 1935, and not at all since 1956.



(Fig 13c)

The current pot is considered an excellent performer and used in both commercial and residential kitchens around the western world. One of the key draw cards to its design is the suggestion, that because of the beauty of form and material you can serve this pot directly on the table. It does however require a heavy-duty trivet or stand so as to not damage the surface. The Creuset Company separately sells such an item at 55 euro.

In my design (Fig 13c,d) the user attaches the trivet to the lid without any need for modification to the original. It is intended to be visually



(Fig 13c)

different from the existing pot but still complimentary, asking the question ‘why was this not here all along’. Now the pot can be carried to the table and served in one design solution. And my idea for a trivet-incorporated lid can reach a wider, already established user group.

### Case 3; camping lantern



(Fig 14a)

This duality of use in camping equipment is most obvious in lighting, many of which incorporate ingenious solutions to accomplish the different roles lighting has to play in the outdoors. An elegant solution is the slide lantern, this dual use lantern transforms from a direct to ambient light source with a simple sliding movement.

(Fig 14a)

My interpretation of this is showing this solutions relevance to a domestic setting. In this case by converting an original task lamp such as the Anglepoise into an ambient light source for other uses. This update is meant as a comment and homage to the brilliance of the original design.

### Time honored design updates

This design exercise is to take ‘classic’ design icons and update them for a modern use. Sometimes the outcome is playful and sometimes profound. The purpose of this is to enable people to open their eyes to the surroundings and look to everyday objects for inspiration. It is like an homage to that which has been before and in some cases passed on and out of our lives.

### Case 1; Electric kettle

The history of the electric kettle is rich. Its move from the stovetop, to the electric variety commonly found today is of interest to me. This curiosity led me to dismantling a cheap, common, plastic electric kettle to see what was behind all the cladding and reveal the working components.

To my surprise this is a remarkably simple object. Consisting of no more than a heating element inside a vessel. But why is there so much plastic? Why was plastic even considered as a material for use in this product? Even in the more expensive stainless steel examples it is difficult to find a kettle without some plastic in the exterior.



Personally plastic and boiling water don't fit on the same material for purpose spectrum. The lineage of kettle from stovetop to plastic bench top is a confusing material story. If you look to secondhand shops you will see many discarded varieties of this construction. The yellowing plastic inside the jug telling a concerning story about what might be being 'leached' from the material to the water you drink.

Initial design proposals tried to combat this by looking to the material superseding plastic in kitchenware, which led me to traditional enamelware. This is a tin, which is glazed and backed in silica in much the same technique as porcelain. The result is a strong, non-chemically conductive, colorful, durable material, and in my mind ideal for an electric kettle.

Similarly to the cookware, I found it difficult to produce in this technique, as it requires complex tooling and specialized techniques. I did however; begin to notice an icon emerging in the existing jugs available both new and second hand. It seemed that they fell into a common category. Teapot, coffee jug and tea billy can. Again they were mainly sold to the outdoor market as with many of the other items I was seeing.

The coffee jug appeared best suited to be converted into an electric kettle. I wanted to introduce the heating element in a similar fashion to that of the plastic variety and see if this new 'mash up' of old icon and new use would fit. Hopefully raising questions as to why we were so eager to turn to plastic in the first place. The bottom portion is sealed in an industrial silicone dip to protect the bench surface and waterproof the cord and connecting points.

#### Case 2; Aluminum dustpan.

My first interaction with the Aluminum dustpan was during an exchange program in the USA, I was working in a wood workshop and was very impressed by the large, robust pressed aluminum dustpans. These are ubiquitous tools for large industrial spaces and few people shared my admiration for these clear well made objects.

It is only now that I am forced to find designs I admire and to update these, does this memory come to mind. I noticed that my mother recently purchased a standing up dust pan and broom for her home so she can sweep without bending down, she also commented that it would be useful for leaves in the garden. The reality is that it is of poor quality and cannot stand the weight of anything more than a cat's hairball. The update in this case will be an extension arm for the broom and the pan so each can find a new home in the domestic setting.



(fig 15a)

### Case 3; Triplex lighter

The original design for this lighter, like many of the objects mentioned here is still available today. It is the German equivalent to the Zippo lighter. Running on fuel and flints, it is a basic and reliable system.

When researching lighters I found a large number of enthusiasts all willing to share stories and collection with me. What I discovered to be a unanimous love was the mechanical qualities of such lighters. They are like small machines, requiring maintenance and care to operate correctly. This is what I believe creates such a strong bond between user and object in this case.



(Fig 16a)

How can an object such as the triplex lighter (fig 16a) be used today? Smoking has declined rapidly which despite being good thing for health, it is sure to see items such as this recline into oblivion. It is my desire to create an extension lighting arm to a shop bought original design triplex lighter, so that one may use it as a stovetop lighter or barbecue lighter. This may at first seem trivial and whimsical but if you consider how many disposable lighters still get bought and used for this purpose, you could relies it can be a very responsible and good use for an aging but still relevant piece of technology.

### Case 5; Tolix A56 Chair

In 1907 Xavier Pauchard was the first Frenchman to perform galvanizing. In 1930 his sheet-metal company Tolix expanded to design and make furniture for cafes and restaurants. The A chair was born out of material understanding, and is a great example of technique and industrial knowledge informing the aesthetes of the design outcome.30 years later his Son added arms to the chair as he saw its popularity grow.

Interestingly this new chair is icon of this design. (fig 17) It has seen a rebirth in recent times, and is as common a site in French flea markets as in new department stores. It is now also becoming increasing present in the home environment, not only as outdoor seating but also inside. One drawback to this is the cold feel and touch the unique galvanized steel has on the skin. It is my intention to like those before me, make an addition in the form of a 'tailored' cushion. One that reflects and highlights its ingenious method of production and gives it new purpose inside the domestic setting.



(Fig 17)

## \_Conclusion

Throughout the course of this project I have undergone a massive shift in my personal perspective on design and my process of creation. It has been a humbling journey into the very depths (and shallows) of human knowledge and I have glimpsed the minds of geniuses (both recognized and unrecognized) along the way.

Whilst to some this may seem like a self-involved project with some inconclusive thoughts, it is in my opinion a worthy addition to design research knowledge. I have strived (through the introduction of the website) to further continue and enhance the work of my design idols such as Achille Castillione and Enzo Mauri. I believe access to this design knowledge is of vast importance nonetheless. I have left territories unexplored and gates open so as to fuel further investigation. The added element of the website I hope will give this project the real depth and meaning it deserves. Once the knowledge and information reaches a wider audience online, real connections and innovation will blossom.

As for the objects presented with this project, they are just one element of this design process. They are to be seen as humble additions to the time honored objects they adorn, a tribute to these often under acknowledged works.

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