Design Ethics in Practice

Between Impact & Intention

A zine produced by the
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Design Ethics & Practice
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Dedicated to our professor, classmates, and everyone who participated in the studies, making this journey insightful and impactful, creating a guide for the rest of our journey in the design field.

Preface

Design is fundamentally about relationships between people, objects, environments, and ideas. As designers, the choices we make ripple outward, affecting communities and ecosystems in ways both visible and invisible. This zine emerged from our collective exploration of how designers navigate ethical considerations across environmental, social, and cultural spheres.

Through interviews with practitioners, field observations, and collaborative design sessions, we examined the tensions that arise when design principles meet real-world complexities. We don't offer simple solutions or universal frameworks, but rather insights into how designers are questioning, challenging, and reimagining their practice to create more just and sustainable futures.

The pages that follow share stories and perspectives from our research journey—moments that challenged our assumptions and expanded our understanding of what ethical design can be. We invite you to join this ongoing conversation about design's power and responsibility in shaping our shared world.

Content

Burak

Kyeung Jin

Po Hsuan Chuang

Yuxin

Social Sphere

Changing Times and Society's Impact on Design

The most important finding from our combined research is that designers must navigate the ethical tensions of technology, the growing demand for privacy as a luxury, media-driven aesthetic shifts, and the influence of fashion brands on social aesthetics.

Burak

I am a firm believer that artists have to function a little bit above themselves to transmit some heaven and my chosen medium has always been design. My North Star has always been design which I see as more than a career path but as a tool that helps me to put my manifestations out in the world. I design for the human spirit that thrives on hope, kindness, and beauty. I am extremely passionate cosmetics industry, and it's intersections with fashion. Also, as a marketing enthusiast, I thrive off creating brand-focused projects and forecasting trend predictions. As the world is going through such unpredictable times, I still have faith in design and its power to navigate humanity toward a brighter future.

Social media's effect on the usage and development of skincare and cosmetics products

Assumptions

As Beauty Continues to Grow, So Does Consumer Confusion.

Some beauty products are being marketed to the wrong demographics.

Social media causes conspiracies and faulty information in product recommendations.

Desk Research

As Beauty Continues to Grow, So Does Consumer
Confusion, BeautyMatter

Consumer confusion in the beauty industry is
widespread, with 72% struggling to understand
scientific terms and 69% buying products
without fully grasping the labels. Misinformation
on platforms like TikTok worsens the issue,
promoting unsafe trends such as misusing
rosemary oil or avoiding sunscreen. Many
consumers rely on brand trust (50%) and reviews
(46%) over ingredient knowledge. The rise of
"clean beauty" adds to the confusion due to
inconsistent definitions. While some brands are
working to educate users, regulation remains
limited—only the EU has taken recent steps.
There's a growing call for transparency to help
consumers make safer, informed choices.

*"Ingredients can't be named as 'good' or 'bad' without
the context of how they are being used. We want to
encourage the consumer to question the ways in which
the industry is speaking to them."*

Key Research Focus

This research investigates social media's effect on the usage and development of skincare and cosmetics products.

Interview Quotes

"A reliable database where consumers can easily check the facts behind product claims would be super helpful. It would cut through all the noise and misinformation."

"Beauty brands should work directly with experts in the field to create clear, educational content. Expert-led videos, articles, or Q&A sessions on social media would help eliminate confusion."

"We could have more collaborations between beauty brands and dermatologists or skincare experts who can offer scientifically-backed advice. That way, the info we get is credible, and we know who to trust."

"I think beauty brands need to be more transparent about their ingredients and the science behind their products. If they were more open about how their products work and why, it would build trust."

"We should push for more transparency from beauty brands, like sharing the results of clinical studies or offering full ingredient breakdowns with scientific backing."

How might we...

fight misinformation & conspiracies in the beauty industry for beauty consumers to obtain reliable sources of updated information, and to make the constantly growing information more digestible?
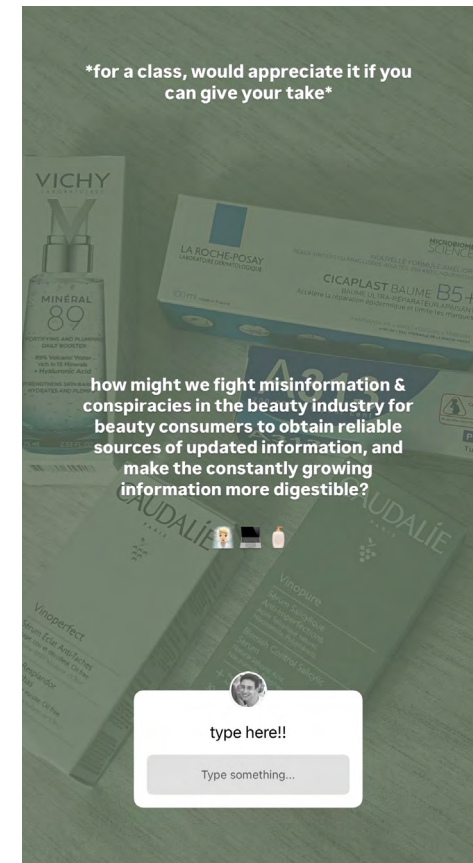
Co-Design Inquiry

Fig. 5. Instagram Q&A

Conclusion

The research concluded that there is an overloading amount of confusion when it comes to finding reliable sources of information.

Future Direction

The future direction is to create a series of campaigns with the intention of debunking the conspiracies in the beauty industry.

Kyeung Jin

I'm a designer who believes that design is not just about visuals—it's a language that connects, questions, and transforms. Rooted in sustainability and human-centered thinking, I create with purpose, constantly exploring how design can ethically respond to social, cultural, and environmental issues. My process blends curiosity, responsibility, and aesthetics to build work that resonates, inspires, and drives thoughtful change.

Investigating how advanced technology creates ethical tensions in the design industry

Assumptions

Copyright issues are the major obstacles to the continuous advancement of AI technology.

AI should only be for support during a process, and the final review should always involve human oversight.

Desk Research

AI positively impacts the design industry but may cause issues like design dehumanization and ethical risks. Designers should actively utilize AI rather than follow its lead. They must understand AI, apply its capabilities, and use strategic thinking, decision-making, and ethical judgment in their work. Collaborating with AI transforms design from simple creation to problem-solving and exploration.

"Professor Dae-sik Kim, a neuroscientist at KAIST, explains that before the use of AI, humans played their roles in each process of ' 1) finding what they want and asking questions, 2) executing it, and 3) selecting and evaluating the results, and he says that they spent the most time and effort on execution among them. He says that 'AI and robots will quickly be able to replace humans in the 2) execution stage. Instead, in the future, humans will be able to focus more effort and time on 1) and 3) - imagining what they want, asking questions, and selecting and evaluating the results'. He seems to believe that this will act as a positive factor in advancing human civilization."

What impact will AI technology have on the design field?, Korea Design Promotion Agency

AI-generated art raises concerns over copyright infringement and ownership. Laws on patents and copyrights, which traditionally recognize only natural persons, need to evolve to address these changes. Companies should use AI wisely while ensuring smooth copyright recognition for their original works.

"In the United States, only creations resulting from human activity are eligible for copyright protection. While the U.S. Copyright Act (17 U.S.C. §§ 101-108) does not explicitly define the term "author," both the U.S. Copyright Office and most courts interpret it as requiring the author to be a natural person. As a result, it is the common opinion in the U.S. legal community that the Copyright Office will reject the registration of works solely created by AI.
If AI cannot be the copyright holder, it is still unclear whether the developer who created the AI or the person who input the data to generate the work should hold the copyright when the AI produces a creation with human involvement."

Who owns the copyright to a picture drawn by artificial intelligence?, KOTRA (Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency)

Key Research Focus

How advanced technology tensions with design ethics play out in the design industry

Interview Quotes

"AI should be used as a tool, while humans should lead the creative process "

"There needs to be a certain level of legal regulation and guidance"

"Implement a standardized process for registering copyrights for AI-generated works"

"Ethical concerns include copyright infringement, biased design, and unethical use"

"If AI usage is fair and does not violate regulations, it is generally seen as a positive development"

"To believe true creation should be done by humans because only humans can embed real stories into their work"
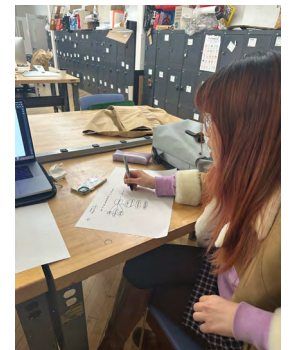
How might we...

enhance designers' awareness of AI usage to encourage originality and prevent copying?

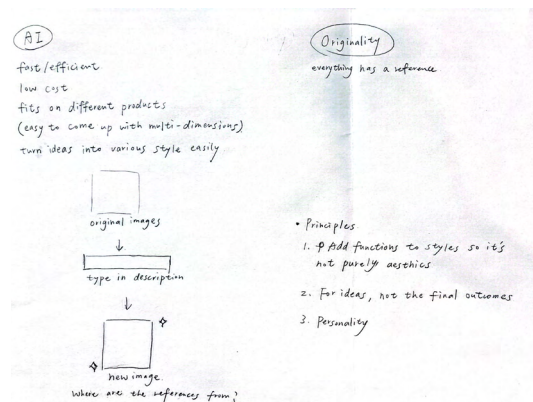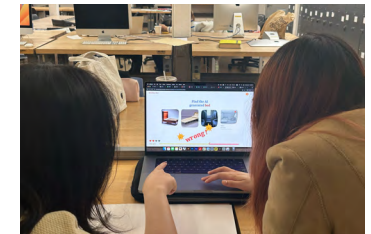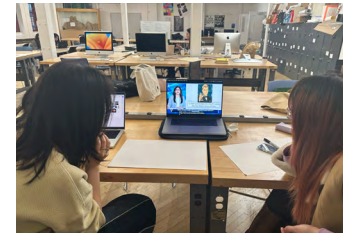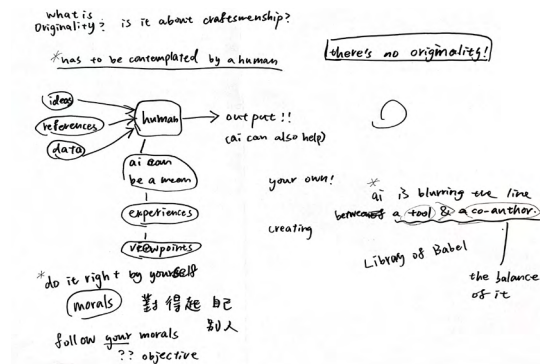# Co-Design Workshop

Collaborative Workshop
What is originality?- Kaitlyn Chen
04/07/2025; 50 minutes

Collaborative Workshop
What is originality? - Ming
04/07/2025; 50 minutes

This co-design session, conducted on April 7th, 2025 with participants Ming and Kaitlyn, aimed to explore the question: *"How might we enhance designers' awareness of AI usage to encourage originality and prevent copying?"* The session was initiated in response to the growing ethical concerns in the design field regarding the blurred boundaries between human creativity and AI-generated outputs. Through discussion and reflection, participants developed two key directions: first, that AI should be used as a supportive tool, but the creative intention must be guided by human contemplation; and second, that designers should hold themselves accountable by following their own values and ethical principles. Throughout the session, participants raised thoughtful questions such as *"What is originality?"* and emphasized the importance of adding function to aesthetic, as well as using AI more in the ideation phase rather than in final outcomes. This session revealed that maintaining originality in the age of AI depends not only on tool usage but on a designer's intentional mindset and ethical framework.

Conclusion

Future Direction

Through this individual interview-based research, it became evident that in today's rapidly evolving landscape—where AI is being integrated across all industries—its use in the design field can lead to powerful and efficient outcomes when applied thoughtfully. However, as AI technology continues to advance, concerns around human creativity and copyright infringement are becoming increasingly prominent.

Participants commonly agreed on the necessity of legal regulations to address AI-related copyright misuse. Furthermore, there was a shared understanding that while AI can assist in the creative process, it should not be relied upon blindly. Human perspective and judgment remain essential, especially in final decision-making. The conclusion emphasizes that designers should uphold human morality and ethical values when working with AI, ensuring that technology complements—rather than replaces—authentic creativity.

What principles should designers follow when using AI in design?

Requires human contemplation
AI can support human output, but it blurs the line between being a tool and a co-author.

Follow your own morals
Stay true to our personal values and design objects.

Po Hsuan Chuang

For me, design is a process where rationality and sensibility coexist, where I can visualize my thoughts and share them with others. It's not as free as pure art, but it's not strict either. The process of moving between a bit of restriction and letting go is what I find most fascinating about design.

Changing Times and Society's Impact on Design

Assumptions

I assume that people are encouraged to keep up with trends and find strategy in a rapidly changing society.

I assume this happens because Short video trends such as " Home setup " or "unboxing" rapidly influence interior design, product, and packaging design.

Desk Research

The shape of social media-towards addressing (aesthetic) design power

The article directly explores the insight of "aesthetics design power of social media ", especially how social media uses visually appealing design to catch and interact with the users and society. For example, the platform adapted a minimalist style to stand out the content, and increase the interaction by using heart emoji besides message notification has enhanced users retention. The behavior that makes things easier also manipulates everyone's behavior. For instance, people only can find positive emoji on most platforms to lessen the negative feedback. Meanwhile, those platforms have created countless opportunities to increase designer's visibility. For instance, the video of "unboxing" influences the packaging design.

"Thus, design artefacts are inherently persuasive, as they are created with intent regarding who will use them, how they will be."

Evolutionary Creative Design Choices in a World of Transient Aesthetic Trends

The article indicated that designers need to consider design context in mind. Especially the ability of considering the environment which involved in the design, including the previous design, how to amplify design's value, also provided new insight while balancing the aesthetics at the same time. There are different trends in different design categories. For instance, architecture design continues for a longer time than fashion design. As for the factors driving the trends is that the latest app on the market makes the trend coming back, and the necessity or changing inside the industry. The small transition they move will create a big convenience and extensibility, it can be a conversation, a symbol.

"While less is often more, it's important to consider whether simplicity dilutes the brand's story, values, and cultural relevance."

Key Research Focus

The challenge between originality and creative autonomy

Interview Quotes

"With tools like canvas and Figma, it takes only a few videos to get started, so now non-designer can make good- looking graphics."
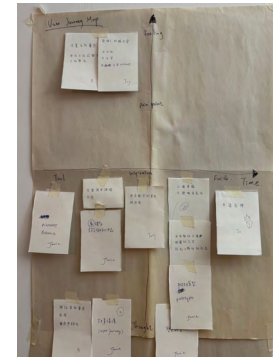
"In the past, we used to plan a brand axis for the whole year, but know we have to change the visual every month"

"Many people only care about the visual appearance, but often overlook the concept and logic behind the design"

How might we...

Co-Design Workshop

Collaborative Workshop
Design Journey Map
07/04/2025: 50 minutes

address originality design for designers to explore alternative sources of inspiration?

The Co- Design session was conducted with Jamie and Joy. The workshop focused on the question: How might we address originality design for designers to explore out sources of inspiration.

The session began with creating a design journey map that outlined several design timeline happen in design.

We spent 10 minutes writing down five ways to preserve originality with designer's in design. We then discussed each method and where it fits into the design workflow.

Conclusion

Future Direction

The experience from doing the research derives me different opinions, and being able to explore a certain question. Like *"Why does media effect design so much?"* By means of interacting with the design professionals and students who study in the design field, which helps me obtain the information from their perspective, experiences and their observation from their life. The research outcome is not only influenced by the data collected individually but also the appropriate guidance during the interviews, the preparation of questions, and the process of inviting participants. Overall the research makes me rethink the question and enjoy the process of finding the answer.

It is vital to safeguard intellectual property, and optimize marketing and innovation tools and consider the questions, "What strategy can designers adopt to avoid the homogenization of design in a trend- driven environment?" and "How can media culture be integrated into design education to foster critical judgement of aesthetics?"

Yuxin

My current research explores how fashion brands can use their influence to drive social change while reinforcing their core identity. I investigate how elements like casting, product storytelling, and collaborative community engagement can shape inclusive, value-driven brand experiences. Through this lens, I aim to develop creative strategies that align visual language with deeper cultural, social, and environmental responsibility.

I aim to further explore how fashion brands can integrate ethics into both their creative and operational strategies — not as a reaction to trends, but as a consistent, value-driven identity. This includes investigating how designers and creative teams can be empowered to make intentional choices when working with emerging technologies like AI, and how brand storytelling can evolve through community collaboration and cultural sensitivity.

Investigating how different fashion brands influence social perception

Assumptions

This happens because brand value and design ethic influence each other, and the market trends always follow

The people involved want to see ethical considerations reflected in design choices
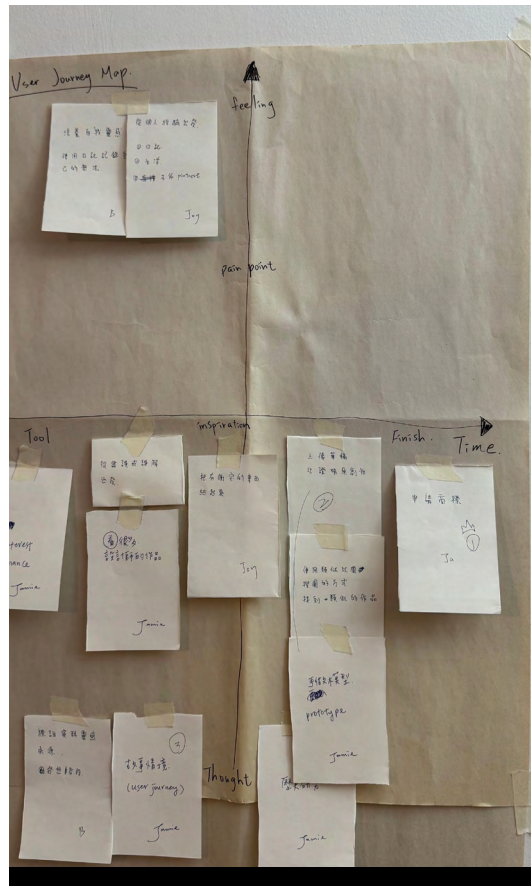
Vivienne Westwood "Alien Sex Club"

Fig. 1. Vivienne Westwood Red Label Spring 2016 RTW collection.

Chanel SS5

Fig. 2. Karl Lagerfeld referenced Emma Watson's HeForShe campaign in the SS15 show, which featured a string of supermodels, including the world's richest, Gisele Bundchen.

Desk Research

This article is talking about fashion designers are crucial in conveying brand values by crafting visual and tactile languages that reflect a brand's ethos, philosophy, and identity through clothing and accessories. Their creative decisions, including material selection, craftsmanship, and design, ensure that each collection aligns with the brand's core principles. In 2024, designers are expected to focus on sustainability, ethical sourcing, and inclusivity, responding to consumer demand for authenticity and responsibility. By integrating these elements, designers not only enhance brand identity but also foster consumer trust and loyalty.

FASHION ETHICS: A PATH TOWARDS HUMAN
PROGRESS AND WELLBEING

Fashion Ethics: A Path Towards Human Progress and Wellbeing is an article by Ana Hriscu. It explains how the fashion industry affects society and people's lives. The article shows that fashion impacts work, culture, and the economy. The text says that using ethics in fashion can guide design choices. It uses simple examples to show that fairness and care in making clothes can shape ideas about style.

"Fashion designers are pivotal in conveying brand values in 2024, serving as architects of brand identity through their unique designs. They craft visual and tactile languages that express a brand's ethos, philosophy, and identity, differentiating it in the marketplace. By integrating sustainability and ethical practices into their work, designers align with conscientious consumer expectations, enhancing brand reputation. Their innovative concepts and groundbreaking designs not only captivate discerning customers but also ensure that brand values are communicated authentically and consistently across all platforms and collections. ."

"The core of this paper consists in a plea for the fashion ethics as path to human progress, a concept that shapes our aspirations through common values and motivates our actions for the wellbeing of the next generations."

Key Research Focus

Investigating how different fashion brands influence social perception

Interview Quotes

"The society has followed the luxury brand, but the young generation has been influenced by streetwear. Sports make a lot of work."

"Fast fashion got inspiration from luxury brands. But they are the same, just focus on different groups."

"As a stylist, I don't have a favorite brand. I select clothing based on each season's unique design language and the message it conveys, ensuring the best match for my clients and creative projects."

"Hollywood is now trending towards a very socialite-inspired, vintage luxury, and refined style. I believe this will be the future of fashion."

"In other consumer goods sectors, affordable products are the mainstream choice for the public. However, in fashion, all design language and social influence are driven by luxury brands or designer labels."

"Luxury brands have substantial marketing budgets, allowing them to better express their aesthetic vision. Many brands place a strong emphasis on the concept of feminism, which helps drive social progress."

How might we...

Make fashion more socially impactful for brands to strengthen their brand value?

How might brands use their influence to drive meaningful change in social justice while reinforcing their identity?

How might brands create socially responsible fashion experiences while reinforcing their identity?
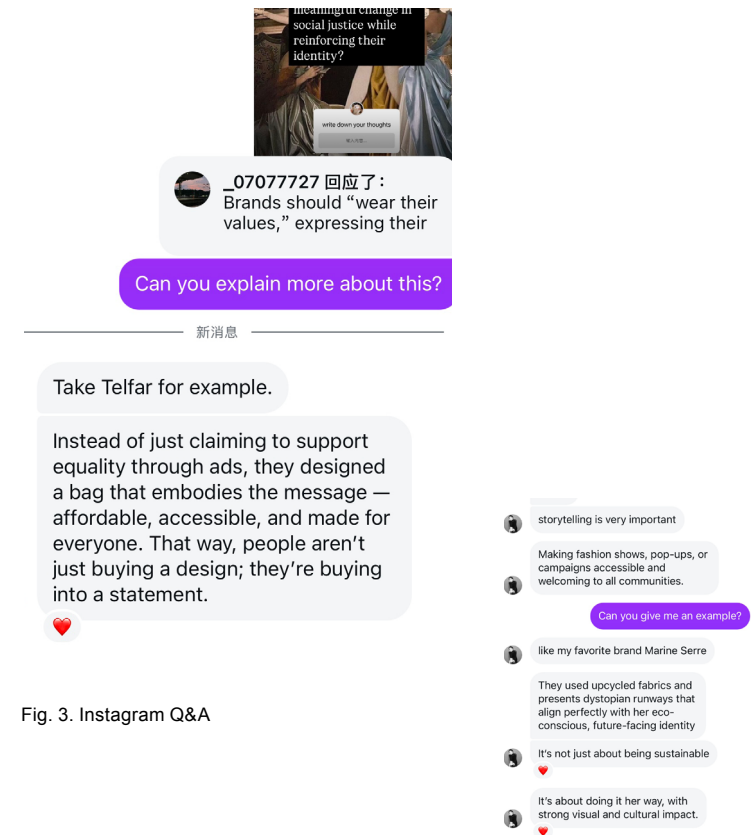
Co-Design Workshop

Fig. 3. Instagram Q&A

Fig. 4. Instagram Q&A

Conclusion

Fashion is storytelling, and brands have the power to shape that story through action, not just words.

To create socially responsible experiences, brands must embed their values into design, collaborate with communities, and use fashion to tell meaningful, inclusive stories. By doing so, they don't just talk about what they believe—they live it, reinforcing their identity through purpose and clarity.

Future Direction

Fashion industry should focus on how fashion brands can *"wear their values"* by expressing their beliefs through their designs. Their process research should explore how brands can collaborate with communities, rather than just speaking for them, ensuring that the creative process aligns with social responsibility. Additionally, delve into how fashion serves as a storytelling tool, where brands shape cultural and societal narratives through design and storytelling. By combining purposeful design with clear storytelling, the goal is to develop socially responsible fashion experiences that drive the industry towards greater *inclusivity, sustainability, and originality.*

Cammie

Jiaqi

Poulomi

Nethra

Culture Sphere

Cultural Influences on Design and Innovation

The ethical sphere of cultural influence in design focuses on maintaining cultural authenticity while embracing innovation. It emphasizes integrating traditional values, craftsmanship, and local heritage into modern design practices, ensuring cultural narratives are respected and preserved. This approach highlights the balance between progress and cultural integrity, where minimalism or global trends should not erase the richness of regional identities.

In an increasingly globalized world, cultural design elements are at risk of being diluted or overlooked in favor of mass-market trends. Ethical design safeguards cultural identity by ensuring that unique regional aesthetics and traditions continue to be reflected in contemporary products.

Design has the power to evoke emotions and forge connections between consumers and their cultural roots. When cultural elements are thoughtfully incorporated into modern design, it fosters a deeper sense of belonging and emotional attachment, making products resonate more profoundly with users.

Cammie Wei

My research explores how wabi-sabi aesthetics—rooted in imperfection, simplicity, and authenticity—are interpreted and applied in contemporary design. Through interviews with designers across disciplines, I found that many unconsciously embrace these values, even if they don't explicitly reference wabi-sabi. However, a recurring tension exists between these authentic design approaches and commercial or client-driven expectations that favor polished, "perfect" outcomes.

The study also reveals how cultural background strongly influences the perception of imperfection, with Eastern design philosophies often more accepting of natural flaws and aging, while Western perspectives lean toward refinement and control. Ultimately, I aim to highlight how embracing imperfection can foster deeper emotional connections, promote sustainability, and lead to more meaningful design outcomes.

How wabi-sabi aesthetics—like imperfection, simplicity, and authenticity—shape modern design and how they're perceived by both designers and users.

Assumptions

Modern design often prioritizes perfection over emotional authenticity.
In the pursuit of sleek aesthetics, the beauty of imperfection and material honesty is often lost, distancing users from deeper connections and the richness of aging or repair.

Commercial pressures often discourage visible imperfection. Designers, influenced by client or market demands, may sideline wabi-sabi principles—organic forms, subtle irregularities, and signs of aging—in favor of polished, uniform work that prioritizes mass appeal over authenticity.

Desk Research

This paper explores how traditional crafts contribute to sustainable development and community resilience, drawing on case stories from West Bengal, India. It examines Kantha—a quilting tradition that repurposes old textiles—to illustrate how craft practices empower marginalized women by creating livelihood opportunities and promoting sustainable fashion through local production, recycling, and reuse. The study also highlights natural fiber-based crafts, such as mat weaving, which strengthen enduring bonds between communities and their environment. By preserving cultural heritage and fostering inclusive green economies, traditional crafts are presented as viable pathways toward achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and integrating age-old practices into modern sustainability strategies.

" Saving and sewing together every little bit, big or small, to create a stronger, warmer whole that lasts for generations."

This article profiles seven Filipino fashion designers who are redefining contemporary fashion by blending traditional Filipino craftsmanship with modern design principles. The designers incorporate indigenous materials, time-honored techniques, and cultural motifs into their collections, ensuring that the rich heritage of Filipino textile traditions remains at the forefront of sustainable fashion. Emphasizing slow production, ethical sourcing, and local artisanal skills, the featured designers not only create visually stunning garments but also foster community empowerment and cultural pride. Their innovative approach preserves ancestral techniques while meeting modern sustainability demands, thus resonating with consumers who value both tradition and eco-friendly practices.

"It's not just about preserving heritage — it's about evolving it together."

Key Research Focus

Imperfection as authenticity in contemporary design

"Imperfection offers emotional depth and narrative to design."

"Cultural perception influences how imperfection is accepted or rejected."

"Designers must balance personal values with client-driven aesthetics."

"Authentic design celebrates materials and aging, not flawless finish."

Interview Quotes

"If we try to get rid of all imperfections, our work wouldn't be interesting anymore."

"I used to strive for perfection, but I've learned to embrace flaws in my work over time."

"I like to reduce elements until it becomes its simplest necessary form."

"Digital design limits how much imperfection you can incorporate—it's meant to be smooth and functional."

"Sometimes I have to compromise my design philosophy to meet client expectations."

"I used to strive for perfection, but I've learned to embrace flaws in my work over time."

How might we...

protect cultural design values like Wabi-Sabi from being erased or polished away by commercial expectations?

"NOT ALL VALUE COMES FROM POLISH. SOME COMES FROM PRESENCE."
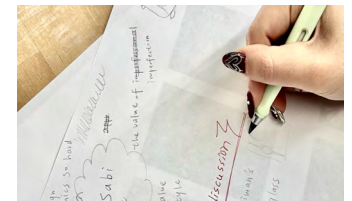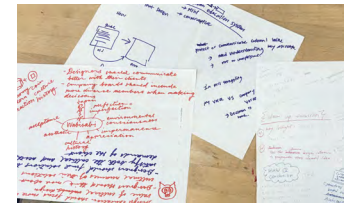
Co-Design Workshop

I conducted two co-design sessions with three participants — Kaitlyn, Chiyo, and Chloe. The workshop explored how we might protect cultural design values like Wabi-Sabi from being erased or polished away by commercial expectations.

Wabi-Sabi values imperfection, aging, and material honesty, but designers often struggle to explain its depth in fast-paced, client-facing environments.
So I asked: *What could help designers communicate those values more clearly?*

Participants emphasized that Wabi-Sabi isn't being rejected - it's being misunderstood. The issue isn't rejection, but communication.

Collaborative Workshop Mind-Map Results - 04/01/2025; 43 minutes

Conclusion

This project helped me understand that protecting cultural values in design — like Wabi-Sabi — isn't about resisting change, but about creating space for meaning to be seen and shared.

I started with concerns about cultural erasure, but through research, interviews, and co-design, I realized the real issue is often a lack of tools for communication. Designers aren't trying to erase meaning — they just need better ways to explain it.

I'm walking away with a new perspective:
Design is not just visual. It's ethical, cultural, and deeply human, and it's our role to make meaning not only beautiful — but understood.

Future Direction

What role can design education play in encouraging emerging designers to explore authenticity over perfection?

Shift focus from flawless outcomes to process-based learning
Teach students to value experimentation, iteration, and personal expression rather than polished final results.

Normalize failure and flaws as part of creativity
Encourage risk-taking and celebrate the beauty found in accidents, limitations, and material honesty.

Highlight diverse cultural perspectives on aesthetics
Introduce global design philosophies—like wabi-sabi—that honor imperfection, context, and emotional depth.

Jiaqi An

My research reveals that young Chinese consumers are not rejecting tradition—they're redefining it. Interviews show that size, material cost, and functionality are major barriers to traditional furniture's relevance today. However, many still admire its elegance and symbolism. The "New Chinese Style" movement—driven more by market trends than direct government policy—proves that blending modern needs with cultural references creates designs that resonate. My takeaway: to keep heritage alive, design must meet people where they live—literally.

How young Chinese consumers reinvent traditional furniture, balancing culture and commerce

Assumptions

Traditional Chinese furniture isn't rejected—it's often outdated in form and scale, making it hard to fit into modern homes.

The government may promote heritage broadly, but its impact on actual consumer purchasing is limited unless it's paired with market relevance.

Desk Research

Chinese culture heavily influences modern
furniture design, emphasizing harmony, tradition,
and simplicity. While many still appreciate ornate
styles, urban consumers lean toward minimalist
aesthetics. Traditional Chinese elements are
being integrated into modern designs, balancing
elegance and functionality.

Economic growth and cultural revival have
increased interest in traditional craftsmanship,
sustainability, and modular structures. Future
Chinese furniture will blend heritage with modern
technology, creating adaptable, transport
friendly, and culturally meaningful designs.

*"Chinese-style furniture has gradually evolved to blend
traditional elements with modern aesthetics, creating
designs that are both elegant and practical."*

Hou Zheng Guang / MoreLess
Contemporary

Jerry Chen | Art Connoisseur
Contemporary

Ming Dynasty Chair, Design Matters
Traditional

Key Research Focus

Cultural reframing through modern modularity

While traditional Chinese furniture has rich craftsmanship, it's often impractical for small, modern living spaces. My focus is on modularity and material shift—rethinking Ming-style aesthetics through flexible, affordable, and youthful design systems. The goal isn't to "modernize" for trend's sake, but to build cultural continuity through new formats.

Interview Quotes

"Only a small number of people can afford traditional hardwoods... but Chinese elements on modern materials would really appeal to younger people."

"They're either too big or too small, and there's no way to control the effect I want.
If there were modular options, that would be incredibly helpful."

"The government's role isn't in telling us what to buy—it's in keeping culture visible and appreciated."

How might we...

reframe traditional Chinese furniture not as a relic, but as a flexible, modular expression of cultural identity for modern living?

Modularity & Customization Let traditional joinery support modern modularity, allowing users to create DIY assembly systems rooted in Chinese aesthetics.

Diverse Materials, replace expensive hardwoods with affordable, sustainable alternatives (bamboo, metal, plastic) while maintaining symbolic carvings, shapes, and structure.

Co-Design Workshop

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Empowered Perception of Traditional Chinese Furniture
|
├── I. Communication & Perception Shift
|   ├── Rename the category
|   ├── Educational Content
|   |   ├── Explainer Videos
|   |   ├── Posters
|   |   ├── AR/VR Exhibitions
|   |   └── Magazines
|   └── Social Influence
|       ├── Government-supported influencers
|       └── Nationwide campaign platform
|
├── II. Interactive Engagement
|   ├── Gamification
|   |   ├── App Game
|   |   ├── VR/AR Integration
|   |   └── LEGO-style Joinery Play Kits
|   └── Workshops
|       ├── Offline Hands-On Events
|       ├── Customizable Furniture Experiences
|       └── School & Maker Collaborations
|
└── III. Product Innovation
    ├── Modularity & Customization
    ├── Diverse Materials (Affordable, Sustainable)
    └── Co-Branding with Modern Furniture Brands
```

Conclusion

Future Direction

I entered this project with a nostalgic view of Chinese furniture as something beautiful but untouchable. After interviewing people across professions and generations, I now see it as something very much alive—waiting to be reassembled into something we can own, move, and reshape. Culture, after all, doesn't need to be preserved in a glass case. It can live in our living rooms.

How can new materials be used without losing cultural symbolism?

Can joinery become a storytelling tool in modern furniture kits?

How can designers create modular systems that honor tradition and invite playful interaction?

Poulomi Sen

Fashion Designer || New Delhi || India

My work is rooted in curiosity, concept-driven thinking, and a commitment to thoughtful storytelling across mediums. I approach each project with a balance of strategic insight and artistic intuition, aiming to create design that is both resonant and enduring.

I am particularly drawn to textiles—their materiality, structure, and the potential they hold. My practice explores the evolving landscape of textile design, including innovations such as biomaterials and 3D-printed garments. I view design as a critical tool to challenge conventional understandings of textiles and garments, bridging traditional techniques with emerging technologies to envision new possibilities.

A textile's materiality and its tactile impression on consumers

Assumptions

I assume this happens because of one's psychological associations to people and/or their memories, subconscious associations and evokes emotions. It further affects the consumers perception of comfort, durability and luxury. Culture affects the consumers' color and textile understanding.

I assume the people involved want a sense of familiarity, value for money, personal expression through color, texture and design. The functionality of the textile in a particular industry(context). The durability of said textile in a personal context

Desk Research

Dina Lewis, a Chicago designer, created Minor Details, a clothing line designed for children with sensory processing disorders. The line includes both tight-fitting and loose garments made from soft materials like lyocell and organic cotton. Lewis sought to provide more stylish, comfortable options beyond the basic sensory-friendly clothing available. The garments feature soft seams and heat-transferred labels to minimize discomfort. Lewis hopes to offer sensory-friendly clothing that appeals to anyone seeking comfort, with a recent expansion to adult clothing.

This adds nuance by adding another layer to my research from the lens of people whose first point of contact with a textile is not visual. Understanding a material from the perspective of a consumer .

"When you've got sensory processing issues, for some kids, they want more sensory input – they want to feel things more, so they want clothes that are tighter that hug their skin – other kids want less sensory input, they want clothes that are loose that don't touch their skin."

The article highlights how fabrics are essential in interior design, offering both aesthetic value and functionality. It discusses how different materials like cotton, velvet, linen, and silk contribute to a room's atmosphere and comfort. Fabrics transform spaces through texture, color, and pattern, creating sensory experiences. The piece also emphasizes the importance of sustainable fabrics, offering eco-friendly options that balance luxury with environmental consciousness. It provides practical tips on using fabrics, such as creating focal points and mixing textures, to elevate interior designs.

"Fabrics are more than simple adornments. They are the elements that bring spaces to life.

Key Research Focus

Material Memory and Nostalgia and its impact on Innovation

This research investigates how the tactile qualities of textiles—such as texture, weight, and surface finish —shape consumer perception and decision-making. It further explores the emotional connections and associations one forms with a piece of textile, which are not solely influenced by its visual appeal but also by its history, heritage, and the social and cultural notions of the consumer. This extends across various industries, including fashion, interior design, automotive, healthcare, and packaging, where textiles play a crucial role in **functionality, aesthetics, and user experience.**

Interview Quotes

""A materials become meaningful through time, evolving from the unfamiliar to the cherished, as we form emotional attachments through use and memory..."
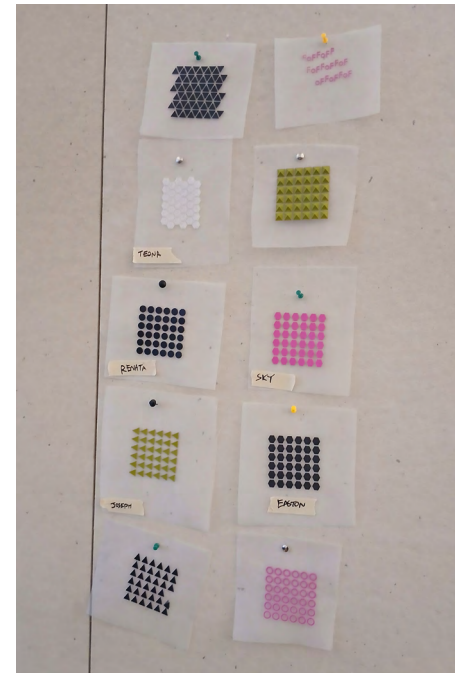
"Textiles are symbols of identity, heritage, and unspoken tradition..."

"Silent storytellers of our emotions, A canvas for interpretation, A mark of memory woven through time..."
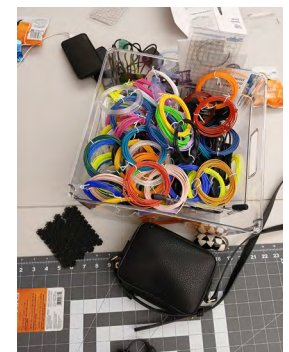
How might we...

increase knowledge for interested consumers to learn about material innovation in textile and alter the perception about new materials?
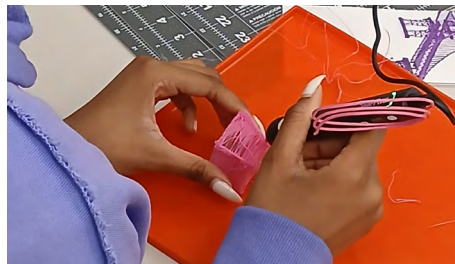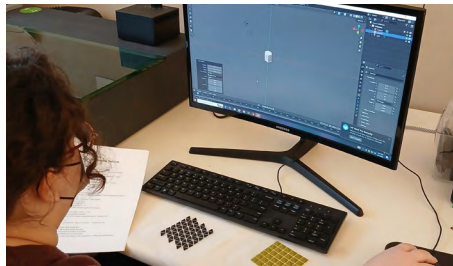
Co-Design Workshop

Collaborative Workshop
3D Printing Fabric
04/05/2025; 43 minutes

Collaborative Workshop
3D Printing Fabric
04/05/2025; 43 minutes

Collaborative Workshop
3D Printing Fabric
04/05/2025; 43 minutes

Collaborative Workshop
3D Printing Fabric
04/05/2025; 43 minutes

Conclusion

This theme investigates how geographical context (urban vs. rural), personal experiences, and sensory engagement shape the perception and emotional value of textiles. It also highlights the evolving nature of material attachment and the subjective lens through which sustainability and innovation are understood, allowing space for individual and cultural interpretation in design narratives.

Digitally crafted design reveals how technology can amplify creativity, refine processes, and redefine the limits of traditional design through innovation.

Future Direction

Teaching children the difference between creativity and technology early on can help them recognize creativity as a personal power, and see digital tools as exciting new ways to express it. The workshop I conducted was an eye-opener, it made me realize how naturally the current generation navigates technology. Surrounded by it from such a young age, they're incredibly intuitive with digital tools. If guided thoughtfully, they have the potential to create in ways we may not even be aware of yet.

Nethra

Visual Designer, Bangalore, India

I design to disrupt, inspire, and make people pause. Growing up between cultures and conversations, I learned that the best ideas collide, evolve, and tell a story. My work is a balance of precision and play, where form, function, and meaning are constantly reimagined. I see design as a language—one that challenges assumptions, bridges gaps, and creates impact beyond aesthetics. My approach is shaped by context, culture, and collaboration, ensuring that every design decision is not just seen but felt. Design is never neutral, and I embrace its power to provoke thought, invite participation, and leave a lasting mark.

Understanding cultural influences on minimalism and design choices

Assumptions

Modern minimalism favors uniformity over cultural depth, often stripping design of its emotional and symbolic significance.

Prioritizing efficiency and mass appeal can lead designers and consumers to overlook the rich textures and traditions that root design in cultural identity.

Desk Research

Ingrid Fetell Lee's article critiques minimalism for stripping away sensory richness and cultural identity, linking it to historical colonial repression of vibrant design. She argues that modern minimalism, while promoting simplicity, often results in sterile, joyless spaces that lack cultural narratives. This aligns with concerns that the trend erases traditions that foster belonging. By favoring uniformity over cultural expression, minimalism risks creating environments devoid of warmth and meaning. The article highlights the need for a balance—preserving cultural richness within contemporary design to maintain identity and connection, showing that the loss of cultural belonging in design is not just an unintended consequence but part of a broader historical pattern of aesthetic dominance and erasure.

The article discusses the rise of minimalism in brand design, emphasizing its appeal for its simplicity, elegance, and versatility. It acknowledges the effectiveness of minimalist design in creating memorable, clean visuals, but questions if it always leads to better results. The article argues that while minimalism works for some brands, it can strip away personality and cultural identity, leaving brands feeling generic or disconnected. The author suggests that a more balanced approach, integrating elements of cultural relevance and distinctiveness, might offer more impactful and meaningful brand identities.

"The pursuit of simplicity has led to environments so stripped down that they feel lifeless, devoid of warmth and personality."

"While less is often more, it's important to consider whether simplicity dilutes the brand's story, values, and cultural relevance."

Desk Research

Carlo Mazzoni redefines the luxury brand as a "Cultural Brand"—one that actively supports independent artistic expression, not as a marketing tool, but as a core value. This model hinges on three pillars: acknowledging and protecting authorship, providing visible financial support akin to modern patronage, and enhancing brand equity through long-term cultural engagement. Brands like Louis Vuitton, Rolex, and Cartier exemplify this approach by funding museums, film, and mentorship programs, often without overt product placement. Mazzoni warns against superficial gestures—such as celebrity endorsements—that dilute cultural authenticity. He emphasizes that true cultural brands must also confront their environmental impact, advocating for sustainability as an inseparable part of cultural relevance. In this vision, culture and sustainability are not marketing trends but essential, interwoven responsibilities.

Harnessing the Power of Cultural Branding
Rivyl (Brand Marketing Agency)

Rivyl's article discusses cultural branding as a strategy where brands align with the values and beliefs of their target audience to build deep emotional connections. It highlights how brands like Nike, with its "Just Do It" campaign, and Coca-Cola, with "Share a Coke," have successfully tapped into cultural movements to become symbols of personal identity and social connection. The article emphasizes that cultural branding transcends traditional marketing by embedding the brand into the cultural fabric of consumers' lives, fostering loyalty and resonance.

"…there's no point celebrating our past, our tradition, our art, and our beauty if our efforts do not lead to a pragmatic vision of the future…"

"Cultural branding is about deep engagement with the intricacies of everyday life. It's about aligning with people's core values, beliefs, and syncing with the trends they resonate with."

Key Research Focus

Cultural continuity and the effect of minimalism on design choices

Nostalgia and cultural continuity shape design, with minimalism refining rather than erasing identity. The future of cultural branding lies in thoughtful integration—responding to local contexts instead of imitating the past. While progress is gradual, emerging designers must challenge norms and rethink culture's role in design. Good design is context-aware, ensuring cultural expression feels natural and relevant.

Interview Quotes

"Minimalism does not have to erase cultural identity; it can distill cultural symbols to their essence..."

"...emphasizing core cultural symbols and integrating them into refined, functional design systems..."

"People tend to return to nostalgic cultural values over time, influencing design longevity..."

"... cultural representation in design should be an ongoing process of learning, engagement, and evolution.."

"Good design is context-aware rather than forcing cultural representation, rethink how culture informs their work..."

How might we...

address the sense of positionality for emerging brand designers to create culturally relevant and contexual designs?

Addressing how ethical considerations require research and collaboration

Learning how to maintain authenticity for cultural representation

Co-Design Workshop
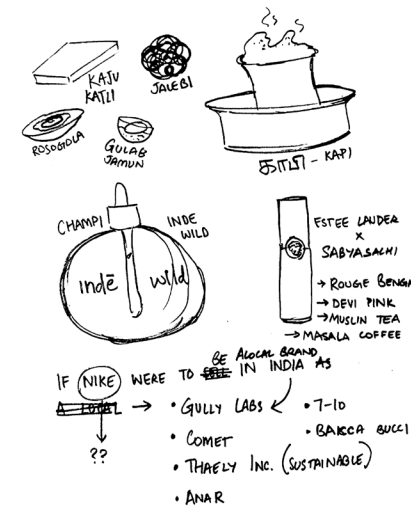
Collaborative Workshop Mind-Map
Results - Deconstruct & Remix
04/02/2025; 1 hour and 45 minutes

Through this workshop, as people also from South-Indian Origin, I provided a list of words, products and brands that either have links to a cultural narrative and/or bring about thoughts. It was through this that we made associations through form, colours, brand collaborations and also being more mindful of the current market and what exists.

Collaborative Workshop
Cultural Treasure Hunt
04/02/2025; 1 hour and 45 minutes

Conclusion

Future Direction

While minimalism and global trends often dominate, they need not come at the cost of cultural identity. In fact, minimalism and cultural richness can coexist when design distills culture to its essence rather than erasing it. Authentic cultural representation in design requires more than surface-level aesthetics—it demands deep research, ethical awareness, and genuine collaboration with the communities represented. Nostalgia and cultural continuity also play a powerful role, shaping emotional connections and guiding design choices that honor the past while innovating for the future. The future of branding lies in embracing this balance— creating designs that are both meaningful and mindful, rooted in identity yet adaptable to a changing world.

Authenticity isn't just a stylistic choice—it's a responsibility. It requires research, collaboration, and a commitment to representing culture with care. I focused on how nostalgia, continuity, and symbolism can be preserved through thoughtful reduction, allowing cultural identity to remain present without being overwhelming or performative.

I aim to develop branding systems that are both culturally grounded and strategically relevant. My goal is to create design that responds to local contexts—materials, stories, traditions—without falling into cliché or surface-level aesthetics. I'm especially interested in helping emerging designers, particularly those with diasporic or multicultural backgrounds, recognize their cultural lens as an asset. I will continue challenging dominant design norms, prioritizing collaboration, and building visual identities that distill culture to its essence—clear, respectful, and resonant.

Karina Liu

Sherry Guo

Environment Sphere

Bridging the gap between design and conception

In this part of the zine, we look at what sustainability really means in day-to-day design work. We spoke with designers and manufacturers to understand the real challenges behind choosing sustainable materials. Sherry explored how supply chains and cost affect sustainable packaging decisions, while Karina looked at the gap between what designers want and what manufacturers are willing to produce. To us, sustainability isn't a label—it shows up in all the small decisions we make along the way.

Karina Liu

I'm a graphic and product designer who loves exploring how visuals and touch can shape the way people feel and experience things. To me, design is more than just making things look good — it's a way to express emotions and share ideas without words. I hope my work can create a warm connection between people, objects, and their surroundings. Whether it's a small graphic detail or a material choice, I always try to make my designs both useful and full of feeling.

How new materials drive innovation and how manufacturers respond?

Assumptions

I assume this happens because the development of new materials takes time, and manufacturers are cautious about investing in unproven technology.

I assume the people involved want designers to have more influence in material innovation, while manufacturers seek to minimize financials

Desk Research

Bio-Based Plastics in Product Design: The State of the Art and Opportunities

This study explores the current state of bio-based plastics in durable consumer products, identifying both opportunities and barriers faced by product developers. Through the analysis of 60 products and interviews with 12 companies, the research highlights that sustainability goals drive the adoption of bio-based plastics. However, challenges such as limited knowledge of material properties and uncertainties about environmental impact hinder widespread use. The study emphasizes the need for increased awareness and education to facilitate the integration of bio-based plastics into product design

"The lack of knowledge of bio-based plastics and their properties contributes to the slow adoption of these materials."

Material Innovation: Designers Must Embrace 'Total Design

This article discusses how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and programmable fabrication, are reshaping material innovation. It emphasizes that designers need to adopt a holistic approach, integrating these technologies to meet diverse consumer needs and address complex design challenges. The article highlights the importance of collaboration across disciplines to fully leverage the potential of new materials and technologies in creating sustainable and innovative products.

"Emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and programmable fabrication are reshaping material innovation, enabling designers to meet diverse consumer needs."

Key Research Focus

Manufacturers' perceptions of new materials.

My research investigates how manufacturers perceive and react to designers' growing demand for new materials, in the context of slow technological advancement in product design. It explores the cautious and risk-averse attitudes often adopted by manufacturers when facing unproven material innovations, the production and investment challenges they encounter, and how these factors shape the pace of material adoption. It also examines how designers' creative pressure and forward-looking expectations gradually influence manufacturing strategies.

Interview Quotes

"Suppliers do not have many choices. What products to produce mainly depends on customer demand, and satisfying customers is the first criterion for manufacturers."

"We manufacturers, of course, care more about cost."

"Now all material lists must have certification for using eco-friendly technology. So between aesthetics and sustainability, we prefer to produce eco-friendly materials because the market demand is higher."

How might we...

address the contradiction between personalization and mass production requires manufacturers to produce more to meet demand?

How might we create a collaborative framework that encourages both designers and manufacturers to explore new material possibilities?

How might we accelerate the adoption of new materials in manufacturing while addressing manufacturers' concerns about unproven technologies?

Co-Design Workshop

我们作为供应商其实没有太大的选择
As a supplier, we don't really have much choice.

Conclusion

Future Direction

Through this research, I have come to deeply realize that the true challenge lies in the understanding and collaboration between designers and manufacturers. Designers pursue innovation and breakthroughs, but manufacturers face the pressures of high risks and production stability, which makes them cautious about unproven new materials. To resolve this conflict, technological progress alone is not enough; more effective communication and strategic support are also necessary.

I have gradually come to understand that design is not just an expression of creativity, but a complex process that involves balancing multiple interests. The collaboration between designers and manufacturers is not merely about the integration of technology; it is also about understanding and respecting each other's needs and constraints. The advancement of innovation should not be a one-sided push but a process of joint effort, finding the balance between innovation and practical application. Only when designers and manufacturers work together and overcome communication barriers can the widespread adoption of new materials be achieved, leading to true technological progress.

Looking ahead, the focus should be on strengthening collaboration and understanding between designers and manufacturers. Creating platforms for open communication will help align goals and address challenges. Future research should explore tools that bridge the gap between design and production, providing manufacturers with better data and predictions on material performance. Manufacturers should also be involved earlier in the design process, offering insights to create more practical and sustainable material solutions. Ultimately, fostering a culture of cooperation will lead to seamless integration of new materials and drive meaningful progress in product development.

Sherry Guo

Packaging Designer

I design with intention—to balance beauty and structure, emotion and logic. Growing up between cultures taught me that design is never just decoration, but a response to its environment. Whether developing packaging or building brands, I always ask: how does form communicate? Why do materials matter? How can design move people? My work blends intuition and research, grounded in sustainability and shaped by cultural context. I believe design is a continuous dialogue—with space, with people, and with the planet.

Feasibility and Challenges of Sustainable Packaging— Material Innovation within Existing Supply Chains

Assumptions

Even when clients recognize the value of sustainable design, they often reject it due to cost concerns, workflow stability, or perceived risk.

Designers may propose viable sustainable solutions, but if these don't align with existing supply chains and business models, they are unlikely to be adopted.

Desk Research

Consumer reactions to sustainable packaging:
The interplay of visual, appearance, verbal claim
and environmental concern

The Interplay of Visual Appearance, Verbal Claim, and Environmental Concern" by Lise Magnier and Jan P.L. Schoormans explores this dynamic. The research indicates that consumers' responses to sustainable packaging are influenced by their level of environmental concern. Notably, consumers with low environmental concern may react negatively to packaging that combines conventional aesthetics with explicit sustainability claims, perceiving such combinations as incongruent. This suggests that without careful integration of design and sustainability, eco-friendly initiatives might backfire, especially among less environmentally conscious consumers.

"Consumers with low environmental concern may react negatively to packaging that combines conventional aesthetics with explicit sustainability claims, perceiving such combinations as incongruent." (Magnier & Schoormans, 2015)

When Sustainability Backfires: A Review on the
Unintended Negative Consequences of Marketing
Sustainability by Stefano Puntoni et al.

This article explores how promoting sustainability can sometimes lead to unintended negative consequences. Puntoni et al. argue that emphasizing sustainability may clash with consumers' personal values or social norms, ultimately reducing a product's appeal. When sustainability messaging is perceived as conflicting with consumer identity, preferences, or lifestyle, it can trigger resistance rather than acceptance. This suggests that sustainable design must be carefully integrated with consumer expectations to avoid backlash. The study highlights the importance of strategic communication and thoughtful design choices in making sustainability more appealing and aligned with user desires.

"Emphasizing sustainable attributes may conflict with consumers' personal values or social norms, potentially reducing product appeal." (Puntoni et al., 2021)

Key Research Focus

The challenges of sustainable packaging and material innovation in supply chains.

Investigating the feasibility and limitations of sustainable packaging in design practice, with a focus on the challenges and strategies for material innovation within existing supply chain and production systems.

Interview Quotes

"Sustainability has always been part of the design process."

"Clients often have their own manufacturing preferences, materials, and cost constraints."

"As designers, we do our part by advocating for sustainability."

"Previously, companies didn't prioritize sustainability, but now consumers actively seek it."

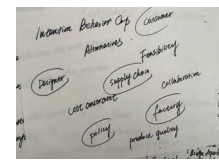"Maintaining a high-quality perception is crucial."

How might we...

address the tension between innovation and practical feasibility for the supply chain to help factories develop new technology?
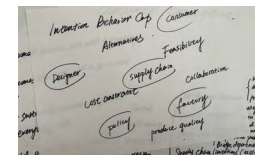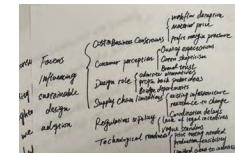
Co-Design Workshop

Interview with Carson Ahlman
04/10/2025; 55 minutes

Focus on the present

Envision the future

Conclusion

Future Direction

Through this project, I've come to realize that environmental efforts in design are never the responsibility of a single department—they are the result of shared effort across the supply chain, marketing, production, and even consumer behavior. The adoption of sustainable materials is not simply a matter of proposing a better design. It is intertwined with cost structures, manufacturing workflows, brand narratives, and public awareness.

Designers are not isolated advocates—we are connectors and enablers. We need to understand constraints while pushing for progress, navigating between creative vision and practical reality. I now believe that the most impactful sustainable designs are not the most radical ones, but the ones that find a way to work within systems, influence decisions, and create lasting shifts.

Is there a transitional strategy to adopt sustainable materials without overhauling the entire production system?

How might we build a more agile cross-functional collaboration model that embeds sustainability early in the design phase?

Can designers gain greater influence within commercial systems to push for material innovation?

In what ways can consumer perception of "sustainable quality" be reshaped?

Beyond legislation and consumer demand, what other mechanisms could motivate companies to initiate change?

Our Conclusion

Our research across environmental, social, and cultural spheres revealed that an ethical design practice requires holding tensions rather than seeking simple solutions. Designers navigate complex trade-offs between client needs, community impact, and planetary health daily.

What emerged most clearly is that ethical design is relational—it's about positioning ourselves thoughtfully in relationship to materials, communities, and cultural contexts.

As we continue our design journeys, we commit to embracing complexity, centering community needs, questioning our assumptions, and making our processes transparent. This zine offers not answers, but an invitation to reimagine what design can be when ethics becomes central to our practice.