

Behind Apple's products is longtime designer Ive

August 26 2011, By RACHEL METZ , AP Technology Writer



In this file photo taken March 19, 1999, Jonathan Ive, left, Apple's vice president of design, and Jon Rubinstein, Apple's senior vice president of engineering, pose behind five iMac personal computers, at Apple headquarters in Cupertino, Calif. Apple CEO Steve Jobs may be the company's most recognizable personality, but much of its cachet comes from its clean, friendly-looking designs _ the product of its head designer, Jonathan Ive. (AP Photo/Susan Ragan, File)

Steve Jobs has been Apple's most recognizable personality, but much of its cachet comes from its clean, inviting designs. For that, Apple can credit its head designer, Jonathan Ive.

Ive, a self-effacing 44-year-old Brit, helped Jobs bring [Apple](#) back from the brink of financial ruin with the whimsical iMac computer, whose original models came in bright colors at a time when bland shades dominated the PC world. He later helped transform Apple into a consumer electronics powerhouse and the envy of [Silicon Valley](#) with the iPod, the iPhone and, most recently, the [iPad](#).

In the wake of Jobs' resignation as CEO, Apple must show that it can keep churning out head-turning products even without its charismatic leader. Apple's chief operating officer, [Tim Cook](#), is now CEO, taking on the role of Apple's public face.

But in many ways the real pressure will fall on Ive to make sure Apple continues its string of gadget successes.

Ive, known to his friends as "Jony," has led Apple's design team since the mid-'90s. Working closely with Jobs, Ive has built a strong legacy at Apple, ushering in products that are sleek and stylish, with rounded corners, few buttons, brushed aluminum surfaces and plenty of slick glass.

Apple's pride in this work is evident even in the packaging: Open up any iPhone box, for example, and see Apple proudly proclaim, "Designed by Apple in California." Six of Ive's works, including the original iPod, are even part of the collection at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

People who have worked with Ive describe him as humble and sweet, quiet and shy, but also confident, hard-working and brilliant. Paola Antonelli, senior curator of architecture and design for MoMA, said she knows "hardly anybody that is so universally loved and admired" as Ive.

"Products have to be designed better now for people to buy them because of Jony Ive and Steve Jobs and Apple," Antonelli said. "All of a

sudden people have gotten used to elegance and beauty, and there's no going back."

Design, as well as software that makes the gadgets easy to use, is a crucial part of setting Apple products apart from those of its rivals. Apple didn't make the first music player or smartphone, but it blew past rivals by making ones that looked cool and worked well.

Ive started out far from Apple Inc.'s Cupertino headquarters. He grew up outside London and studied design at Newcastle Polytechnic (now Northumbria University) in Newcastle, England. After finishing school, he co-founded a London-based design company called Tangerine. There, he designed a range of products including combs and power tools. It was through Tangerine that he first got to work with Apple.

In 1992, while Jobs was still in the midst of a 12-year exile from Apple, the company's design chief at the time, Robert Brunner, hired Ive as a senior designer. Thomas Meyerhoffer, who worked under Ive at Apple in the '90s, believes Ive came because he understood Apple was different from other computer companies.

"He came to Apple to take that even further," Meyerhoffer said.

And Ive did, but not right away. Ive quickly became a leader, working as the creative studio manager and helping to build Apple's design team during a period in which the company struggled to innovate.

Apple declined requests for an interview with Ive. But during a 1999 interview with The Associated Press, Ive said that for years, designers would produce foam models of computers only to be sent back to their drawing boards because of managers' fixations with focus groups and marketing figures.

"We lost our identity and looked to competition for leadership," Ive said at the time.

Brunner left in 1996 and suggested that Ive take over the post, even though Ive was only 29. When Jobs returned from his exile and became interim CEO in 1997, he named Ive as senior vice president of industrial design.

With Jobs again at the helm and Ive as his style guru, Apple refocused around design and produced a hit that got the company back on track. Apple shook up the personal computer industry in 1998 with the candy-colored all-in-one iMac desktop, the original models shaped like a futuristic TV.

Unlike previous product attempts, the iMac concept was immediately embraced by the top decision makers at Apple, and the design went through very few revisions.

"We knew we had it when we saw it, and with Jobs' support we were able to make it happen," Ive said in 1999.

At a time when most computers were boxy and largely black, beige or gray, the iMac was bulbous and flashy. People snapped up 150,000 of them in the first weekend following its release. Apple sold 800,000 iMacs by the end of the year.

The iMac changed the way consumers thought about personal computers and about Apple itself. It gave Apple a vital boost that helped it usher in a new era of consumer electronics that were quirky, fun and colorful. The marketing team even teased consumers by encouraging them at one point to collect all five - strawberry, blueberry, grape, tangerine and lime.

With Ive in charge of design, Apple then bought out the first iPod in 2001, the [iPhone](#) in 2007 and the iPad in 2010. In recent years, the company has largely dropped the bright color palette (though you can still find it on some iPods) in favor of black, white and silver hues. Yet they retained simplicity that made them approachable to everyone - from the tech geek to Grandma - as well as the curves, shiny surfaces and expensive appearance.

As a result, Apple's products are more popular than ever, allowing the company to surpass rival Microsoft Corp. last year as the most valuable technology company in the world.

"He wasn't responsible for them, but they definitely couldn't have done them without him," said Leander Kahney, who has written about Apple in several books and on his "Cult of Mac" blog.

Ive and Jobs have worked hand in hand and, in many respects, have contributed to each other's success. Ive has always been in contact with Jobs and speaks the same language as him, Antonelli said, and they clearly have chemistry.

Don Norman, who worked at Apple in the '90s as vice president of the company's advanced technology group, said that while Ive had good design ideas "sitting on the shelves," he needed Jobs to get those designs off the shelves.

"Jony has always been Jony - brilliant," Norman said. "What he needed was a [Steve Jobs](#) to say, 'Make this happen.'"

Now, the test will be whether Cook can continue to keep that focus at Apple and encourage Ive to continue creating hits.

In a sense, the challenge won't be as difficult as it had been in the 1990s.

Now that Apple has developed a style, it can build on it rather than try to reimagine it with each new product.

And that, Norman says, is now in Apple's DNA.

More information: Ive collection at MoMA: <http://bit.ly/niZFGZ>

©2011 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Behind Apple's products is longtime designer Ive (2011, August 26) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-08-apple-products-longtime-ive.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.