

Apple design chief faces new world without Jobs

September 8 2011, By Jessica Guynn

Printed on the back of every iPod, iPhone and iPad is "Designed by Apple in California."

Those five words speak volumes about the pride Apple Inc. takes in design - and in design chief Jonathan Ive.

Steve Jobs may have dreamed up the ideas. But Ive turned them into products with a cult following.

The synergy between Apple's co-founder and its top designer set into motion a decade of hits from the iPod to the iPad.

Now Apple will be counting on Ive to continue to deliver breakthrough designs without much oversight or support from Jobs, who last month stepped down as chief executive.

Ive is one of the world's top industrial designers, and his work has become the stuff of case studies at design schools and permanent collections at New York City's Museum of Modern Art and the Georges Pompidou Center in Paris. All the Apple products he has designed are being featured for the first time in a high-profile design exhibition that recently opened at an art museum in Hamburg, Germany.

But his value to Apple is not that his designs pleased his demanding boss or design gurus; it's that his designs helped forge a personal connection with legions of Apple fans in the fickle [consumer electronics industry](#),

analysts say.

Apple's devotion to design - not just software and hardware - has for decades set the company apart from its competitors. While many electronics companies pinch pennies, Apple gambles on pioneering ideas, new materials and innovative production processes, analysts say. And Apple's design plans are not guided by market research or focus groups.

Instead, Apple has relied on the instincts of Jobs and Ive to anticipate what consumers will want, said Tim Bjarin, an analyst who has tracked Apple for decades. Together, he said, Ive and Jobs fueled Apple's turnaround by transforming dull gray boxes into simple, sleek gadgets. And that has made Apple one of the world's most valuable and influential companies.

Ive's design eye is so keen, it's "even better than Steve Jobs'," Bjarin said.

"Steve had gut sense about industrial design, whereas Jonathan has that plus the professional design experience," he said.

The 44-year-old British-born designer known to his friends as "Jony" is by all accounts a soft-spoken, self-effacing craftsman intensely driven not by money or glory (although he has plenty of both) but by the obsessive desire to create products that are meaningful to people. Former colleagues refer to the ability of a product to tap into people's emotions as "having Jony-ness."

Ive and his elite team of a dozen or so designers work in secrecy in a design studio deep within Apple's Cupertino, Calif., campus. The studio, sealed off from all but Apple's top executives, is stocked with expensive prototyping equipment.

The team eats pizza and listens to music while designing gadgets to make them simple for consumers to use, devoting attention to every detail in a relentless effort to peel away any part that isn't necessary, according to former Apple employees. The team works in concert with Apple's engineers and marketers, and even manufacturers, to make sure the products match the vision.

Ive's goal is to "make something that looks like it wasn't really designed at all because it's inevitable," he said in 2006.

"He seems to embody the very essence of the best of Apple people: a quiet, thoughtful but intense passion to do the very best," said Mike Martucci, a former Apple marketing director. "This manner, this vision and this level of passion is what drove Apple to the top before and, I believe, is driving it again."

Apple declined requests to make Ive available for an interview. But in past interviews, he says he was drawn to Apple for its desire to - in the words of its own marketing campaign - "think different."

He says the company's revolutionary nature was clear to him from the moment he first touched a Macintosh computer.

At the time he was nearing the end of his four-year industrial design studies in England. Not one to read an instruction manual, he was frustrated with personal computers and feared he was "technically inept." Then he turned on a Mac and said he felt an instant connection to the computer and to the people who designed it.

"I could just use the product straightaway. It was a really profound moment. I don't think I ever had actually quite the same sense of 'wow' with a product before," Ive said.

Ive, who was fascinated by how things were made since he was a teen, joined Apple in 1992 from a small design firm in his native Britain. He called the move "some sort of reckless sense of faith." At the time, Apple was bleeding money and market share.

He toiled in obscurity until five years later, when Jobs returned to pull Apple back from the brink of ruin. Jobs conducted an international search for a design director but picked Ive after wandering into the design studio and discovering the work Ive had been doing there.

Ive's first product with Jobs was the iMac, the radical line of translucent desktop computers whose bright hues contrasted with the bland-looking products from competitors and whose expense flew in the face of falling prices for computers. Ive and his team even visited a confectioner as they experimented with candy colors and gumdrop shapes.

At the time, Ive described brainstorming sessions with Jobs being not about the iMac's chip speed (as was common in the industry), but rather about, "How do we want people to feel about it?"

Over time, Ive became so in tune with Jobs that some joke they shared a brain. With Jobs at the helm and Ive leading the design team, Apple produced a decade of cutting-edge products: the iPod in 2001, the iPhone in 2007 and the [iPad](#) in 2010.

Even with millions tethered to Apple products, Ive says it's an "incredible thrill" when he spots someone with telltale white iPod earphones.

"Apple was one of the few brands which was able to break out of the beige box of computers," said Thomas Meyerhoffer, who worked for Ive at Apple. "Apple as a brand promised users a different experience with their computers, a different relationship."

Can Ive continue to delight consumers with his designs?

That may depend on how much faith new CEO Tim Cook places in Ive and his [design](#) team and on Cook's willingness to keep investing in elements that set Apple's products apart.

"Apple is a company where you are allowed to create products that are more expensive to make. It is the only company doing that," Meyerhoffer said. "[Apple](#) sees that cost in a completely different light. It's not a number on a spreadsheet; it's a necessity to make the brand keep its value and accelerate forward."

(c)2011 the Los Angeles Times
Distributed by MCT Information Services

Citation: Apple design chief faces new world without Jobs (2011, September 8) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-09-apple-chief-world-jobs.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.