

Design for everybody

Thierry Brunfaut tells ThinkBusiness why we connect with certain brands, the importance of common sense in design and the power of a good story.

"Brands are like people, they stand out through their unique personalities and attitudes," says Thierry Brunfaut, creative director and partner at Base Design.

You give a talk called 'Brands are like People', in what way and how do you make your work about people?

We use this 'brands are like people' analogy all the time at Base. It's a simple filter that helps us to work. Brands are, indeed, like people. They are born, they grow, they change, they die. Young brands behave like teenagers, dressing all the same. Mature brands behave otherwise.

Each brand has a different personality: some are serious, others bold, sophisticated, or funny. When they grow bigger and diversify, we can see how they behave as a family of brands, with perhaps different personalities but with the same DNA. When they gather on special occasions, we use the term of 'brand friend'. No matter what, as with people, we have an emotional connection with brands. We love or hate them, without often knowing why. That emotional bond is what interests us at Base.

How important is common sense to design and what are the dangers of design straying too much from this?

Fundamental. Common sense governs most design decisions at Base. What does that mean? It means everything you do must aim at essential, simple, accessible ideas. It is a difficult process. But it is also an attitude: don't stay away from clichés or ideas that seem too simple. Embrace them. The main danger for designers is to create in a vacuum, to design for an elite that 'understands design'. Therefore, one of our Base motto: 'Don't design for designers. Design for people'. A good test is always to show your design to a six-year-old kid. If he or she gets it or is inspired by it, it's probably good.

What makes you stand out as a design company?

I don't know, it is for you to tell me. The thing I can tell is you're not only defined by what you do (your projects, your designs) but much more by how you do it. And with who. With time, we realised at Base our approach was more important than our design skills to promote our company and our people.

How do you stay creative?

Who's creative and who isn't? At Base, we don't divide people between creative and non-creative. Sometimes you have an idea, sometimes you don't. It's a question of moment and context. Whether it's a good one or a bad one, the important thing is that you must be able to express it freely. Sometimes one very bad idea plus one other very bad idea can bring out a great idea.

Where do you get inspiration?

Inspiration is a personal experience. Some people are inspired by images, some by books, music, movies or events of their daily life. Some take pictures, others gather items. No universal recipe here. I believe a great designer must develop his own ability to capture what gets him/her going. Personally, what drives me are good stories. I believe a good story to tell is always a good project.

Thierry Brunfaut will be delivering a keynote speech at the WhyDesign International Women's Day event in Dublin in Friday, March 8th.