

The lighthouse

Esquire's resident design expert
CYRIL ZAMMIT on the power of
father figures



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I am always surprised to see the discrepancy in the way Mother's Day (March 21st) and the Father's Day (June 21st) is celebrated. In terms of gifting, it is rare that mothers do not receive anything, with most people planning things weeks in advance. Dads, however, rarely get presents, or if they do, they tend to be last minute ones. Whether that last minute 'World's Best Dad' mug shows the level of our appreciation, we cannot overstate that the impact that father figures have on our lives.

For me, a father is like a lighthouse. They are a guide; a rock of reliability; a guardian of a set of values. One of the fundamental things that my father bestowed upon me was the understanding that complexity hides behind simplicity. It is something that shapes my tastes and appreciation of things today, especially when it comes to design.

That element of 'elegant simplicity' would go on to link the three designers that have had the most impact on me—Emile-Jacques Ruhlman, Jean Prouvé and Gio Ponti.

A rarity these days where it seems the louder you are the more you are appreciated.

A master of merging luxury and functionality, Ruhlmann was one of the most important figures in the Art Deco era. By revolutionising crafted fine furniture as an art form he was essentially a haute-couturier in the furniture world, refusing to compromise on the quality of material he used for his designs, despite many considering his work too expensive. For many design fans, he remains a man of impeccable standards, which influenced many younger designers that came after him. One of which was Jean Prouvé. A member of the French Resistance during WWII, his skill as an industrial designer and steadfast social conscious set himself apart in the post-war era. Working with electric welding and metal sheets, his designs allowed him to respond to the extraordinary demand of reconstruction in a devastated Europe and expanding Africa. His social conscious made him at the forefront of the mass production and prefabricated homes, with a goal of remaining as affordable to everyone including refugees.

The final, and arguably my favourite, designer is Gio Ponti. The Italian was so prolific there wasn't much that his ranging talents did not touch. From designing 250 pieces of furniture, ranging from lamps and machines, to glassware; he also worked on more than 200 projects in 13 countries including the Pirelli Tower in Milan—just one of the 40 buildings he designed in his home city. Through it all Ponti remained true to his aesthetic and his set of design values—timeless shapes with pure and simple lines—without closing the door to the contemporary world. Ponti famously once said that 'the house should never be in fashion, for it should never go out of fashion.' In the design world, he remains a lighthouse; a guardian of a set of solid values; a father-figure. ☺

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