

A Designer's Call to Arms

We've screwed up. Now it's time to redesign our future.

by Mike Lin

The Present: People, we have a problem

The jury is in: Our air, soil, and water are polluted. We've exploited every natural resource imaginable, including human labor. We are royally screwed. Thus, a call to action for a new design movement. This is not a political statement; it's not about left or right. Rather, it's an ethical and moral obligation. We face a challenge to reshape industry, business, and culture to ensure for ourselves a healthy and livable future. In short, we've made some serious mistakes. We need to redesign our future.

The Past: Eco-friendly didn't cut it

We've been settling for second best for too long—too often do “ecological,” “green,” or “sustainable” products fall short in function and design. Despite good intentions, such token products as ineffective natural cleaners; dim compact-fluorescent light bulbs; and coarse hemp garments reinforce stereotypes of inferior quality and inconvenience. Mediocre products cause more harm than good; their disappointing functionality and lackluster design alienate the general public and fail to resonate with the broader audience needed to effect real, mainstream change. How could these dysfunctional solutions and underwhelming experiences ever inspire a cultural shift? They're a liability to our future.


The Future: A new design movement

Design often grapples with the most important questions of the day. Thus going forward, we need a new design directive, a new philosophy, and a new culture. We need to inspire a shift in which society not only values economic efficiency, functional simplicity, and refinement in form—but also deeper, intangible emotions. Imagine a culture whose aesthetic sensibility combines social justice and environmental elegance in such a way that they're not even noticeable. Imagine a consumer who not only loves a car, laptop, or MP3 player but also delights in the knowledge that it is ethically produced and decomposes as easily as it was created without sacrificing functionality for those traits. Imagine a landscape free of the ills of industry that still benefits from all of humanity's greatest advancements.

This is our future—but it's slipping away. Design is a method of action: We need to learn from our mistakes and create solutions. We need to futureproof our products, our processes, and our built environment to ensure a healthy and livable future.

Change is already happening

We are entering into a Prius-equipped, local, organic, *Inconvenient Truth* era. A hunger for new solutions is growing. Consumers are calling for a secure, healthy, and livable future.

You are this movement. Answer this call. 

Futureproofing means:

- Accept the challenge. Prove that ecologically intelligent solutions work.
- But first, break the stereotype: Eco-friendly products shouldn't require sacrifice. They need not be expensive, earth-toned, or of inferior quality.
- Approach design for the future with optimism and playfulness. Nothing breeds contempt like preaching fire and brimstone.
- Appeal to hippies and hipsters alike. Turn the culture clash around and make healthy design for all.
- Go against conventional wisdom.
- While designing, collaborate with everyone. Designers can't do it alone.
- Create multiple options that are obvious, intuitive, and guilt-free.
- Empower the user to decide what works best.
- Think on a systems level but still consider the details.
- Pay it forward: Use your design and positive user experiences to inspire others to change and innovate.
- Design mediagenic solutions that attract press attention. This is no time to be shy: Carry your ideas far and wide.