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'Design Is One' at the Architecture and Design Film Festival

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The Architecture and Design Film Festival kicked off in New York at the Tribeca Cinemas with the world premiere of *Design Is One*, a film about the legendary design duo of Massimo and Lella Vignelli. Filmmakers Kathy Brew and Roberto Guerra's retrospective of the Vignelli's union and career covers a spans a vast array of material, in keeping with the breadth of the legendary designers' work. Played to a standing-room-only crowd, the film captured the often humorous and always insightful wisdom of design's first couple.



To leave an indelible impact on a whole nation of people is an accomplishment perhaps no other husband and wife team can claim. The Vignellis moved to New York from Italy in 1966; only a few months later, they were commissioned to redesign the New York City subway signage and map. While the map was replaced five years later, the seminal signs remain in use today (and the map itself has resurfaced for use in the MTA's Weekender app, showing that perhaps the Vignellis were ahead of their time). Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, says every time we take the subway we are entering "Vignelliland"—

this analogy could be taken a step further as even those residing in Anytown, USA, come across multiple marks of their design legacy every day, whether in driving a Ford Focus, shopping at Bloomingdale's, or catching a flight on American Airlines (the Vignellis designed all three brands' logos).

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Vignelli fans eagerly away the premiere of *Design Is One* outside Tribeca Cinemas.

Of course, this is just a small sample of their portfolio—collectively the two created branding for Knoll, Knoll's Handkerchief Chair, numerous book covers and layouts (always following Massimo's unigrid system—a method for design still practiced today), interiors, furniture, clothing, and package design. While each has their area of speciality, their works are collaborative in nature. Throughout the film, talking heads (including Michael Bierut of Pentagram, architect Richard Meier, and graphic designer Milton Glaser) spoke of the perfect balance created by Massimo and Lella. With Massimo operating as the dreamer, Lella's realist instincts tempered his ideas into the achievable.

After the film, Massimo fielded questions from the audience and dispensed sound advice: "There is no good design without discipline," and "Freebies are your best work, they're not contested by the client," he says.



Design Is One director Roberto Guerra discusses making the film.

A recurring theme throughout the film is Massimo's fascination with eternal life. He and Lella have ensured their name's immortality through omnipresent and timeless design. Of his career, Massimo says, "I can die any minute, very happy. But of course I hope I'm going to be here a very

long time." His work continues, as he is currently producing an anthology of Lella's career.

The Architecture and Design Film Festival travels next to L.A. And Chicago this spring. For a design fan of any pedigree, *Design Is One* is not to be missed.