Glimmer: How Design Can Transform Your Life, and Maybe Even the World

By Warren Berger

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Can great design transform people's lives? And can we all learn from the way great designers think? For a new generation of designers, such as Bruce Mau and Yves Behar, the answer to both questions is an unequivocal 'Yes'. To them, design is more than just a question of fashion or taste; it's a way of asking fundamental questions in order to solve complex problems. In "Glimmer", award-winning journalist Warren Berger shows how these visionary thinkers are taking design principles out of the studio and applying them to the tough issues of today, from making medicines safer to counteracting the threats of global warming. By approaching seemingly intractable problems with simple thought-processes that often seem counter-intuitive - 'ask stupid questions', 'embrace constraint' - designers are creating 'glimmer moments', when a life-changing ideas crystallise in the mind, and coming up with breathtakingly innovative solutions.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Exclusive: What Can We Learn from the World's Greatest Designers?

The answer to the above question is "a lot." We can learn how to solve problems better. How to look at the world around us with a fresh eye. How to think more creatively, and ultimately, how to open up new possibilities in our lives.

These are the things that great designers do every day. But the premise in my new book Glimmer is: "You don't have to be a designer to think like one." There's a whole way of thinking used by designers, and a step-by-step process they follow, that really can be embraced by anyone—whether you're in business, out there trying to contribute to the world in some way, or if you're just looking to improve your own life.

What I found, in studying some of the world's most innovative designers, is that—in addition to being immensely talented and bright people, of course—they tend to have two big things they rely on. First, they have a certain mindset that enables them to be fearless and optimistic and open to all kinds of new possibilities. And second, they have a framework they use—a proven methodology that helps them to bring their ideas and plans to life, to get things done, and to be successful. I sort of dejargonize this methodology and give lots of examples of how it works in Glimmer.

One of the things designers are known for doing is questioning everything. In fact there's a joke that asks, "How many designers does it take to change a lightbulb?" To which the answer is: "Does it have to be a lightbulb?"

It's a joke, but it's not: Designers all the time really do ask basic things like Does it have to be a lightbulb? The design process often begins with questioning the conventional wisdom about how we currently do things.

Of course, it's one thing to question the world around you-but it's much harder to begin to change it. As I

write in Glimmer, if you just question everything without trying to improve it, you may end up being more of a whiner than a designer. Designers actually must take action in order to create new possibilities—that's their job. And so it's not surprising they've developed proven methods to help them do that.

I examine those methods in detail in the book, but they involve, for example:

- Teaching oneself to be open to new ideas by "thinking laterally" (which is really about tricking your brain into moving in unexpected directions, instead of the usual straightforward ones).
- Developing a better antenna for figuring out what's missing & what's really needed in the world around you—that's how designers find great opportunities.
- Learning how to bring ideas to life, and make them real. All of us have ideas in our heads, but designers make their ideas real and tangible-by sketching, by modeling, by scotch-taping things together. It's what designers call prototyping, and it's the way you take a dream and gradually build it into a reality. And this is a technique anyone can use.
- Another important thing designers do is, they "fail forward." Most of us are afraid to fail, but designers fail every day. What they understand is that every failure—if you know how to react to it and use it—can be a critical step that brings you closer to the end goal.

These are just a few of the basic tools and principles designers use. And what really surprised me, as I worked on the book, was to see just how accessible these tools are to anyone. And how applicable they are to just about any situation.

In today's world, with all the challenges and problems we have to grapple with—both in our daily lives and in the world at large—we can benefit from having that designer mindset and methodology. Because the truth is, we all need to become better at facing up to tough challenges and finding new solutions.

From Publishers Weekly
Humanity's problems can be designed away with ingenious products and catchy marketing, according to this giddy manifesto. Journalist Berger (*Advertising Today*) channels the insights of celebrity designer Bruce Mau, whose grandiose projects—he's helping the University of Arizona to reinvent higher education—yield such pensées as everything communicates. He distills Mau's wisdom into high-concept glimmer principles, including work the metaphor and design for emergence, and applies them to everything from disaster relief to personal life. Berger tries to both abstract and systematize the process of innovative design and to give it a populist spin: you don't need expertise or money to solve problems, just optimism, an attentive eye and a childlike readiness to Ask Stupid Questions. Nifty gadgets are showcased, including a nut-sheller for Third World farmers and a wheelchair that climbs stairs. But much of the book is just a retread of self-help bromides (you have to be willing to grow) and familiar business buzz concepts, one that treats a pet food company's promotion of an international holiday for dogs as a humanitarian crusade. The result is an overhyped brief for a shallow approach to the world's ills. *(Oct.)*

Review
"A design book for the rest of us.... In *Glimmer,* Warren Berger explains to the uninitiated what designers have been saying for years: that good design really can change the world." --GOOD magazine, October 2009

"One of the best books about design I've read." --TechRevu.com, November 2009

"In his new book, *Glimmer,* Berger argues that basic design strategies can be adapted to everyday issues,

such as how to get along with colleagues, how to balance work and life, and how to ease gracefully into old age." --Fast Company, November 2009

"Berger challenges readers to move beyond the correlation between design and style to associate design with problem solving." --Booklist, October 2009

"*Glimmer* holds inspiration for non-marketers, too, with its accounts of regular folks who had a `glimmer moment'--a sudden vision of the possible--and followed through to create something useful." --Psychology Today, December 2009

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Velda Thornley:

Have you spare time for any day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent their own spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or maybe read a book entitled Glimmer: How Design Can Transform Your Life, and Maybe Even the World? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have some other opinion?

James Brown:

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