



Material ConneXion

THE GLOBAL RESOURCE OF NEW AND INNOVATIVE MATERIALS
FOR ARCHITECTS, ARTISTS, AND DESIGNERS

GEORGE M. BEYLERIAN

ANDREW DENT

EDITED BY ANITA MORYADAS



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LIVING IN A MATERIAL WORLD

Materials surround us.

Everything we hold, everything we see, takes shape thanks to materials. Materials will always be around us. We experience how they are evolving every day.

Look around and you will see the world of materials we frequently take for granted: wood, polymer, glass, ceramic and so on. How often do we notice the variety of textures, finishes and colors? Since materials are everywhere, we rarely pause to truly think about them. And yet they help to sustain our life and increase productivity, and they serve a variety of critical human needs.

We have learned how a great design becomes successful if the right material is selected.

I strongly believe that material equals design.

Material ConneXion was founded to provide innovative materials to specifiers across many diverse industries, from automotive to apparel. This library, with several thousand samples, has become a forum from which to launch new materials and accelerate new business opportunities.

Material ConneXion has created the opportunity for anyone involved in a creative endeavor to learn and find materials and processes to be applied to

their specific field. For everyone from students to executives, the information is provided in a simple and accessible manner, thus creating an international hub where developers and specifiers can meet.

Nowadays the creation of products demands not just affordable prices but quality. In this arena, materials play a very important role.

Materials are not trendy; they are a necessity for the realization of creativity. It is up to everyone to create a better environment by choosing the right material for the right product.

We will always live in a material world.

MICHELE CANIATO

THE POWER OF MATERIALS

The refinement and transformation of raw materials are essential signs of civilization. The earliest tools were derived from materials that were found, developed and fine-tuned over time. Flint, for example, was found to be useful in order to improve the quality of human life by both making the ignition of fire comparatively easy and making the act of cutting possible. Materials – how they were formed and shaped, what was made of and with them – have been one of the essential constants throughout human history.

As our forebears found and shaped materials into tools and other necessary items, they developed 'professions' which were defined by those individuals who knew what materials to use, and how, in order to make objects of utility or beauty.

During the nineteenth century, for instance, craftsmen and -women in France produced baskets made of woven steel wire (page 9). They wove the wire over a 'form', thus producing the shape of the finished product. Contemplating such objects makes us wonder how materials and those who shape them (in one form or other) form civilizations. People who do things with materials not only add to our culture but also, in the process, are able to make a living.

Of course ideas are always changing, and innovations continually transform our lives and cultures. In the West today there are a very few people who are able to make their living just from working with

wire. The same thing is true of basket-weaving: though still prevalent in craft circles, the idea of a basket repairperson has disappeared. In fact numerous materials-based professions simply vanished in the last century. Raw materials and the ways they are processed formed the core of many of those lost (but not forgotten) modes of employment.

Such transformations are ongoing and can be seen in the continuing changes to the world's economy and the evolution of its labor force. China, awakening from strict Communism, has become one of the largest consumer-goods suppliers in the world. While this massive source of labor supplies products at competitive prices, the United States has retained its leading position in the area of high technology. Even if China is building up its own technological resources, the power of American spending on research and development is vastly greater.

For many years I have been observing the flow of interest in, and experimentation on, materials by design professionals and artists. Although not always knowledgeable about the world of science, artists are the most prone to experimenting with new materials and forms, seeking new media to achieve their creative goals. Some are obsessed for extended periods of time, like Picasso with his ceramics and pottery. Others are more aggressive in the use of materials for their 'inventions'.

Let us probe the works of various creative people who have used materials intelligently, provocatively and innovatively. I have personally observed a certain tendency, maybe a natural evolution, in where and how things happen. Just like prehistoric humans who found flint and shaped tools out of it, our cultural evolution has brought us to a world in which material innovation is the major symbol of progress. The 'invention' or selection of a material has much to do with 'winning' at the end of the day in the world of commerce, with distinguishing the ingenious individual from the crowd in art, fashion, buildings and products. Some of these inventions are best analyzed as the wonders of the time in which we live.

Whether it's economic or cultural pressures, or the professions that produce the talent of innovation and the innovators themselves, one needs to observe how things evolve. My own observations have led me to think that artists are usually the first ones to delve into material

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experimentation. There are artists of international fame who have made incredible works with exciting media, as well as artists maybe of lesser fame who have made great creative contributions. There are of course craftsmen, who used not to be considered fine artists, a highly debatable issue best discussed elsewhere. Then there are product designers, who act like artists, creating masterpieces. Benvenuto Cellini was a Renaissance silversmith, but he so excelled at his craft that the cultural world would certainly call him an artist, not a silversmith or a metalworker.

This essay is not about how to label people, and not about the full list of unbelievably talented creators. It is written to help us understand how craft, workmanship and material – all combined – each have an incredible impact on the final 'label' one assigns to a work or product.



WIRE BASKET

A turn-of-the-century wire basket made by hand in France.



It is appropriate to intervene here with an idea that has puzzled many people. It's the old 'fish or fowl' syndrome that arises when trying to define the profile of a multi-talented person with a high level of productivity across several fields. How do we categorize such individuals? Some are trained in many fields; some are not formally trained in any but excel in several (call them 'talented'). Other such 'talented' individuals become bored with their early work and move along to other fields in which they excel (trained or not).

Let's take Michael Graves as an example. My first exposure to Graves was a temporary 'installation' he had done for Sunar at the Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles. It was a most ingenious solution to a temporary need. A brilliant solution. The work was unlike anything else he'd ever done. When I then went to see his new work at the Merchandise Mart in Chicago, I found, much to my surprise, something completely different from his Los Angeles masterpiece. Here was an incredibly visual spatial experience blasting with colors, a maze-like tour of a blend of ancient Egyptian and Assyrian architecture, all combined with the utmost dexterity. All this effort and bravura was the setting for 'contract furniture'. This was a cultural 'trip' that nobody would ever forget. Was it architecture or some other profession for which no description has yet been coined? Shortly thereafter, I discovered Graves' show of beautiful watercolors at the Max Protech Gallery in New York: a reverie of Tuscan and Roman pastoral scenery with

lots of delightful sketches of classic architectural elements.

Is Graves an architect, a painter, a product designer? We are pleasantly baffled. His enormous current success is the myriad of products he has designed for Target. Many members of a mass audience will recognize his name for work he was not formally trained to make. His oeuvre defies simple categorization.

Our second example is the indomitable Gaetano Pesce (his name says he's a FISH – or is he a FOWL?). Pesce has an incredible knack for material experimentation, a form of play with things others haven't tried, or thought to try, before him. His use of materials, sense of symbolism, manipulation of color and reverence for historical references all add up to his genius.

Pesce's original training, as with many other material people of the day, was in architecture. So many Italian architects were trained without the chance to put their skills to work toward buildings, especially post-World War II. Their key to success has often been through industrial design to meet emerging social needs. Hence the strong sense for useful objects of sensual beauty and furnishings that have caused Italy's second Renaissance.

Pesce is an idea man: he knows he's great. Anybody who can create an armchair out of spaghetti must have considerable talent. My first exposure to his early work was possibly the Golgotha



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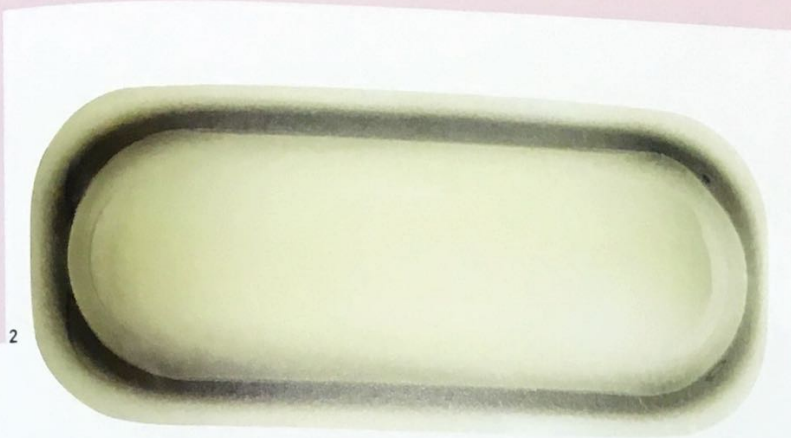
This boom box, created by Philips for Target, has a pearlescent finish.

2 UNTITLED, 1968

Original idea and lustrous finish developed by Craig Kauffman.

3 I FELTRI, 1987

An armchair made of felt, designed by Gaetano Pesce for Cassina, that is an industrial product yet has a hand-made look.



2



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