

THE MEANINGS OF MODERN DESIGN

Peter
Dormer •
The
Meanings
of
Modern
Design •
Towards
the
Twenty-
First
Century

Peter Dormer

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Thames and Hudson

Our Domestic Landscape

produced object is *necessarily* less satisfying to all the senses than a handcrafted one.

It is true, however, that far from all industrial products have anything like the emotive, sensory appeal of the kind of camera described above. The unsatisfactory nature of their being is not necessarily an imperfection in the overall performance, or their finish, and hardly at all in their decoration or the cleverness of their expressiveness. For example, in recent years the injection-moulded plastic 'jug' electric kettle has become popular; it can safely boil a small or a large amount of water and, because the handle is on the side opposite the spout, like a jug, you do not burn your fingers on the last sighs of scalding steam, as you do with the conventional kettle.

As an expressive object the plastic kettle is interesting enough. In its general appearance it looks like a jug. It is rounded, padded, puffy, similar to the traditional jug. The spouts carry into space (where rounded edges are doubly dangerous) and the kettle expresses safety.

But the kettle is not a good example of design by the awkward switches. There is no problem with the kettle, but it is in fact a good example of design. One struggle with the kettle is that one feels that the kettle is not a good example of design.

However, the quality of production is not good. And as we do so, we are being persuaded by designer stylists at our emotions.

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BY
PETER DORMER.

Emoting about the object

The 1980s generation of graduate product designers has grown up in the post-modern aesthetic, taking part in but not initiating the rebellion against the modernist belief in classical, ideal form. How does such a young designer think? Alexander Groenewege, from the Netherlands,

was asked by the design manager (for small domestic appliances) to make some suggestions for a range of hairdryers that Philips would produce in the 1990s. These products had to compete with Japanese products (everywhere in the industrialized world Japan sets the competition).

The general qualities that Groenewege had to aim for were obvious but, in some degree, contradictory: *solid* quality, but with *fun* and *personality*. The design had to be appropriate to the status of the purchaser, reflect something of that person's lifestyle. The detailing was to be *perfect*, the design innovative.

Interestingly enough, in the context of the earlier discussion about 'tools', Groenewege remarks: 'therefore, what one wants is something *nice* for the hand and the eye – and, because this is a product which you bring close to your face, then rational thinking rejects a design which looks like a gun.'

Groenewege mused on a variety of images; he claims that with the hairdryer he has devised, he wants to put fantasy into high gear: 'Drying your hair you start dreaming about waving palm leaves along Pacific beaches, Spanish Flamenco dancers, Japanese geishas . . . everyone has his [sic] own thoughts.' Moreover, he wanted the design to have a *silent* beauty even when it was switched off and left on the bathroom or dressing-room table.

In reviewing how he developed the image of the hand-held, non-technological fan as the basis for his hairdryer, Groenewege retraced his steps as follows:

imagery

- I did not begin with 'form follows function'.
- I started with wind, not with the thing that produces it.
- Then I thought about things that pushed and pulled and floated in the wind – feathers, birds, aeroplanes, wings, palm trees, leaves.
- Put *style* and wind together and you have a peacock.
- A peacock's fan tail is like a fan that Spanish women use to wave air. But a fan is also a communication tool and it depends how the women handle the fan, how they hold it the hand, how close it is to the face, how it is placed on a table. Is it dropped, meaningfully, to the floor, or snapped shut loudly?



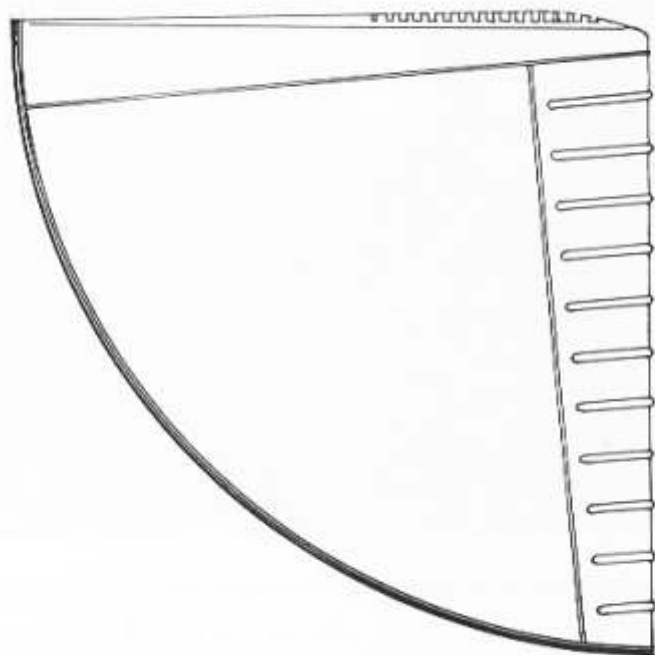
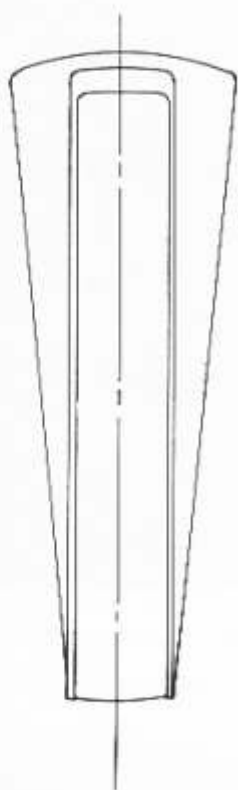
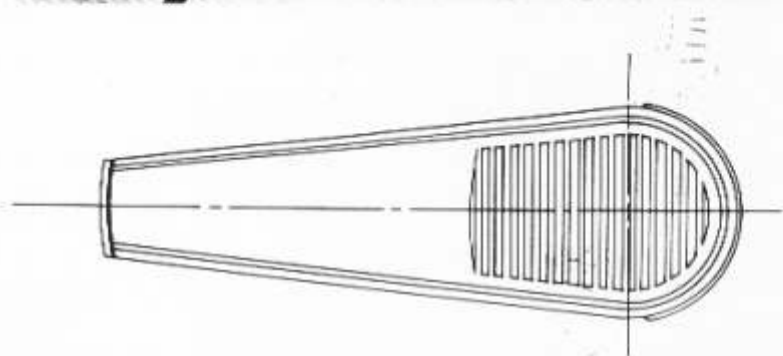
- The fan has a lot of hidden temper to it: rhythm, flamenco, tension, tenderness.
- In my imagination then the step to Japan (a styling and competitive must for my product) was not so big.

technology

- I needed body volume to contain the motor.
- It is usual for the motor chassis and external case to be one unit; I wanted them separated. This allows new styles to be built around the one unit. A step towards flexible production. The same unit can be fitted in a variety of different forms attracting different groups of consumers. Niche marketing.
- I also developed the dryer to hang on a cord because the Japanese like to use driers with their hands free.

Apart from being a good designer, Groeneweg is disarmingly honest. Although he has (surely correctly?) rationalized his rejection of the 'gun'

The simile of the gun is present in a surprising number of domestic tools – but then the gun is a naturally useful form. However, such imagery was rejected by Alexander Groenewege in this ‘Fan’ hairdryer designed for Philips. He wanted to elicit the allusion to hand-held fans, to grace, flight and air.



Our Domestic Landscape

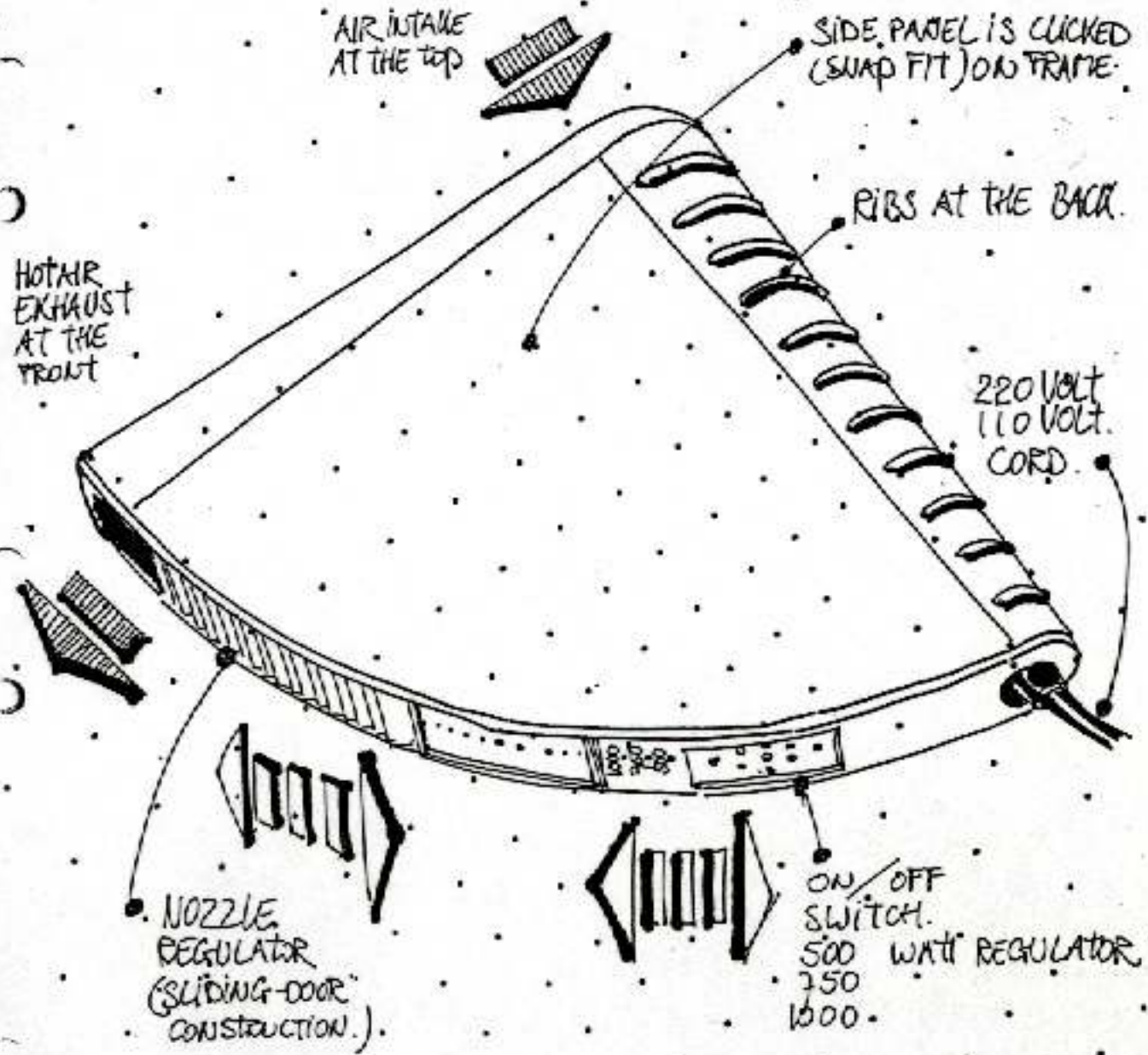
shape for his hairdryer, he also acknowledges the driving force of product differentiation. He does not want his product to look like existing versions (nor does his client). He says that existing designs, such as those by Braun or Atlantic Design, are very good but that they are 'too well known, too much copied to surprise me'. Novelty, not necessity, is the engine of product development, especially in products that are mature – where they have been around for years, and where fighting for an increased market share of as little as 3 per cent can mean a considerable difference to company profits.

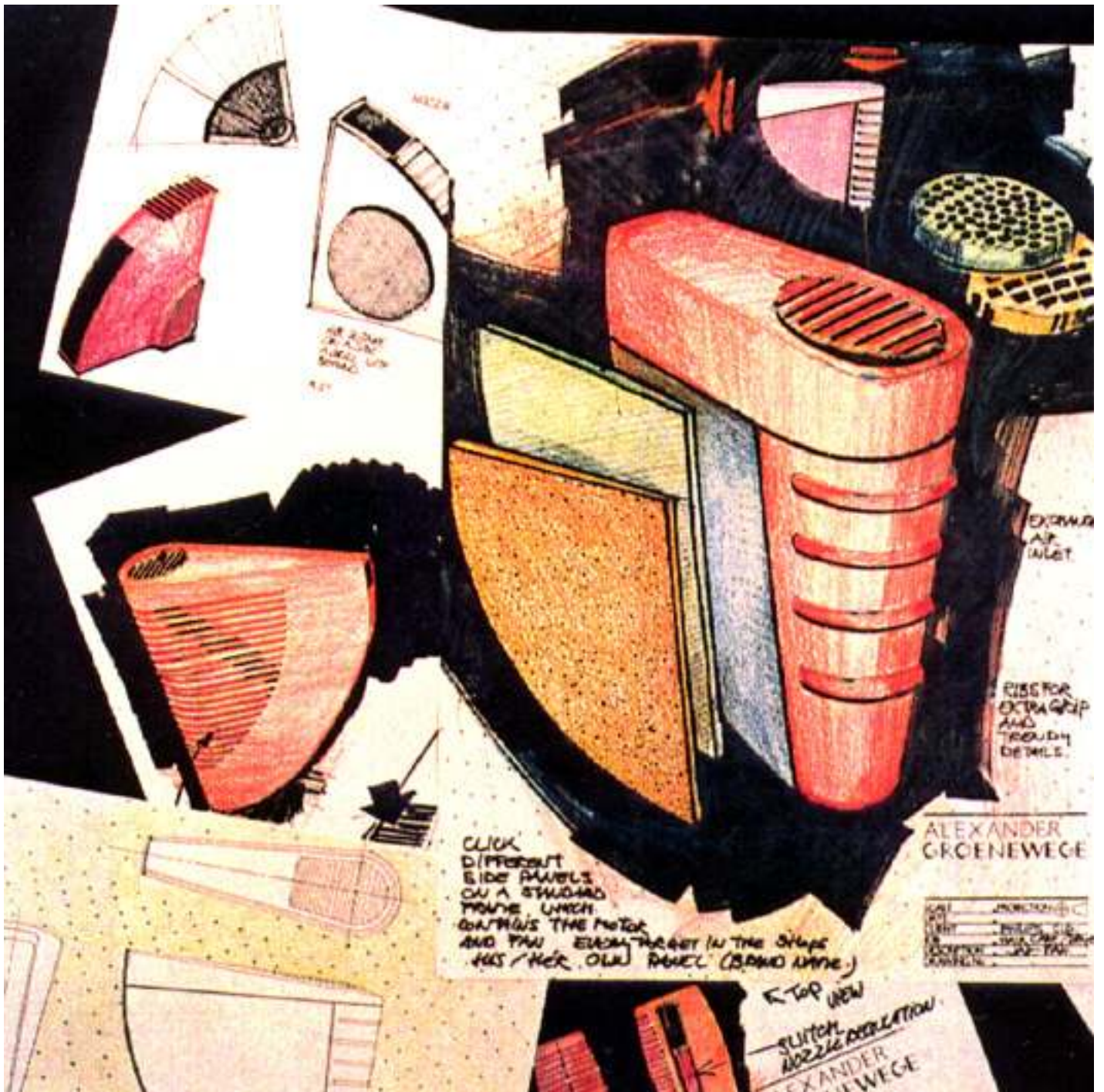
Very few designers, or their clients, like to leave a product unimproved; they are forever seeking 'faults' in existing products that they can 'correct' and thus use as a justification for the new development. In mature products these faults are seldom purely imaginary, but nor are they fundamental. In this instance Philips had requested in their brief that the hairdryer's nozzle should be fully variable and fully integrated; the company did not want a design that used additional, clip on nozzles (which people tend to lose).

Not all products of our time are as susceptible to designer improvement as, say, electrical or electronic goods which, by their very nature, have a more decisive and divisive split between 'below' and 'above the line' design considerations. The bicycle, for example, a perfect example of the tool that extends the human body, is very difficult to improve – although people keep trying. Graham Vickers, a design journalist and bicycle buff, comments: 'Basically unchanged for half a century, the familiar "safety" bicycle poses a unique design challenge in a society accustomed to the regular reshaping of its most cherished objects.' The bicycle is intolerant of designers' whims because, says Vickers, any infelicity in the design immediately causes pain to the rider. There have been successful re-designs but only after re-designing the brief, such as demanding a lightweight bicycle that can be folded away for easy transportation. (The design, building and craftsmanship of the best bicycle frames are discussed in the next chapter.)

The bicycle frame is an appropriate modernist object and it is quite refreshing that it stubbornly resists re-working. But what is it that the late 20th-century designer opposes in modernism? The immediate answer is that the post-modern designer opposes anonymity and mystery, he and she oppose objecthood and praises clear subject matter, story telling and openness. The object is replaced with the word.

EXPLANATION HAIR DRYER





MEZ28
HE 2000
L 2000
L 2000

EXTRA AIR INLET

RIBS FOR EXTRA GRIP AND TROUGH DETAILS

CLICK DIFFERENT SIDE PANELS ON A STANDARD FRAME WHICH CONTAINS THE MOTOR AND PAW. EACH TRIMMER IN THE SHAPE HAS / HER OWN PANEL (BAND ANNE)

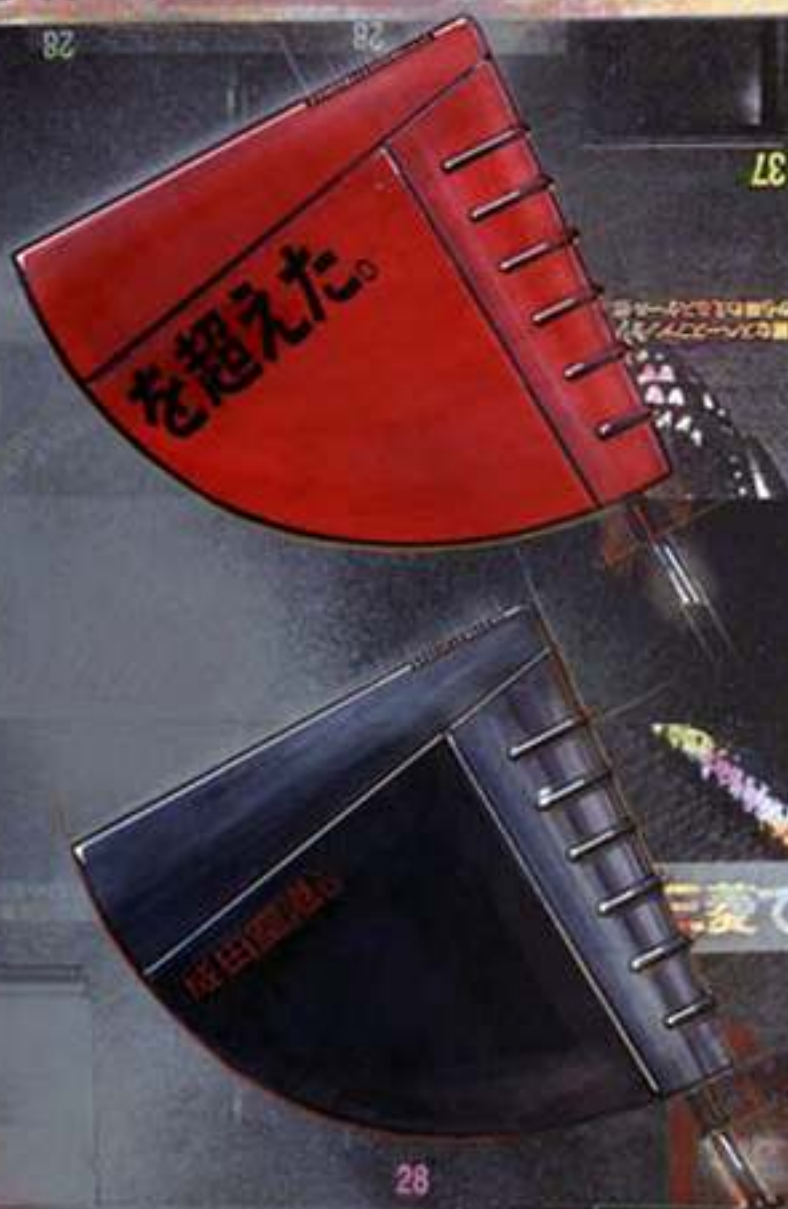
ALEXANDER GREENEWEGE

DATE	DESCRIPTION
BY	BY
CHECKED	CHECKED

TOP VIEW
SWITCH NOZZLE OPERATION
ALEXANDER GREENEWEGE

D-100

薄さが、20%を切った。機能は、想像を超えた。



37

を超えた。

原田國治

三菱です。

28

ALEXANDER GRONOWSKI
Industrial Designer



