
Industrial Revolution & The Industrial Design Industry

In a world popularised by the growing 4th Industrial Revolution, the industrial design industry is moving towards creating products that, both physical and digital, are shaping the way we live both now and in the future. At the forefront, are innovative pioneers such as Benjamin Hubert, who are leading the pack in transforming what is usually style-based designing, into people-focused ingenuity. Where energies were mostly spent on tangible products that were pleasing to the eye, Hubert's minimalistic approach and shift more so towards savvy technologies, is all about functionality, sustainability and being carbon-footprint consciencene.

English industrial designer, Benjamin Hubert, 32, graduated from Loughborough University in 2006 and opened his self-titled studio. The award-winning designer specialised in furniture and lighting fixtures for which he was awarded Designer of The Year (2009), Home and Garden Young Designer of the Year (2010) and IF Awards 2012, to name a few accolades. However in 2015, Hubert rebranded his studio and it is now Layer. Layer, "a strategic industrial design agency," is the transition from Hubert's initial love for furniture design (hardware) to more functional technologies (like smart wearables) and software (applications.) Hubert shares his views on the shift in an interview: "Software is something that has a much smaller carbon-footprint than producing more stuff that needs to go somewhere, then needs to be resold, remade, reused, recycled. Whereas, software is deleted and replaced."

The IDSA (Industrial Designers Society of America) describes industrial design as "the professional practice of designing products used by millions of people around the world every day." Thus, Hubert and Layer emphasize the people-focused experience - but his strategy is no longer about "the next best chair," it's about how to enhance the everyday accessory. Namely, Layer transformed the basic structure of a wheelchair, and turned it into a customized stylish piece for every single user - not forgetting that it is 3D printed. Part of Layer's repositioning is the LayerLAB, a research division that investigates and tests technologies and applications that improve everyday life. This has included the 3D printed GO wheelchair that is customized according to a client's "body shape, weight and disability to reduce injury and increase comfort, flexibility, and support."

The accompanying GO app allows users to participate in the design process by specifying optional elements, patterns and colourways, and to place orders." The addition of this division, using future orientated technologies, is the epitome of people-focused ingenuity, whilst being conscience of environment-friendly materials and manufacturing. But what is the importance of these expertise? From designing user-friendly products and apps, colour and font choices of digital products and shapes and colours of tangible products that influence the user's

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psychology, the above skills are all people orientated. And how does one know what works and what does not?

Ethnographic research. According to spotless.co.uk, "Ethnographic research is a qualitative method where researchers observe and/or interact with a study's participants in their real-life environment." This means that a researcher will live or interact with a target market group for a year or more, in order to further learn about the needs of the group, their lifestyle and whether or not a particular product designed for this particular community is of value to them. This also allows for designers to identify, amend and improve any features to better the product - ensuring that it is tailor made to work at its optimum in order to satisfy the user's need(s). For example, in designing the GO wheelchair, Layer came to understand the need for gloves for wheelchair users. So the studio created the GO glove system that are designed to interlock with the rims of the chair. So, instead of the friction against the hand or a normal glove, these are designed to suit the wheelchair and improve one's mobility. This is a first of its kind.

I personally appreciate Hubert's human-centred approach to design because growing up in a middle-class home with the constant presence of visitors, every single piece of furniture and appliance may be pleasing to the eye, but above all, it needs to be functional. Our home may not be as technologically advanced as some of Hubert designs, however, I find his work inspiring. I am also fascinated by his minimalistic aesthetic. I grew up constantly surrounded by bold and vibrant colours and audacious designs of doors and tables, for instance. Hence, the disruption of my norm from his dissimilar style, is welcomed and respected. Be it his modest choice of colours, mainly whites, greys and pastels, or his subtly beautiful designs, Hubert's aesthetic is very relevant to the ever-growing minimalist population. This community, focused owning as few as possible material items whilst living an experienced-driven life (that is sustainable and environmentally friendly) has become incredibly popular over the last few years.

Popular minimalist YouTubers include, Jenny Mustard, Sadia Badiei of Pick Up Limes and The Minimalists. They share tips and tricks about minimalism which also includes diet and environmental awareness. Mustard and Badiei, in particular, are vegans who share a primary concern about environmental health and carbon footprint. Mustard is also well-known for her fashion and interior aesthetic which are minimalistic, inspired by the Scandinavian simplistic charm. I believe Hubert particularly designs for such customers. Not just how his products look, but how they function too. For instance, Worldbeing, a stylish wristband, along with an app, that tracks one's carbon contribution daily. The device is especially helpful for people who are looking to change their lifestyles and wish to become more carbon conscience. Therefore, not only is the device inspired by people and their lifestyles, it is also forward thinking in its design and purpose in encouraging sustainability.

In conclusion, Hubert and Layer's attitude towards designing products with sustainable

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longevity, is commendable. His natural eye for style whilst concerning himself more so with the individual customer's need along with environmental preservation is a skill in which I am awed. It is a symbol of the possibilities available to us all, ways in can improve both ours, and others' lives in this technologically advanced world we are living.

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