



Rock Solid

Foundation of Industrial Design

What attracted you to design?

KV: It's a long story! I was born in Uganda and grew up there. I did my secondary education in India, finishing my Senior Cambridge in Kampala, Uganda. In the early 1950s there were very few colleges and no universities for further education in Uganda, so most of the people would look towards either India or England, since Uganda was still a British colony. I thought I would do electrical engineering; one reason for that was I wanted to return to Uganda where they had just started a very interesting hydroelectric scheme on the banks of the River Nile. They were building a dam at the point where the Nile, which originates from Lake Victoria, becomes a river. It had been a dream of Winston Churchill to harness the water of the Nile and produce electricity. It was a huge scheme, and all the people were quite excited.

Meanwhile I had applied to the Faraday House College of Engineering in London and on the strength of my good Senior Cambridge marks, they granted me admission but there was a slightly strange stipulation. They said they could not offer me the seat immediately as they were busy taking in the young people demobilized from the Front, returning to Britain. This was in 1949 and while they did say my seat was secure, I would have to wait.

That must have been disappointing?

KV: Yes, it was. I thought meanwhile I should do something related to electrical

and at the design school I happened to meet some students of industrial design. They would talk of what they were doing and were kind enough to take me around the studios. I realized this was exactly what I wanted to be doing! I made an important decision to switch over from engineering to industrial design and applied to the school. Fortunately they accepted me and that is how I ended up learning design.

I studied industrial design for three years. It was a good program on the whole, even though in the beginning it seemed to be a strange way of learning; certainly different from engineering! Also there were some good teachers - one was Prof. Douglas Scott in whose office I was to eventually start working; another was Prof. Bruce Archer who later was to author one of most definitive studies of the design process, Systematic Method for Designers. We also had Dr. Rayner Banham with his rather unorthodox approach to design history.

How did the move to India happen?

After finishing my education I joined Douglas Scott's design consultancy office. While doing my diploma in the final year at the School, I had become interested in what was happening in India especially in the area of design. I used to wonder what the scope of design was in a newly emerging nation and an evolving economy.

I used to visit the Indian High Commission to keep me acquainted with what was

What was the position?

KV: He said I would be working as a designer and also be a member of the faculty. I told him I had never taught or thought about teaching anybody anything. He replied to the effect not to worry, as it would come to me. When I met him at his house in London, he asked me if I would mind if he visited my office, and he came and had a long talk with Douglas Scott, saw what I was working on, and seemed to like what I had been doing.

You are known more as a faculty member than a designer. Tell us more about your early work as a designer.

KV: When I began working with Scott in 1956, the entire office was engaged in redesigning the famous double decker London bus, the Routemaster. We were designing not just the body, but also the interior spaces, the passengers' seats and the driver's cab. At the time of my joining we were working on the final details, which in itself was quite an experience. After that I worked on various products for a client, the Ideal Standard which had their works in Britain, Italy and Holland. I worked on their bathroom ceramics and accessories. And then for the same client, a space heater and a series of vending machines that vend out insurance forms at airports or postage stamps at post offices. There were also a series of slide viewers and a projector for a company called Paterson. These are the important ones that I remember.

Kumar Vyas: Rocksolid foundation of Industrial Design in India



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