

the design. In my own field of product design, designers are torn between the requirement to create a product that is technically viable and ergonomically sound and displays marketable value and the need to make it visually attractive. The idea that design should always be about the creation of something beautiful has deep historical roots: the very first professional “industrial designers” were needed because the first manufactured homewares produced during the industrial revolution were often overdecorated monstrosities (Heskett 1985). Until that time, before the advent of mass production, middle-class culture had been restrained in its tastes by the costs of craftsmanship. Ornaments were expensive, and thus were a status symbol owned by the few. But manufacturing suddenly made ornamentation very cheap, releasing a veritable flood of curls and patterns on every available surface. Manufacturers kept heaping it on, believing the more, the better. The 1853 world’s fair in London (held in the spectacularly modern Crystal Palace) was the first venue that brought these fruits of industry together, and the result was shocking to the beholder. The criticism in the world press was appropriately scathing. The exhibition served as a wake-up call for the need of a new aesthetic for industrial products, and spawned the profession of industrial design. Despite all the years of evolution away from these early form-focused beginnings, the image of beautification still accompanies the popular notion of design. As Foucault (2002) has shown, although ideas might follow one another in quick succession, the underlying “discourse” in society changes only very gradually. He was talking about mental health, but he could have taken design as an example.

*Design is not all about ideas*

This is another great and intransigent myth, and to be honest, it is one that the design professions have been reluctant to dispel. The popular notion about design is that it works like this: client gives brief to designer, brilliant idea is born, client is happy, designer becomes rich and famous. This virtually never happens. Only novice designers who haven’t yet developed the skill and amassed the experience to work in a much more deliberate way will have to rely on “the idea” to save them, resorting to the superficial scattergun approach of brainstorming to hopefully catch it (Lawson and Dorst 2009). Such a trial-and-error process is time-consuming, confusing, and hugely inefficient. When creativity techniques like brainstorming are used in a professional design context, it is always in a very specific manner, to explore solution possibilities within a constrained setting (see Sutton and Hargardon 1996; Sutton and Kelley 1997). Professional designers do not focus on the generation of “the idea”: