

Design

AT STANFORD University you can learn how to design calm. The course is one of several dozen offered by what Stanford calls its d.school, an eight-year-old program in design thinking. The hybrid discipline—dubbed "the hottest trend in business culture" by *Businessweek*—is now taught at schools ranging from Parsons to Yale. At California College of the Arts you can get an MBA in Design Strategy, learning how to apply design principles to such seemingly un-designy pursuits as human resources and accounting.

The definition of *design* has been expanding since the 1940s, when Walter Gropius, founder of the German Bauhaus movement, wrote that the word "broadly embraces the whole orbit of man-made, visible surroundings, from simple everyday goods to the complex pattern of a whole town." In other words, design could be applied at every scale, but (unlike calm) it at least had to be something you could see and touch.

Recent developments have been more radical. One, best embodied by Apple, is the shift from designing objects to designing user experience. A second, deployed successfully by Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, is the idea that design should be dynamic, shape-shifting, so that the same brand appeals to diverse audiences. (Designers John Slabyk and Scott Thomas created subtly different logos for every constituency and platform.) A third is represented by Target, which is trouncing Walmart with the notion that good design appeals to everyone, regardless of class or education.

We're also in the midst of another major development: Design has become accessible to anyone with a laptop. You don't need Bauhaus training or a workshop. You can do it yourself with intuitive software like Sculpttris and a 3D Systems desktop printer or Shapeways account. Need funding? Just launch a Kickstarter campaign. So now everyone—in theory—is a designer, and design encompasses everything.

A similar sea change rocked the art world a century ago, when Marcel Duchamp submitted a urinal to an art show. His "readymade" sculpture encouraged others to make art without any of the traditional constraints. For instance, Andy Warhol jolted a generation of Americans into questioning consumer culture by depicting products and celebrities using industrial silk-screening techniques.

Yet it took a genius to make good use of total artistic freedom. After Duchamp, there was more creative potential than ever, but on average the quality of art has suffered. (Most is lazy or gratuitous.) Expect the same in design. For every iPad or Audi A3, we'll see thousands of plaid chihuahua bow ties. Better stock up early on designer calm.—JONATHON KEATS