

TEACHER NOTES

TERENCE CONRAN

THE WAY WE LIVE NOW

16 NOVEMBER 2011 – 4 MARCH 2012



INTRODUCTION

The Design Museum marks Sir Terence Conran's 80th birthday with an exhibition that explores his unique impact on contemporary life in Britain. Through his own design work, and also through his entrepreneurial flair, Conran has transformed the look of the British home. He has established a design studio and an architectural practice with a worldwide reach. He was the founder of Habitat and a pioneer of the new restaurant culture driven by a passion for simplicity. *The Way We Live Now* explores Conran's impact whilst painting a picture of his design approach and inspirations.

The exhibition included a vast range of work by both Conran and many of the talented designers that he has worked with. Prototypes, drawings, tool racks and a recreation of Conran's study are also on display offering insights into his ways of working and practicing design.

KEY THEMES

Starting Out – Early Career and Design Influences

Born in 1931 Terence Conran studied textile design at London's Central School of Art. Quitting his studies in 1948 to seek full time employment, Conran set up a workshop with his tutor, the artist and print-maker Eduardo Paolozzi where he concentrated his skills on furniture design, ceramics and fabrics. Travelling in France, the young Conran saw for the first time, simple but delicious food, enticing country markets and shops full of unfussy kitchenware's and was inspired to introduce this appealing way of life to Britain.

Habitat and the High Street

In the 1960s, London became the capital of cool, Carnaby Street, The Beatles and Mary Quant represented a young new generation who aspired to clean lines and colour. The opening of Habitat in 1964 shattered the mould of existing furniture stores and created an entirely new retail experience. Habitat introduced European aesthetics, modernity and affordable design, creating aspirational interiors with Bauhaus armchairs, Braun electrical goods and modular seating units. Habitat's simple forms, natural materials and fresh colour palette were imaginatively presented in the store.

The success of Habitat propelled Conran into the retail mainstream, the 1980s saw him establish The Storehouse Group which acquired Heals furniture store. Conran also oversaw British Home Stores and Mothercare and set up Next, the high street fashion chain. His desire to sell good design to the mass market enters a new chapter with the forthcoming home ware collection for Marks and Spencer, alongside his other furniture businesses Benchmark and Content by Conran.





The Conran Design Group

In 1956 Conran launched the Conran Design Group. The Conran Design Group demonstrated the best of design in Britain, and undertook projects as diverse as lighting, furniture, kitchenware, packaging, architecture and retail design. Projects ranged from designing the interior for Terminal One at Heathrow, the interiors and cutlery for Concorde, the redesign of the Concorde Room at JFK airport, pushchairs for Mothercare and ashtrays for the rapidly expanding Conran restaurants.

Food

Conran's approach to food is traced by a look at the many restaurants that he has designed and opened. In 1953 he opened his first restaurant The Soup Kitchen just off The Strand in London, selling soup, espresso coffee, French breads and cheeses and apple tarts. The Soup Kitchen was followed by The Orrery restaurant, hailing the beginning of a variety of Parisian style brasseries that would transform Britain's eating habits. Conran's restaurant empire continued to grow both at home and abroad with iconic restaurants such as Mezzo, Bluebird, Quaglino's and Le Pont de la Tour opening in the UK and Guastavino's in New York and Alcazar in Paris.

Supporting Design

The design decade of the 1980s saw Conran establish the Conran Foundation, an educational charity focused on promoting a better understanding of design. Its first initiative was the Boilerhouse Project, a gallery housed in the basement of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Conran and Stephen Bayley opened the Design Museum in 1989, in the development of 13 acres of Butlers Wharf which Conran had acquired. It was the first museum in the world devoted to the promotion and examination of design. In 2014 the Design Museum will relocate to new premises in the Former Commonwealth Institute on Kensington High Street, London, this new project, passionately championed by Conran will create one of the world's leading design museums.

EXHIBITION GUIDANCE

Many of the objects in the exhibition are on open display, ie not protected by glass cases, to allow our visitors to get a close up view. However, please note that most of these objects are not to be touched, so please brief your students accordingly.

Depending on your group and your itinerary for the visit, we would recommend that you set aside approximately 45 minutes to explore this exhibition.

Please ensure that you read our school visit Terms and Conditions document before making your visit.

We encourage the use of sketchbooks and pencils in the gallery. To access free downloadable gallery activity worksheets for students, please visit our online resource Discover Design <http://designmuseum.org/discoverdesign/downloads.html>

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