

Early laptop designer Moggridge dies at 69

September 9 2012

(AP)—Bill Moggridge, a British industrial designer who came up with an early portable computer with the flip-open shape that is common today, has died. He was 69.

The Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum said Moggridge, its director since 2010, died on Saturday from cancer.

Moggridge is credited with the design of the Grid Compass, a computer that had a keyboard and yellow-on-black display that sold for \$8,150 when it was released in 1982. It was encased in magnesium and seen as rugged, and was used by the U.S. military. The computer made its way into outer space aboard the space shuttle Discovery in 1985.

Although there were many portable computers being developed around that time, Grid Systems Corp. won the patent for the clamshell design with the foldable screen hinged toward the back of the machine, said Alex Bochanek, a curator at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California.

Moggridge pushed for this foldable design when it was realized the flat-panel screen, keyboard and circuitry could all fit snugly together.

"In terms of the industrial design of the enclosure, Moggridge was instrumental in proposing that," Bochanek said. "He came up with that particular form factor."

Until that point, portable computers resembled portable sewing machines

that weighed more than 20 pounds (nine kilograms) and had a big handle, he said.

It was after using the machine that Moggridge's ideas about design began to change, Bochanek said. His work began to focus more on how people interacted with devices, rather than just making sure they were enclosed well.

Moggridge authored the books "Designing Interactions," which was published in 2006, and "Designing Media," published in 2010.

"Beloved by the museum staff and the design community at large, Bill touched the lives of so many through his wise council, boundary-pushing ideas and cheerful camaraderie," said Caroline Baumann, associate director of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, in a statement.

He is survived by his wife of 47 years, Karin, and two sons Alex and Erik.

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