



**Ten Principles  
for Good Design:  
Dieter Rams**

The Jorrit Maan  
Collection

Edited by Cees W. de Jong

With contributions by

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1.

# **An Important Question**



Table Radio SK 25

1961.

Artur Braun, Fritz Eichler.

**Back in the late 1970s, Dieter Rams was becoming increasingly concerned by the state of the world around him – “an impenetrable confusion of forms, colors, and noises.” Aware that he was a significant contributor to that world, he asked himself an important question: is my design good design?**

**As good design cannot be measured in a finite way he set about expressing the ten most important principles for what he considered was good design.**

**Please share these principles accurately and fairly.**

## **An Important Question**

Cees W. de Jong

Dieter Rams has rationally formulated the true challenges and solutions of the design process in a unique way. Additionally, as a designer he has created useful series of everyday objects that are durable and readily understandable and usable by human beings.

As a product designer and university professor, Dieter Rams' products and design ethos have had significant influence on designers around the world. Designers, manufacturers, and consumers remain inspired by his products and his legacy, especially his "Ten Principles for Good Design."

Dieter Rams is a personal source of inspiration. Meeting him and his wife Ingeborg at his home in Kronberg was very special to me. I was also extremely pleased with Dieter Rams' positive response to our plans to publish this book.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the following people and institutions for their contributions and advice.

I would especially like to thank Klaus Klemp, who was always there to answer my questions and provide the correct information. Jorrit Maan made a significant contribution from his collection to the selection of the one hundred products to show. Erik Mattie wrote his two essays about Dieter Rams' legacy after we visited and spoke with Dieter Rams in Kronberg.

I would also like to thank the Dieter & Ingeborg Rams-Stiftung, Frankfurt am Main; Britte Siepenkothen, WPM Consulting, Kronberg; Paola Mulas, Braun P&G Braun Communications, Petit-Lancy; Julia Schulz, Vitsø, London.

Their support and efforts have helped create this book. As a designer you try to give form to ideas. This book shows that this is not without consequences. Dieter Rams has taken a clear stance which remains current and continues to influence people all over the world.

**“Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?”**



Portable Receiver exporter 2

1956.

HfG Ulm, Dieter Rams, Redesign.

**“Just what is it that makes  
today’s homes so different,  
so appealing?”**

Klaus Klemp

**The design ethos of Dieter Rams, Braun, and Vitsoë reflect a cultural and, in the end, significant artistic impulse, albeit one that drew attention to itself by being so quiet.**

“Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?”

**That’s the title English artist Richard Hamilton chose for his 1956 collage for the London exhibition *This Is Tomorrow* which became the opening shot of British Pop Art. The imaginary living room in this collage consists of nothing but pictures taken from American magazines that point to the emerging consumption-driven society. It is more allegory and parody with a good dose of humor than an example of the Informalism that was sweeping post-War Europe at the time. Hamilton showed another, new world, determined by a new physicality, vanity, corporate brands, and media technology. The collage not only has the latest television set and vacuum cleaner, but also the portable Reporter tape recorder (1953) by British company Boosey & Hawkes which still reflected the machine aesthetics of the previous decade. Since Peter Behrens’ pioneering work for AEG between 1907 and 1914, this had been state-of-the-art design for other home technologies too. Indeed, the kitchen machines made by Frankfurt-based Braun also had a similar look in 1953. Barely ten years later, Hamilton discovered completely different Braun household appliances and admired their restrained, elegant aesthetic. Having himself worked as a designer and teacher of design, Hamilton had decorated his flat in the late 1950s in**

**the very latest modern style, certainly not without one or more new pieces from Braun.**

<sup>1</sup> Opening speech by Richard Hamilton for the IDZ exhibition in West Berlin, November 28, 1980. In: François Burkhardt / Inez Franksen (eds.): *Design: Dieter Rams & Exhibition Catalogue*, IDZ Berlin, Berlin 1980 and 1981. p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Richard Hamilton dated February 24, 1980 to François Burkhardt on the occasion of the preparations for the Dieter Rams exhibition in Berlin. In: *ibid.*, p. 183.

**Pop Art, a term which Hamilton, by the way, vehemently rejected, was all about the artistic exploration of the things of everyday life. As the opening speaker for a Dieter Rams exhibition in Berlin in 1980, he stated: "It was my habit, one picked up from Marcel Duchamp, to examine things always in terms of dichotomy of oppositions. I often wondered if the vulgarity of "Pop" source material was an essential feature of it. When I later put the question to the test, I looked for the opposite of the hot dog, the ice cream cone, or the Coke bottle. In a flash of intuition, it came to me that Braun products were their exact antithesis. The ideal that Braun epitomized for me also had practical value. I had to do very little. The more I tampered with it, the less perfect the image became, so the art was to do almost nothing, as little as possible."<sup>1</sup> In a letter sent beforehand to François Burkhardt, Hamilton said: "My admiration for the work of Dieter Rams is intense and I have for years been uniquely attracted towards his design sensibility; so much so that his consumer products have come to occupy a place in my heart and consciousness that the Mont Sainte-Victoire did in Cézanne's."<sup>2</sup> Even if we leave aside the emotional appeal, the fact remains that an extremely self-reflective artist like Richard Hamilton regarded the aesthetics of Braun design**

**not only like Duchamp viewing the bottle rack as a ready-made product ready for repurposing, but also as a visual subject of research for his own artistic production. From 1965 to 1968, Hamilton used three Braun products in his works, although strikingly none of them was designed by Dieter Rams himself, but by other team members.<sup>3</sup>**

**Without a doubt, Hamilton was not only concerned about these concrete products, but about the design ethos, the aesthetic, and the presence of Braun products, and thus also addressed the right person, namely Dieter Rams, who had been working with an ever-expanding team since 1955. Even the factual Braun advertising copy of the period had an impact, being taken up and reinterpreted by Hamilton in his own work.**

**At the same time, Braun design in the 1960s offered a contrasting model to the pop culture of the era with its garish colors, alienation, and loaded language. Many, especially German designers and critics, saw Braun and Rams in the 1970s as being stuck in a functionalist past that refused to die or as "a dead grey mouse," as Memphis Design star Matteo Thun would later put it.<sup>4</sup> Now, however, Memphis Design is largely forgotten, but Dieter Rams' design has been experiencing a kind of renaissance for two decades, not least in the aftermath of Apple's success. Apple's chief designer, Jonny Ive, has consistently named**

<sup>3</sup> The subject of "Still-life" (1965), photograph with spray paint, was the HG1 combination grill (1962) by Reinhold Weiß. The print-graphic "Toaster" (1967; no. 75) was also based on Braun's HT 2 Toaster (1963), also by Reinhold Weiß and the multiple "The Critic Laughs" (no. 60), Galerie René Block, 1968–1972 and 2014 referred to the Mayadent, the first electric toothbrush (1963) by Willi Zimmermann.

<sup>4</sup> Matteo Thun: "My emotional attachment to a Braun alarm clock is similar to how I would react to a dead grey mouse that frightened me out of my slumber every morning at 6:45." In an interview with Georges Desrues, *Welt am Sonntag*, April 3, 2011.

**Braun as his model. Rams himself always spoke of the usefulness of his products, the need for clarity and clean lines, but never indicated any artistic intentions with his work. This might have been a strategic or perhaps a pragmatic decision on his part, but it is not quite true. The design ethos of Dieter Rams, Braun, and Vitsœ reflect a cultural and, in the end, significant artistic impulse, albeit one that drew attention to itself by being so quiet. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan spoke of media that are hot and media that are cold. The former gain attention through opulence, while the latter are reduced, make inferences, and allow recipients to shape their reception, not unlike Cool Jazz or the designs Rams made for Braun and Vitsœ.**

# **In Dialogue with Dieter Rams**



Radio-Phono Combination PK-G 4  
1956.  
Hans Gugelot.

# **In Dialogue with Dieter Rams**

Erik Mattie

**“In Japanese there is a word for all objects made, designed, and improved by people: *dogu*. The *dogu*, the object or objects that people live with, represent the owner’s personality. One enters into a relationship with *dogu*, a dialogue. Dieter Rams lets his designs and his house speak.”**

**Dieter Rams does not need many words to expound on his vision for making designs. His “ten principles for good design” suffice (see the chapter “Ten Principles for Good Design”). Should there be reason for more explanation, then a glance at his impressive and consistent oeuvre suffices.**

**It was therefore not as much an interview as a pleasant conversation with Dieter Rams that took place in the autumn of 2016. The location was his own home in Frankfurt. Present were the publisher Cees W. de Jong, the collector Jorrit Maan, and the undersigned. Later, Klaus Klemp and Britte Siepenkothen joined us and of course photographer and spouse Ingeborg Kracht Rams was also there<sup>1</sup>.**

**The house exudes a serene peacefulness and has beautiful views of the Japanese-oriented garden with the swimming pool where Dieter Rams does his physical exercise.**

**A visit to the home is an experience: everywhere is order – aesthetic and practical, felt and visible. Books on Japan, a drafting table designed by Friso Kramer, some carefully selected *objects d’art*, and of course the Braun household products designed by him, are immediately taken in by the visitor. And of course, the Vitsoe furniture and storage systems are just as present in the house where all spaces and objects fit in with each other.**

<sup>1</sup> Britte Siepenkothen’s working life has been linked with Braun starting in the 90s as personal manager and advisor to Dieter Rams. Klaus Klemp is art historian and chief design conservator attached to the Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt am Main, professor at the Hochschule für Gestaltung Offenbach and a personal friend of Rams, about whom he has several times published and lectured.

**Dieter Rams' products tell the story: *Weniger, aber besser* (*Less but better*). What applies to the designs also applies to the house, designed by Rams himself in 1971. In view of his architectural background, it is not strange that Rams had taken over its design. In fact, it is regrettable that this was limited to just the one building project.**

**The underlying design ideologies regarding architecture and industrial design are, after all, in line with each other. "A house is a large piece of furniture and a piece of furniture is a small building," is sometimes said. A walk through his home clarifies at a glance what Rams is about in terms of design and architecture: peace and clarity.**

**The municipality in which the house is situated is Am Rothen Hang, developed from the 60s onwards, but it was already bought in 1958 by Erwin Braun for his own people.**

**The urban plan, drawn in 1968–1969 and further developed by Rudolf Kramer, was partly based on ideas conceived by Dieter Rams who had gained inspiration from the Swiss Hülen. The location – near the Braun headquarters in Kronberg im Taunus – in a wooded area on a hill, with a view of Frankfurt and the Main valley, borders on the sublime. The L-shaped units with a courtyard tend, by contrast, towards the picturesque and the village-like, despite the modern architecture. Also the absence of sidewalks contributes to an intimate, village-like atmosphere.**

**The L-shape is excellent for staggered, connected homes with patios; the uneven ground works well for terraces. The combination is much more than the sum of the parts. Yet, the urban design of the community as a whole is not convincing.**

**The houses are built too close to each other, and there are too many of them, edging out the green spaces.**

**The relationship with the surrounding landscape and the river valley is not fully exploited. Furthermore, the layout of the public space is rather dated, to put it mildly.**

**However, this cannot be attributed to either Braun or Rams. The departure of both Braun brothers also had consequences for the development of the location, which took place mostly between 1971 and 1974. Market-oriented thinking was introduced, leading to this greater building density. Because of this, Rams' original ideas, which were presented to Braun, unfortunately did not become a reality<sup>2</sup>. The dilution of the area's urban development, despite its nomination for the monument heritage list, is the result of overbuilding: more but less.**

**The urban development shortcomings, however, definitely do not apply to the architecture. The L-shaped bungalows are grouped in a combination of *Terrassentyp* and *Hofhauser*.**

<sup>2</sup> The example of Halen near Bern is much greener, but also much more modestly set up. *Architekten Atelier 5*, 1961. Also the municipal swimming pool had appealed to Rams.

Rams' house, built on a double plot he purchased, is an excellent illustration of his mental world: spatial and three-dimensional. The location on the hill offers unparalleled possibilities for organizing the inside spaces optimally. The main entrance and the main accommodation are at level 0, the highest level. Between the main entrance and the street there is a spacious front garden. The lowest level is designated as -2 and is the workshop. Here is a second exit, directly facing the street, more formal, with house numbering. The intermediate level (-1) has space for the studio.

Level 0 as well as -1 provide direct access to the garden. The L-shape does not only join both levels, but also encompasses the green space. On the outside, the facades are characterized by white spaces, hardly broken by the presence of windows. For instance, on the street at level -2 there is a long workshop window, the only window for this space. But the house is certainly not dark; lighting comes from the garden. An expanse of glass separates the garden area from the accommodation areas and the studio. In addition, light domes have been placed on the flat roof in order to directly illuminate the spaces not adjoining the garden. The overhanging roof forms a veranda between the living room and the garden, thereby passing filtered light through.

**The floors, walls, partitions, retaining walls, and ceilings blend together in a composition of white rectangles. The closed white exterior facades show more unity with the interior than one would suppose at first sight. Peace and modesty are, as mentioned above, core notions in Rams' work.**

**The fact that Rams alludes to Japan in his design as well as garden landscaping is no surprise for someone familiar with his work. He says himself: "In traditional Japanese architecture, living spaces are designed from a position that is similar to my own. The aesthetic of an empty room, with its clear and precise organisation of floor, walls and ceiling and careful combination of materials and structure is much more sophisticated than the European aesthetic of opulence, pattern and loud forms."<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup> *As Little Design as Possible*, p. 45

**Rams' preoccupation with Japan can be seen in his design language, which is emphatically a reference to Japanese design, not a derivative of it. In a completely different context than the Japanese, Rams undergoes a similar aesthetic experience. Recognizable elements that can be traced back to Japanese garden layout are the planting – which includes the Japanese maple, bonsai and the rhododendron (greenery) – but also the stones and rocks (stones, rest), and water (life). These three elements are characteristic of Japanese landscaping.**

Finally there is, again owing to the difference in height, a view from the garden of the greenery beyond (“borrowed landscape” or “shakkei” in Japanese), thus suggesting an endless garden. Looking both uphill and downhill, the visitor gets the impression that Rams’ house is the only one in the woods. From the vantage point of the garden, the urban layout works optimally.

In the house itself, reference to Japan is less palpable. The context and also the materials, the detailing and the objects defining the interior are completely different from a Japanese house. But the principles, the organization of the spaces, their blending, and the relationship between the inside and outside, bear witness to the same foundation. The kitchen adjoining the hall is half open, but at the same time a clearly defined space. The same applies to the staircase: the half-height balustrade gives an overview, but here too the separate functions can be clearly distinguished. The rectangular planes, sills, and folding doors provide the demarcation, just like the walls, ceilings, and floors do.

Within this spatial composition, the Vitsoe 606 storage system and the artwork made of white planes and shapes by Nul-artist Jan Schoonhoven, occupy their natural place.

The clear white of the planes is interrupted by color accents, for instance, in the shape of a Persian carpet accentuating the axial direction, and a plain carpet in a neutral color. The carpet defines the *Sitzlandschaft* (*Seating Landscape*) where the 620 series Vitsoe furniture defines a space within the room. Here one can relax, read, and converse. When the living room's vertical blinds are open, the plate glass window provides a panoramic view of the garden. The resemblance between the *Sitzlandschaft* and the Frankfurt Vitsoe showroom is not accidental. The arrangement of the carpet and furniture and even the white tiles are the same. It's the designer's statement: "I have only ever designed furniture that I myself would like to have."

Beyond the seating landscape, other furnishings have been carefully arranged in the living-room space. Thus, one sees a 601 chair; the lightweight frame recalls Rams' designs for speakers and audio equipment. The chair seems to float above the tiled floor. Apart from Vitsoe units, there are also chairs by Thonet and Fritz Hansen, the rare M3170 from a design by Jacobsen. Seated on these stools, the visitor is given coffee poured from, what else, a Braun coffee machine. The living room overlooks the Japanese garden and across a lower level of Am Rothen Hang, in the direction of Frankfurt.

At right angles to the hall towards the residential section is the staircase leading down to the workshop section on levels –1 and –2. Artworks guide the way to the studio. Because of the differences in levels in the house there are strongly shifting perspectives. The walk from the living section to the working section is a short, but pleasant trip. Once in the studio, the visitor enjoys, just as he did above, a view through large glass panels overlooking the garden and the lower terrace. The interior is dominated by a shelving system (the 606 series), but also by two large drawing tables by Friso Kramer, and in front of them, the Jacobsen stools on small, plain, round carpets. One level lower is the workshop, completely closed, with the layout focusing on the work tables. The introverted workshop has black tiles and is extremely tightly and efficiently arranged. There is no distraction save for the work itself.

Careful consideration – even the doorknobs are a design by Dieter Rams – has been given to all details. Timelessness and universality are expressed by the house itself, the layout, and the objects. A tour of the house is like an interview with the designer himself. Every step contributes to a better understanding of the *10 principles for good design*.

**In Japanese there is a word for all objects made, designed, and improved by people: *dogu*. The *dogu*, the object or objects that people live with, represent the owner's personality.**

**One enters into a relationship with *dogu*, a dialogue. Dieter Rams lets his designs and his house speak. In the present era where many certainties suddenly have become less certain and design has been democratized and sometimes even made vulgar, the work of Rams is an oasis of calm.**

The arrangement of furniture on a carpet laid upon white tiles is also a defining interior element of Dieter Ram's home.

Vitsœ showroom. 1971.

Photographer Ingeborg Kracht Rams.



# **Design – Ritual of a Hopeful Society?**



Compact System studio 1

1957.

Hans Gugelot, Herbert Lindinger.

## **Design – Ritual of a Hopeful Society?**

April 10, 1984 / Dieter Rams

**“At Braun, we do not create ‘design objects’ for fashionable rituals of aestheticism. Instead, we create everyday household appliances for the kitchen, razors, watches, hair care devices, and entertainment electronics.”**

**For me, design is a very concrete task, a challenge, and an opportunity for a society that is becoming increasingly aware of its responsibility for shaping its environment while still preserving a remnant of its hopes.**

**In my life and work, ritualized design serving its own purposes and the corresponding atmosphere of superficial and thoughtless optimism play no role at all.**

**At Braun, we do not create "design objects" for fashionable rituals of aestheticism. Instead, we create everyday household appliances for the kitchen, razors, watches, hair care devices, and entertainment electronics.**

**From our continuous dialogue with the people who use our products, I think we know the real value of design. We also know the real challenges that design can and must solve.**

**We know how important it is to make devices even more intelligible, even more useful, even more durable, even more human. We know that the opportunities for concrete, user-oriented design are not yet exhausted!**

**Useful products should still encourage a certain fascination, but I vigorously resist any design that only employs bold designer stimuli to garner attention. We must drastically reduce the chaos of shapes, colors, and symbols that surrounds us. We need to defend ourselves against being overwhelmed with stimuli and return to the pure and simple in order to reclaim some leeway for our own selves.**

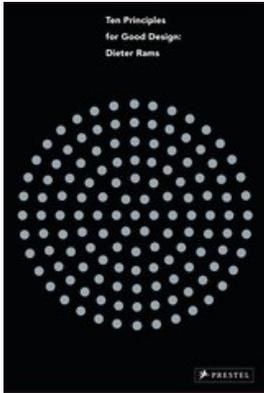
# Tokyo Manifesto



Radio-Phono Combination SK 55

1963.

Hans Gugelot, Dieter Rams.



Cees W. de Jong

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