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Dieter Rams: Apple has achieved something I never did

As Apple prepares for its latest announcement Dieter Rams, Braun's designer and Apple's inspiration, writes exclusively for The Daily Telegraph.

Matt Warman reports.

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Designer Dieter Rams, pictured with a Braun radio on some Vitsoe units and (inset) a portable Braun radio he designed along with an original Jonathan Ive-designed iPod Photo: REX

On Monday, Apple will announce what's next for its globally popular range of iPods, iPhones, tablets and computers, and the strand running through all of it will be peerless design, integrating software and hardware to produce devices and services that are popular because they are simple.

The man behind that is Briton Jonathan Ive, officially the senior vice president of industrial design at Apple, and he has long acknowledged Dieter Rams as his inspiration.

Rams, who has never spoken at any length about Apple, was the man behind Braun when it made a host of classic gadgets from radios to juicers, and he's the subject of a forthcoming celebration published by Phaidon, to which Ive has written the foreword.

When Ive talks about Rams designing “surfaces that were without apology, bold, pure, perfectly-proportioned, coherent and effortless”, he could equally be talking about the iPod. “No part appeared to be either hidden or celebrated, just perfectly considered and completely appropriate in the hierarchy of the product’s details and features. At a glance, you knew exactly what it was and exactly how to use it.”

Ive goes on to say that “what Dieter Rams and his team at Braun did was to produce hundreds of wonderfully conceived and designed objects: products that were beautifully made in high volumes and that were broadly accessible”. Little wonder, then, that the calculator on the iPhone and iPod Touch is so clearly inspired by Rams’ version for Braun.

Today Rams is best known for his range of minimalist shelves, made by Vitsoe, and for his influence on Ive. As the Apple designer puts it, Rams “remains utterly alone in producing a body of work so consistently beautiful, so right and so accessible”.

For his part, writing on Apple for the first time, Rams is muted. He says simply that Apple’s products are now, a bit like Second World War rations, queued for around blocks all over the world.

He argues that Apple are one of the very few brands, almost unique in the modern world, who are not devaluing the word “designer”.

Dieter Rams on Apple

I have always regarded Apple products – and the kind words Jony Ive has said about me and my work – as a compliment. Without doubt there are few companies in the world that genuinely understand and practise the power of good design in their products and their businesses. Probably the first example was Peter Behrens and his work for the German company AEG, in the early part of the 20th century. He might be considered to be the founder of corporate identity. Adriano Olivetti was close behind as he transformed his father’s Italian company, Olivetti. Having become aware of this scarcity at the start of my career in the 1950s, I am sorry to report that the situation does not seem to have improved to this day.

I have always observed that good design can normally only emerge if there is a strong relationship between an entrepreneur and the head of design. At Apple this situation exists - between Steve Jobs and Jony Ive. This was the case at Braun where I always reported to Erwin and Artur Braun or, after their departure, the chairman of the board. It is the same in my relationship with the furniture manufacturer, Vitsoe, where I worked closely with the founder Niels Vitsoe and, since his death, Mark Adams - a period now spanning more than 50 years.

I am always fascinated when I see the latest Apple products. Apple has managed to achieve what I never achieved: using the power of their products to persuade people to queue to buy them. For me, I had to queue to receive food at the end of World War II. That’s quite a change.

I am troubled by the devaluing of the word ‘design’. I find myself now being somewhat embarrassed to be called a designer. In fact I prefer the German term, Gestalt-Ingenieur. Apple and Vitsoe are relatively lone voices treating the discipline of design seriously in all corners of their businesses. They understand that design is not simply an adjective to place in front of a product’s name to somehow artificially en-

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hance its value. Ever fewer people appear to understand that design is a serious profession; and for our future welfare we need more companies to take that profession seriously.

You can pre-order Phaidon's Dieter Rams: As Little Design as Possible [here](#)