

BIG IDEAS

PREDICTING THE BUILDINGS, PRODUCTS AND TECHNOLOGY THAT WILL CHANGE OUR LIVES IS NOT EASY. KENDALL HILL TALKS TO SOME EXPERTS WILLING TO TAKE ON THE TASK.



FROM LEFT: The renewal of New York's High Line will affect future design, as it reminded us of the importance of public gardens; the implications of 3D printers, especially in medicine, are very powerful.

MACHINERY TRANSFORMED DESIGN IN THE 20TH CENTURY; IN THE 21ST, TECHNOLOGY IS FUELLING THE REVOLUTION.



History and hindsight come in handy when assessing iconic design. With the 20th century now safely behind us, it's relatively easy to say what were the defining inspirations of that dynamic era.

The Sydney Opera House would make the icon shortlist, surely. The Model T Ford and the Volkswagen Beetle. The Eames lounge chair, still in production 51 years after its debut. The Chanel suit. And everyday items such as the Penguin paperback, the Post-it note, Lego, the ballpoint pen, the Band-Aid. (As Paola Antonelli noted in her best-selling 2005 volume, *Humble Masterpieces*: "Everything is designed, one way or another.")

It's a far more formidable task to predict what will become the enduring, instantly recognisable designs of our present, adolescent century. Not least because while machinery transformed design in the 20th century, in the 21st, technology is fuelling the revolution, and it's doing so at a dizzying pace.

So we turned to the experts, assembling a panel of professionals whose lives are steeped in the finer principles of design, and asked them to single out contemporary ideas that have an essence of genius to them and are likely to be viewed as standards of the new century. Their choices are not an exhaustive or definitive list; more a selective sample of ideas from people whose opinions we value.

"It's a very difficult thing to do," Melbourne-based architect Pascale Gomes-McNabb says of the task of forecasting design greatness. "If you told me to pick my top favourite designs, that's easy – the Concorde, the Aeron chair, Bang & Olufsen ... But this is in the future."

The smartphone is an obvious choice, for the dramatic, universal impact it's had on the way we live in the last decade. "It's been one of the biggest game changers on our society," Gomes-McNabb says. She says the iPhone, particularly, has made design accessible to the masses, putting it in the palm of our hands.

"I think the iPhone has made people consider what design is about, even in a subconscious way."

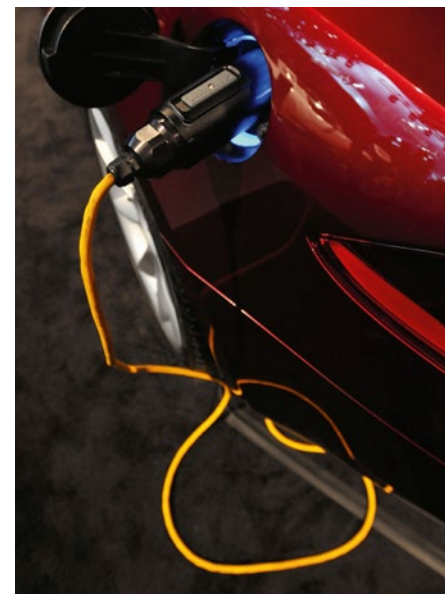
Functionality is at the heart of all great design and for Gomes-McNabb the ease of integrating work and personal lives across iPhone, iPad, laptop and desktop is a compelling feature. Not to mention the iPhone's array of more than 1.5 million apps that cater to seemingly every human need and desire.

"It's made us quite antisocial, yet globally social," she says.

In a similar vein of "overlapping, inter-lapping technology", Gomes-McNabb predicts the newly announced Tesla Powerwall lithium ion battery – which stores solar power and promises a practical, simple alternative to our centuries-old dependence on fossil fuels – is likely to be another life-changing innovation of the new millennium.

The use of 3D printers, especially in medicine, also intrigues her. "There's a hospital [in the Netherlands], where they constructed part of a woman's skull using a 3D printer. I think the implications medically are going to be powerful."

Both Gomes-McNabb and the director of Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, Elizabeth Ann Macgregor, proposed a solar



THE LITTLE SUN IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW AN ARTIST CAN CHANGE THE WORLD BY BRINGING A CREATIVE IDEA TO THE TABLE.

light called Little Sun as a revolutionary design of current times. MacGregor, a voracious reader, was initially tempted to select the Kindle, the e-reader launched in 2007 which she says she now couldn't live without.

"But after careful consideration, I actually changed my mind and instead chose the Little Sun – a beautiful, high-quality solar-powered LED lamp developed by contemporary artist Olafur Eliasson and engineer Frederik Ottesen.

"It's a light completely independent from the grid. It's clean, eco-friendly, reliable, and it helps the Third World by providing affordable light to the 1.1 billion people worldwide without access to electricity. I think it's a fantastic project and a really lovely object. To me, it's an example of how an artist can change the world by bringing a creative idea to the table, especially around issues such as climate change."

Gomes-McNabb praised the Little Sun for its socially aware, sustainable design. "I think there has to be more giving back to society." Sustainability is also at the core of the EcoSmart Fire, nominated by leading hoteliers Hayley and James Baillie. The Baillies first saw the Australian-made product on the New Inventors show in 2003; a year later they installed it at their newest hotel, Capella Lodge on Lord Howe Island.

"These ethanol burning fire boxes look great with their simplistic design and provide essential heating in a very clean and green way," Hayley Baillie explains. "We have used them throughout Southern Ocean Lodge on Kangaroo Island and have recently installed them on our new balconies at Longitude 131, where they will create ambience and warmth

if you decided to sleep under the stars in our outdoor swags." The flueless burners, available in designer variations and exported to more than 50 countries, use renewable, smokeless bioethanol fuel and can be installed in conventional hearths or configured as freestanding fireplaces.

The Baillies' other "essential" design icon is the Qantas first-class lounge at Sydney Airport. "The best in the world, stunning interior architecture, complete with first class food and beverage offering," Hayley says.

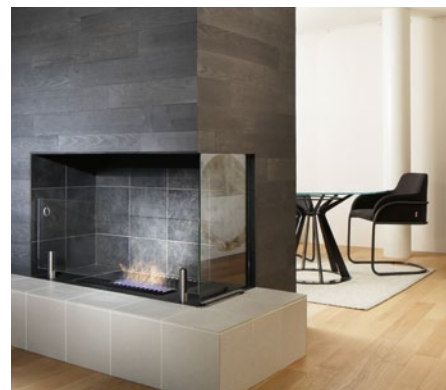
British decorator Guy Oliver, whose portfolio ranges from Claridge's Hotel, where he's been an in-house designer for more than two decades, to the state rooms at Number 10 Downing Street, is a constant traveller and partial to any innovation that improves the ease of getting from A to B.

"Customs in the UK had the most brilliant machine (now sadly phased out) called IRIS," Oliver says. "It was a retinal scanner that meant I could whiz through the airport in no time flat. It was different to the e-passport scanner because you had to register for it and so was great for regular travellers like me who pass through the airport twice a week. I would love to see it back in the airports again."

(Versions of iris recognition technology can be found at Amsterdam Schiphol and at airports in the United Arab Emirates and Canada.)

Melbourne architect Rob Mills singles out New York's High Line as the design concept of the last decade he believes will have a lasting impact. "The High Line reminded us of the importance of our existing public gardens," he says. "If the leaders of New York were prepared to create a garden in the sky treading its way through high-density New York, then gardens must be important to our people."

The elevated parklands developed on a disused section of the New York Central Railroad were the catalyst for urban renewal and conversion of industrial buildings into residential, he says. Markets, cafés, restaurants, schools, libraries and public transport followed, transforming dead industrial space into "a



PHOTOS: ROB HOMER; STUDIO BOURULLEC; GETTY IMAGES

RIGHT: Adam Goodrum names Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, whose crystal rope Gabriel Chandelier hangs at the Palace of Versailles, as the designers of the decade.

living, breathing part of New York City" that now attracts 5 million visitors annually.

For Sibella Court, TV host, interior stylist and shopkeeper (at Sydney's The Society Inc), the most compelling innovation of recent years has been Instagram, the smartphone photo-sharing app. "We are in such a digital revolution, a real time of collaboration. I use Instagram daily for inspiration, connecting with other creatives as well as for my company's marketing, portfolio and shop."

She uses the app as a design resource, following restaurants, other designers, product developers, furniture makers – anyone from whom she can get visual inspiration.

"I got that a lot from magazines before, now Instagram is my online magazine, and my portfolio, too – I threw out my old one."

Sydney-based industrial designer Adam Goodrum, whose Stitch chair was named one of 2008's best designs by the London Design Museum, cites the iPhone, the Tesla electric car ("it's definitely the future")

and an ingenious product called LifeStraw that filters parasites and bacteria from water.

"It's incredibly small and compact and has been a lifesaver in crises such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods," Goodrum says.

While it remains a vital resource in dealing with humanitarian crises, the LifeStraw is now also available to consumers such as hikers and adventurers who want safe drinking water in remote locations. A single straw can provide potable water to a person for a year.

Despite the pitfalls of trying to prophesy which lifestyle product of this new century will be viewed as iconic in years to come, Goodrum reckons the Gabriel Chandelier by Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec will stand the test of time. The shimmering crystal rope, the first permanent modern artwork installed at the Palace of Versailles, is "so elegant, poetic, thoughtful," he says.

"The Bouroullec studio would have to be the designers of the decade." ❧



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The Little Sun solar-powered LED lamp provides affordable light in the developing world; the Tesla electric car could well be the future; the flueless EcoSmart Fire uses renewable, smokeless fuel; the Qantas first-class lounge at Sydney Airport is nominated for its stunning architecture.

