

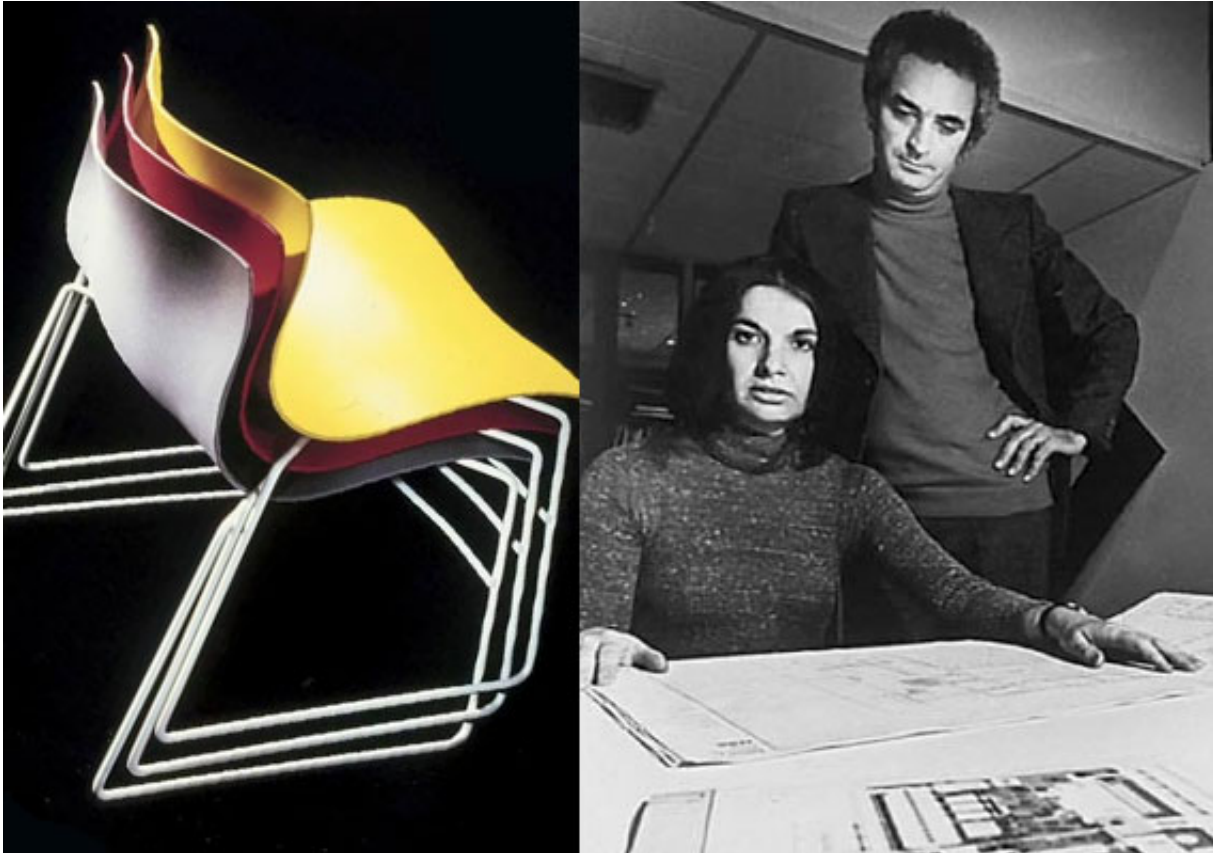
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Festive

The ByDesign 13 Film Festival

by [Charles Mudede](#)



What do the Ford logo and New York City's subway signage have in common? Lella and Massimo Vignelli, Italian designers who married in the mid-'60s, moved to New York City, set up shop, and conquered the world. Their work—the subject of the excellent documentary *Design Is One: Lella & Massimo Vignelli*, which opens this year's ByDesign film festival—is all over American culture: furniture, jewelry, interior spaces, public spaces, corporate logos, and so on. But despite their incredible American success, the Vignellis are profoundly European. From their way of dressing, their attitudes about life, their manner of standing, sitting, talking, and eating, one would gather that the 50 years they've spent in America has made no impression on them. The Vignellis are as European today as they were on the first day they arrived in New York.

In one scene (my favorite in the documentary), Massimo Vignelli describes a plastic coffee cup he designed with a peculiar kind of handle. The cup proved to be a flop not because he designed it badly, but because Americans don't know how to drink coffee properly. Americans, he explains with calm contempt, fill the cup to the very top. But the right way, the civilized way, the European way to drink coffee, is to fill it only halfway. So if Americans knew how to drink coffee properly, there would be no spilling problems with the peculiar but elegant design of the handle. Massimo does not blink an eye when he calls Americans uncivilized. Those who enjoyed *Eames: The Architect & the Painter* will certainly enjoy *Design Is One*. ★

ByDesign 13 runs July 19–24 at Northwest Film Forum. Full info at **nwfilmforum.org**.

Got a film festival you want us to write about? E-mail **festive@thestranger.com**.

