

Iconic design and how to
give products enduring
appeal and lasting values

Some fundamentals
about what it takes to make
designs that stands out for
all the right reasons

valeur
designers

1: Design for the idea, not the time

The concept of creating products with enduring appeal has never been more relevant than today. It is the antithesis of all these indifferent products that are thrown away far too soon. Our coming masterclass posts will focus on the topic of creating iconic products with enduring appeal.

First thing to notice is that all iconic products have one thing in common. They stand out with a strong identity, based on a clear idea and a shape that refers to that idea and not to the time it was created. The stronger emotion evoking identity a design has, the better chance it has to gain the enduring appeal, because only then you will recognize it and remember it.

When we design, it all starts with a strong idea. An idea that surprises by its logical originality and stays true to the essence of the role of that design. Then we refine the design and removes anything that takes away from the original idea. We keep going until there is only the essential left. To make sure that every shape relates to the idea and to the object's unique reason to exist. Now the idea becomes the product identity.

Beosound 8, Beosound 2 and Beosound Level are all portable music centres. Each with its own strong identity. The time gap between them is substantial, but they fit together in a timeless sphere.

Key point: To become an icon a product must stand out by its clear understandable idea.



2. Focus on the essence

Great design; the kind that defies trends and fads come from finding the true identity of an object. This identity is both original and new; it's intuitive and obvious. And it comes from understanding the essence of the product.

Essence precedes existence – is both a statement of Plato's philosophy and a design principle we follow at Valeur Designers. We start by finding the essence of the object, rather than settling on already existing and established forms.

When we recently were asked by Bang & Olufsen to design a new remote to control your music and your smart home, we left behind the conventional wisdom of how a remote should look like. Instead, we dissected it into elements of essence: A large ring for tactile and joyful volume adjustment and a wide horizontal screen good for displaying music tracks and angled for best ergonomics. To highlight these two essential elements, we arranged them, so they appear floating in the air like a kinetic sculpture.

The result is BeoRemote Halo that is surprising but intuitive. It has a shape that is rather atypical for a remote that controls your music and smart home. You may expect the user to be confused when using something unusual for the first time but on the contrary, Halo gives out a clear visual clue of how to approach it. It feels natural to turn the outer ring to adjust the sound. The product also invites you to grab it by the ring like a portable basket on your way to another room. Radically different yet completely logic.

Key point: Revealing the essence makes design stand out as iconic design.



3. Radically new yet completely logic

Design that is radically new yet completely logic is the foundation of iconic design. The logic comes from what the product should do, how it fits with the surroundings and what is inside. Therefore, it is equally important to design from the outside in and from the inside out.

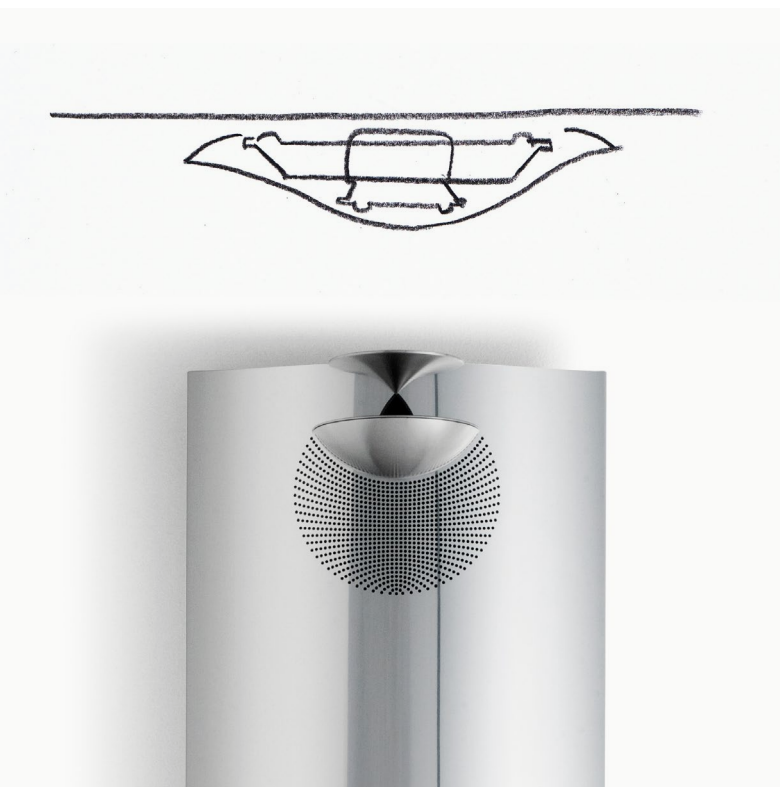
All our speaker designs appear very sculptural at first sight. When looking deeper at them you will find a strong link between the inner build and the outside shape. Without this link the shape would appear artificial, maybe even false.

Beosound 1 and 2 is a family of conical speakers. The conical shape, though unconventional, got accepted and is now repeated in other speaker designs because it is grounded in rationale. The cone shape is not superficially invented but naturally derived from inner contents and the use scenario.

Starting with the hardware given to us, speakers, prints and batteries, we experimented with the layout. The build with the bass driver at the bottom and the tweeter at the top made best sense for the shape and the acoustic. It was naturally to place the user interaction at the very top, but that required the tweeter to be turned upside down. Tests by the acoustic engineers proved it was suitable. This is the “inside out” approach.

At the same time, we had the goal of creating speakers that could be placed anywhere and look welcome without stealing the attention. The cone shape aligns with the omni-directional sound function and the wish to fit in anywhere. The user interaction should support the omnidirectional nature of the speakers. That is why we designed an interface that is free of directions, but automatically adjust its sensing to the direction your hands come from. This is the “outside in” approach.

Key point: Logic products are designed according to the inner build and the outer circumstance.



4. Explore physically

We have stressed the importance of identity and making radically new yet completely logic designs, but how do we achieve that? How do we find out what really makes sense? Focus groups, user testing, briefs and research are common tools to find out what makes sense for the user. However, to fully discover the users' latent needs we must climb into the user's mind, be the user and answer all the questions that occur during the creation.

Like an actor climbs into a role we must be the users, and that is an integrated part of the complete design process. Because we may not have the right questions in the beginning. Relevant questions come during the process, and we must be able to answer the questions the moment they occur.

Our process is based on direct design and prototyping. A very hands-on exercise that allows for lots of curious explorations and tactical experimentations as we move forward towards the final design. Why?

We want to create a lasting love relationship between user and product. This requires intimate familiarity with the problems we are solving them for. We try to become the user; to think like him, ask his questions without any preconceptions. We do this by physically playing out user experiences and asking all the difficult questions we need to answer. We combine these findings with those of our clients to get the most accurate insights as possible.

Key point: sketch hands on and answer the question on behalf of the user.



5. Make it last

Our goal is to create objects that are not only instantly desirable but embody a lasting appeal to keep them. There is something incredibly charming about products that stand the time. However, longevity is a compliment that does not apply to most contemporary electronic appliances.

There are several aspects to designing a product that stands the battle against the time. One of them is a timeless look. It should be able to fit in the ever-changing context of your life, for example, a changing interior. Moreover, it should allow for upgrades and changes, both functional and aesthetic.

Beosound Level was designed for a long life. The speaker's ageless look will still fit into your interior years from today. The outer shape is designed so it is easy to change the appearance and bring novelty to it during its commercial lifespan. While it's essence and value will prevail, the inner components can be upgraded as the technological development marches forward.

Beosound Level is like a reliable friend that you keep close throughout the years and different stages of your life. And while sentiment and electronics are rarely associated with one another we hope that Level becomes an object you can create memories with.

The goal we have is shared with Bang & Olufsen and the team behind Beosound Level has focused on longevity on all aspects that is thinkable. It is the first consumer electronic product certificated as cradle to cradle. It shows that collaboration and a common goal is essential.

Key Point: Make it last by combining ageless design with materials and technology that stands its time.



6. Complete everything

A compelling object radiates finest quality through having it's every detail attended to. For us, a prime quality product is complete from any angle you choose to look at it. In other words, no element should appear like a compromise or an unsolved problem.

Attending every detail with dedication and precision shows the user that we who designed and produced the product went to great lengths to accomplish the best possible outcome. This care and accuracy show our respect towards the user. We believe it is fundamental if your product should evoke an enduring appeal, since you treasure things made with passion and devotion.

Beosound 1 and 2 are designed to be viewed from all sides. The cone shape is seamless and can be approach and interacted with from any position. Even when you lift it up and look at the bottom there are no careless details.

Looking at Beolab 14 you find a rock-solid speaker completely free of unwanted details. The ring looks like a massive piece without part lines and the front and back are fully flush to the ring. You cannot see how its assembled. Its shows super quality.

The router TP-Link Belt has very clean detailing and a quality level unseen for this type of product. Even the connectors are hidden.

It is essential that you design with the final product in mind. Designing a product that peaks in the store. You design with the engineers in mind, not to make it easy for them but to be ahead of them, so issues does not let down the design. And you engage in a respectful and knowledge-driven dialog where we strive to make the seemingly impossible come to life. In the end, all parties need to be proud of it.

Key Point: Making product with enduring appeal requires that all details are solved.



7. Bring joy

A large portion of a technological object's charisma comes from how well the user interface is crafted. An interface is a dialogue between the user and the device, and it is an opportunity to make the product experience joyful.

This interaction should be as transparent and effortless as possible. Never appear complicated or let you down by not giving what you wish. None the less, we want every encounter to be enjoyable and memorable - maybe even magical.

Design talks to all our senses including the sense of touch. We often look at the product with our fingers. It is our way of judging the quality.

Beoremote Halo has a palm-sized metal ring to adjust the loudness. It is unconventional yet uncomplicated, intuitive and wonderfully tactile. It turns with gentle resistance in small increments and makes silent mechanic clicks along the way. Halo's tactility is a large contributor for the joyful usage and the product's character.

Beoremote 1 may be the most joyful remote to hold in your hand. The slim and solid piece of aluminium with the smooth surface feels ergonomically well and tight in your hand.

Beocom 2 has a long slim aluminium body that was very comfortable to hold making hourlong conversations pleasant.

Key Point: All interaction with a product should be a joy.



8. Reflect inner value

When judging a product, we use all our senses. We often look at a product with our fingers. Curious we touch the surface to sense the tactility of the surface. We hear how it sounds when we knock on it. We open and close things or hold it in hands to feel how it fits to our physics. It is all to determine the quality feel of the product.

But the choice of materials and finish is about more than evoking the right feelings of poetry and quality. When tactility matches the look and when the surface matches the material it becomes an honest product, where promise and delivery matches. This kind of honesty is humane and trustworthy. Honesty is a long-lasting value.

We use genuine materials in our designs. We expose edges to highlight the true nature of the material, we shape the parts according to the material while pushing the boundaries. Because we wish to express the inner value of a product and show the substance and dedication put into the product by the creators.

Key Point: When honesty is shown in all material choices you will view the complete product as honest quality.

