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Superb designers are featured in 'Design Is One: Lella and Massimo Vignelli' - video



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Near the end of the documentary "Design Is One: Lella & Massimo Vignelli," an expert observes that a good designer is the "intermediary between information and understanding," making the complex clear. As directors Roberto Guerra and Kathy Brew work through illustrative examples from the Vignellis' work, what that means becomes crystal clear.

We might not know Lella's and Massimo's names, but we all immediately recognize their graphic work: American Airlines, the New York subway map, Bloomingdales and National Parks' brochures. They've also designed jewelry, lamps, furniture (notably for Poltrona Frau), Heller dinnerware (with an amusing, negative reception for a one piece cup) and clothes, following their precept that "if you can't find it, design it." It also becomes obvious why clients feel such affection for the Vignellis' approach when they compare their work to the medical profession, their client the patient.

Married for 51 years, they complement each other perfectly. Massimo admits to being the dreamer; Lella describes herself as the more direct, more sensible and rational partner. Their distinct and appealing personalities emerge in the lengthy exchanges with them that provide the spine of the quick, 79-minute film. Interviews with associates and design experts add endorsements, though the film really didn't need quite as much redundant praise when the gems here come from the Vignellis' own generously offered insights into their thinking about everything from elegant pragmatism to useful typefaces. They introduced Helvetica, still Massimo's favorite, to the US in 1965.

Massimo says, "Every society gets the design they deserve." I'm not sure we've deserved the Vignellis' stunning contributions, but we have benefited from them for over 50 years. "Design is One" illustrates the diverse ways and the psychology behind their work. It's a treat to spend time listening to them.

The St. Louis premiere of "Design Is One: Lella & Massimo Vignelli" is at Webster University's Winifred Moore auditorium at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, December 18th through Sunday, December 22nd. For more information, you may call 314-968-7487 or on the web at: Webster.edu/filmseries.