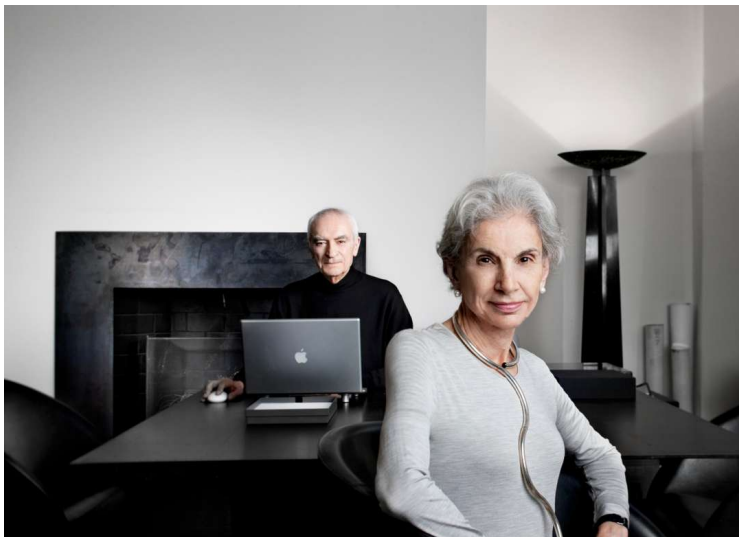


Story by Kathy Brew, co-director of *Design Is One*, made with her husband/collaborator, Roberto Guerra. *Design Is One* is distributed in the US by First Run Features and in Canada by KinoSmith, and is part of the ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN FILM FESTIVAL, which launches in Los Angeles March 12. Here Brew writes about the origin of the film and working with the Vignellis.

“If you can’t find it, design it.” That’s the motto of Lella and Massimo Vignelli, and this legendary couple has designed just about everything— “from the spoon to the city,” as Massimo says.

I had the privilege of getting to meet and work with the Vignellis on the film *Design Is One*, thanks to my collaborator and husband, Roberto Guerra. He had history with the duo. Many years ago, while living in Europe, he made a six-part series about designers all over the world, called *By Design*. The series featured portraits of Milton Glaser, Karl Lagerfeld, Richard Sapper, Jane and Ben Thompson, Elliott Erwitt, and Lella and Massimo Vignelli.



Lella and Massimo Vignelli. Photo: John Madere

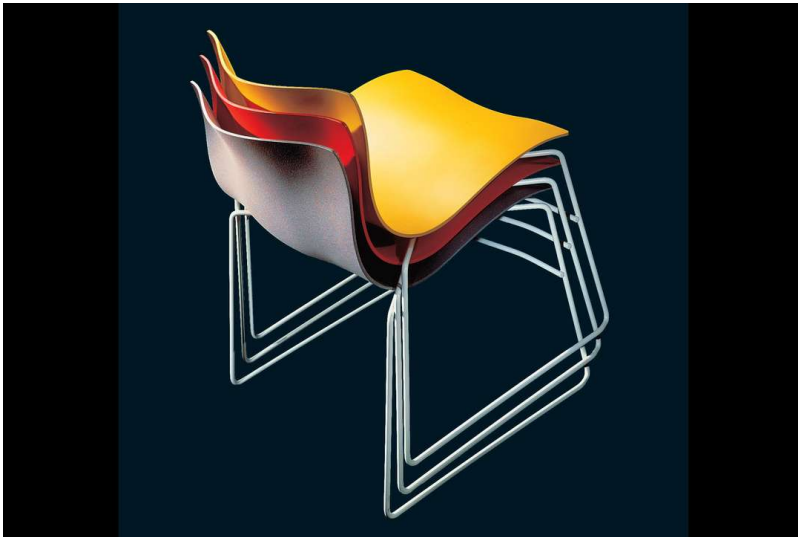
So when the Rochester Institute of Technology announced that it would build a design center in the Vignellis’ name—where it would house and display their vast archive—it was logical that Roberto and I would be called upon to create a new film on the couple.

The work of the Vignellis is timeless. “Will it matter 100 years from now?” Peter Eisenman muses at the end of *Design Is One*. “Yes. And that’s what important.” Indeed, the Vignellis’ influence on the entire field of design is even more potent today than it was when Roberto made the first film about them. As Barry Bergdoll, curator of Architecture and Design at MoMA states: “The Vignellis are known by everybody, even by people who don’t know their name. They’re surrounded by the things that they’ve conceived.”

Stacking chairs designed by the Vignellis

1972 NYC Subway Map, designed by the Vignellis

Indeed, one of the challenges in making a film about the Vignellis and the work they’ve created over the past 50 years is that most of their projects are already completed and out in the world. Thus we didn’t have an opportunity to show their “creative process.” However, in addition to interviews with them—and with Milton Glaser, Richard Meier, Michael Bierut, Paola Antonelli, and others—we did get some verité moments with the subjects.



These include Lella and Massimo

preparing a spaghetti lunch in their kitchen—a scene that usually elicits a good laugh—as well as Massimo explaining their design for the Heller coffee cup. Apparently, the mug was ultimately perceived as a failure and had to be modified due to an American sensibility that didn't understand the more sophisticated European standards for coffee.



Kitchen and glassware by the Vignellis

As I write this, I've been in San Francisco for some screenings of the film, which are always fun. People come up afterward and say how the film has left them with a new way of looking at the world, paying more attention to all the things we encounter in our designed environments. They are inspired by the Vignellis' approach to design, their joyful creativity, and their enthusiasm for life and beauty.



Postscript: The timing of the release of this film is a bit bittersweet, as Roberto, my collaborator (or accomplice as he liked to refer to our partnership), died on January 10, ending a six-month battle with pancreatic cancer. Roberto's spirit and equanimity in the face of his sudden cancer diagnosis was inspirational. His joy for life and people and his creativity will live on through all the work he (and we) created and in all the lives he touched. I dedicate all

future screenings to my beloved accomplice.

For more about the Architecture and Design Film Festival, check out the website.