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## A world that works for every one

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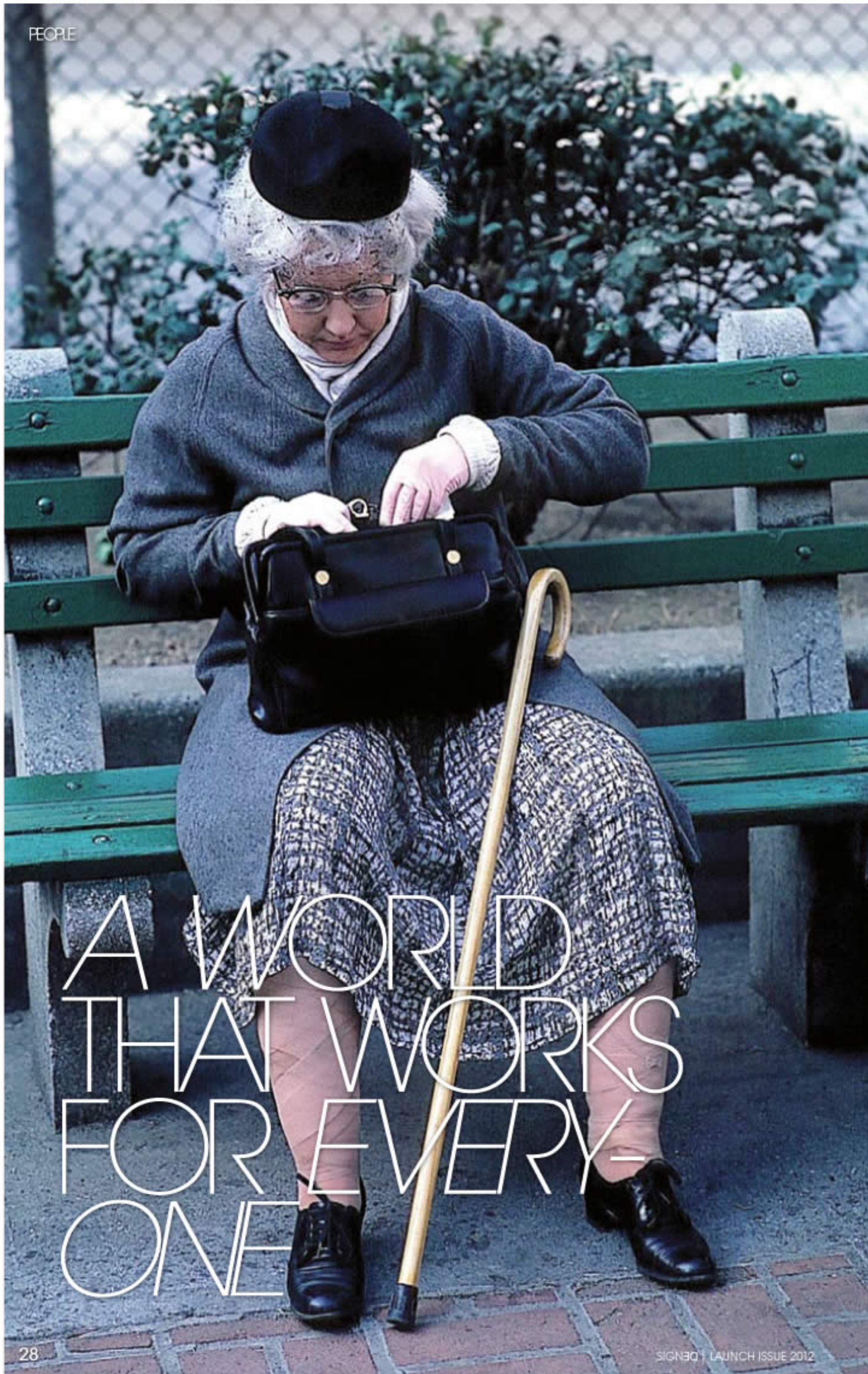
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A WORLD  
THAT WORKS  
FOR EVERY  
ONE

PATRICIA MOORE



LEFT MOORE  
AGED 26; OPPOSITE  
MOORE AS AN  
85-YEAR-OLD ELDER

*In 1979, twenty-six year old **PATRICIA MOORE** disguised herself as a woman in her 80s and travelled to 116 cities throughout North America, to discover if urban design met the needs of the elderly. Dressed in her grandmother's clothes, she developed a unique form of immersion research that revitalised the role of architecture and design in our daily lives. Now she is working with the HKDI to develop solutions that work for all age groups. Here she lays out her passionate vision for the future of design.*

WE HAVE BEEN designers since the moment our Cro-Magnon ancestors began chipping stones to make cutting tools. Creating for our comfort, providing for our existence, responding to the daily challenges that impact our lives, these are all matters that require design solutions.

The places and things which we encounter every day are the results of someone's daring, thinking, and action. Throughout history, designers have been people who challenged the norm, rose to the occasion, and seized the opportunity to make a difference.

The path of the designer is a noble one. Da Vinci's curiosity paved the way for the first flight of the Wright Brothers. The combustion engine led to rockets successfully travelling into space. The invention of the moment gives birth to the products of the future.

The pioneers of the field – Loewy, Teague and Dreyfuss – shaped the products that fill our lives. Automobiles,

PATRICIA MOORE

aircraft, telephones – all the things we, as consumers, have come to expect and require – were made possible by the creativity of the art and science that is design, under the direction of dedicated designers.

In the 1960s, product designers found themselves faced by ever-growing challenges. Concerns about poverty, environmental protection and physical accessibility gave them a new role as arbiters of the quality of life.

Determining the shape and scope of our cities, protecting and supporting the fragile resources of our planet and the independence and autonomy of

all persons throughout the course of their lives have catapulted the significance of good design and the position of the designer into an entirely new and vitally important role.

Just as Da Vinci questioned what was hitherto accepted, today's designers must redefine what is known. Today's answers must support tomorrow's questions. There has never been a more exciting or vital time for design. And the need for humanism in design has never been greater. By focusing our talents on the needs of each individual, designers have given birth to a new order: "inclusivity by design".

This "design for all" approach focuses on possibilities, not limitations. Inclusivity in design supports the belief we can provide solutions for shortcomings. Where there is ignorance, we will strive for enlightenment. Where there is a roadblock, we will create a pathway. For example, we can no longer speak of the disabled. Our responsibility is to enhance a person's abilities,

«The need for inclusivity has never been more critical»

AN ELDERLY MAN WALKS PAST AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR A NEW LUXURY STORE IN THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF HONG KONG



recognising that all of us are distinct and “differently-abled”. Design and designers are true “enablers” who present and promote balance in all places and things. We no longer focus on age as a limitation to a response. Our “elders”, not the “elderly”, require good design in their lives, as much as people of all ages.

The designer’s domain spans from birth to death. With the dawn of the new millennium, designers have emerged as navigators, translators of our hopes and our desires. Their work has never been more important, and their opportunities to make a difference have never been greater.

Beyond providing the corporate realm with a successful bottom line, designers have the ability to fashion the quality of life itself. Design is no longer a mere variable in determining the course of the future: it is the means of our very survival.

So why has the international design community seemed so slow to embrace these ideas?

Perhaps it’s the circumstances in which industrial and urban design was conceived. Born in an era of economic chaos, design’s primary objective was to promote products. Whether people needed them or not, designers led them to believe they could not live without the “thing” of the moment.

That imperative was not seriously challenged until the advent of a more humanistic approach to design in the 60s, when the issue of personal wealth, individual health and the environment became important arbiters of a designer’s worth. Tragically, the 60s pioneers soon fell under the influence of economic pressures and in late 70s and most of the 80s, when profit and glitz became the market’s king once again.

Now, designers have begun to focus on individual needs again. The ageing baby boomers in the United States have created a catalyst for change. Growing concern for our children, parents and the world we live in has meant that accountability is regaining control. The human factor has returned to centre stage.

Yet, despite a font of good will, it appears the design community has done little more than fill student portfolios with good intentions and perpetuate myths and misconceptions, thus failing to satisfy real consumer needs.

The results have been product and environmental designs for those considered “average” or less than


“normal” that fail them at many levels. True design universality is still the exception. As a force for creation and change, designers need to step back, analyse their mission, and treat all consumers as equals. The need for inclusivity has never been more critical.

If we assert that some people – because of age, body form, or functional range – can be disregarded during mainstream product development, we will fail to meet the wishes, needs, and dreams of consumers as a whole. When we describe people as “young” or “old”, “able-bodied” or “disabled”, we create conflicting camps and reduce resources for everyone. Nobody is elderly, we all have to age. Nobody is disabled, we all have different abilities.

As long as chronic health conditions and the effects of disease, ageing, and injury create consumers who might use wheels to “walk”, eyes to “hear”, fingers to “see”, there will always be a place for specific-need products and environmental compensation. But those requirements are best considered within the context of the design process, so that even the so-called special situations become commonplace and ordinary.

Only when we focus on providing features and aspects to meet the range of everyone’s needs, not just those of specific people with other abilities or younger, healthier consumers, can we will realise our potential as designers, architects, and human engineers.

Unless we change our attitudes and perceptions of the “norm”, we will continue to create safe passageways for some and roadblocks for others. As consumers negotiate the hazards of everyday life, they should view designers as pathfinders. Design is the ultimate prosthetic, and designers are the veritable enablers.

Ours is an exciting mandate that extends beyond aesthetics. We have the capacity to fashion the quality of life itself. Design is no longer a mere variable for determining the course of the future; it is the very means of our survival. 

*Patricia A. Moore is the President of Moore Design Associates LLC. In 2000 she was selected by a consortium of news editors and organisations as one of The 100 Most Important Women in America and was named by ID Magazine in 2007 as one of the world’s 40 Most Socially Conscious Designers. In 2006 she was given the American Society of Interior Designers’ Humanitarian Award and she is a Fellow of the Industrial Designers Society of America.*

MIKE CLARKE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES