Design: A Concise History
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The fact that this book was translated into American English from the original German suggests that the British education system was not at the forefront of people's minds when they decided to publish it. Determining its target audience is therefore not easy to do and leads me immediately into raising the question as to its value to teachers and its appropriateness to our curriculum. The wording and style of the writing leaves one in no doubt that this is not a student resource book below A-Level and I've no doubt that most sixth formers would be well advised to have a dictionary close at hand. I'll say nothing about teachers!

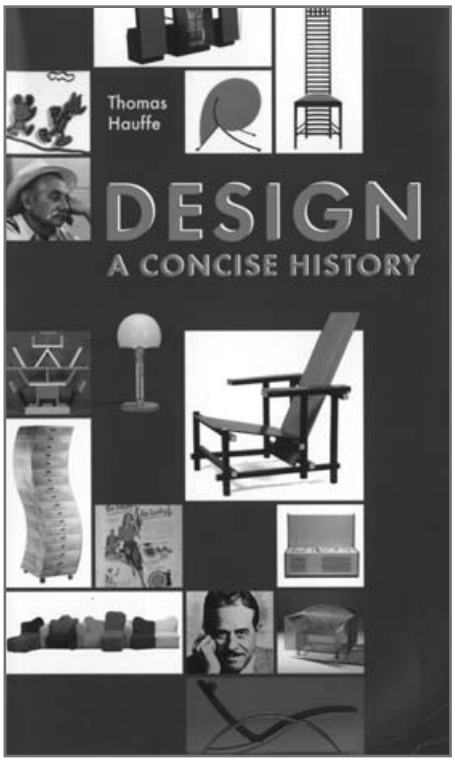
The book itself is as compact as it is concise. Each page contains the main body of text plus examples of design, or very brief biographies of the various designers under discussion. To compensate for being a physically small book dealing with a large topic, the font used in the main text is quite small and that used for the examples/biographies part is even smaller. This is not a book for anyone with defective sight! One has to raise the question of whether the book would have benefited from being larger. The design examples are interesting and are of value to the content of the book. Having such small photographs without the ability to see the detail in them is selling them short.

Right from the outset the book lays down its purpose in a preface by the author. For those of us who are well versed in reading and talking about the subject of design, and particularly the history aspect, we are left in no doubt as to the enormity of his task. It would be all too easy to criticise the content as not going into sufficient depth on occasions, or leaving out topics that we would have felt to be worthy of recognition. For example, in the section dealing with 1945-1960 and the after effects of the war, I was expecting at least a cursory mention of the Utility Scheme in this country and perhaps a quick mention of Gordon Russell, but it never appeared. The fact that the author is German and has the appropriate expertise and knowledge may explain the reason why the book pays more attention to the German influence on design than any other book of this nature that I've read. However, this was not excessive and fitted well within the narrative.

The book makes a good attempt at threading together the numerous influences and movements that have affected our design history in the West and the more developed countries throughout the world since the 18th Century , and where possible has set them in a social context. It deals with design from a very wide base and in general follows three threads: decorative art, product design (mainly furniture) and architectural/environmental design. As a result the reader may feel that the content 'jumps about'. But then understandably 'design' is not something that is easily compartmentalised.

A teacher of Art History may find the book of more value overall than those of us teaching Design and Technology. Where I feel the book becomes more relevant is in the later sections, particularly the last one (Postmodernism). By this stage it is accepted that design is a mature phenomenon in society and is something that is well to the forefront of people's consciousnesses Product design is much more of an emphasis in the latter sections and now that I have read the book in detail I am in no doubt that I will insist that my A-Level students at least read these since they outline the position of design and technology in society in such a way that enables them to relate to it.

In conclusion I'd say that if you have got an interest in the history of design, would like to have a few examples of the different styles of design and have got about £10 to spare then by all means get it. It doesn't take up too much space on your shelf and it may provide a student with a starting point for researching by other means.



Concise History of Design

Appropriate content	✓✓	Generic use	
Pupil/student use	✓✓	One of a series	⇐
Teacher resource	✓✓✓	Photocopiable	
Visuals	✓✓	Pupil/student activities	
Overall style	✓✓✓	Cross-curricular	⇐