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Editor's letter

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ESSENCE

EDITOR'S LETTER

THE ITALIAN MODERNIST designer Massimo Vignelli, who died earlier this year aged 83 was a prolific creator who applied simple geometric forms to an astonishing range of design problems. He was responsible for the New York City subway map, he made an acclaimed documentary called *Helvetica*, and he designed furniture, invented new forms of packaging and worked as an architect. Vignelli is celebrated for the expression, "If you can design one thing, you can design everything," but equally intriguing is his belief that "There is no design without discipline. There is no discipline without intelligence." This statement is a manifesto for elegant design, or the belief that the forms and products we create should avoid superfluous artistry and have an empathetic regard for humanity. Thus we have chosen "elegance" as the theme for this ninth edition of SIGNED, in order to celebrate what design can achieve when it's restrained and meticulous. These days the word "elegance" is most often associated with celebrities and fashion models, but its roots are much more meaningful. The word emerged in the 15th century as a derivative from the French "*élégant*", which had its roots in the Latin terms *elegantem* meaning "choice, fine, or tasteful," and *eligere* meaning "select with care". Its use in the 16th and 17th centuries suggests that the word was associated with activities that required "training and cultivation through the study of models or

ideals of grace" especially when craftsmanship was involved. This makes "design" and "elegance" a pair of close relatives who should properly be regarded as members of the same family, with the same bloodline. A design that has no elegance is unlikely to have much impact, and to say that something elegant has no design values is an offence against logic. The stories in SIGNED IX explore the power that design and elegance have when they work in tandem. In *Seize The Day* the work of graduates from HKDI's programmes are showcased and the pieces that most powerfully strike the eye are those that have the discipline and intelligence that elegant design requires. In *Picture This* and *Moving Images* we see how the visual arts rely upon an elegant selection of angle and editing to produce the most powerful photographs and films. In *Capability Town* we see how Patricia Moore uses design to create elegant solutions to make the lives of elders more comfortable and productive; *Angel's Share* tells the story of the Muses Foundation and the elegant simplicity of its mission to support young design talents that might otherwise miss their chance to shine. Everywhere in this edition design and elegance are combined. Design and elegance flow together like drops of water in a river, one where the currents of culture combine to make new forms, elevating and refreshing humanity. As Vignelli observed the seeds of one design has the fruits of many. And thus do designers make the world a better place.

DANIEL JEFFREYS
Editor-In-Chief

« ELEGANCE IS USUALLY CONFUSED WITH SUPERFICIALITY, FASHION, LACK OF DEPTH. THIS IS A SERIOUS MISTAKE: HUMAN BEINGS NEED TO HAVE ELEGANCE BECAUSE THIS WORD IS SYNONYMOUS WITH GOOD TASTE, AMIABILITY, EQUILIBRIUM AND HARMONY. »

PAULO COELHO