



Glimmer

How Design Can Transform Your Life and Maybe Even the World

By Warren Berger
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The reaction against overdesigned and overpriced products from the 1990s, along with mounting economic and environmental concerns, has created the

need for the redesign of—everything. So says designer Bruce Mau, the central character in Warren Berger’s profile of innovators whose products have helped solve a variety of business, social and personal problems. From his research and interviews with creative thinkers, Berger presents their intriguing projects and establishes ten principles that readers can use to spark “the glimmer of possibility and potential...of an innovative idea or a life-changing plan.” Mau’s design-can-do-anything philosophy is at the heart of Berger’s intent to encourage citizen designers to see the world as one big design project and make it better.

Their projects include interests with water transport, the aging population, transportation and shelter and often begin with life experiences. Van Phillips’s glimmer moment started as an idea to design a prosthetic foot for himself and employed one of Berger’s design principles “Jump fences.” By connecting the disparate mechanics of a Chinese C-sword, a diving board and the hind leg of a cheetah, Phillips developed a distinctive C-shaped leg and foot refined enough for an Olympic contender in 2008. Another principle, “Embrace constraints” describes the design of a tool by Jock Brandis used to shell peanuts that needed to be cheaply reproducible to improve livelihoods. The device is now used throughout Africa and Asia.

The book’s underlying tone is one of optimism, a quality Berger finds all designers have in common, but he also includes the setbacks that portray more practical moments. A particularly clever design is Steve Mykolyn’s “15 Below” coat for the homeless. It could be folded to fit in a pocket, used as a pillow and stuffed with newspapers as insulation from the cold. Berger reveals the temperature tests in freezers and the problems Mykolyn encountered with the coat’s distribution.

Some homeless people became angry, either from feeling an outsider was trying to fix their problem or from not knowing what to do with the new design, and Berger writes, “Designing a better world gets complicated.”

With a gift for storytelling and a graceful way of connecting the innovations with his design principles, Berger encourages designers to act. For his final principle, “Begin anywhere,” he includes valuable process steps to get going and suggests charting the moments of each day for opportunities to make design improvements a reality. — R.H.

