

'Design & Architecture' films showcase projects big & small

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Almost everything you see and touch - your house or apartment building, the streetcar you take, the pen you write with and the chair you sit in - came into existence after much thought.

"Everything is designed. We live in a designed world," says filmmaker [Kathy Brew](#), who'll appear as part of a "Design & [Architecture Films Showcase](#)" at the [Yerba Buena Center for the Arts](#). "People see stuff, but they don't know who made it. Hopefully people will look at things differently after they see these films."

Brew's newest film, "Design Is One: [Lella & Massimo Vignelli](#)," which she made with her late husband, [Roberto Guerra](#), looks at the half-century career of two of the world's leading designers - of everything from industrial and product design to furniture design - and is the kickoff for a nine-film series about design at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

Other films look at the hidden rivers beneath our metropolises, the rebuilding of ground zero, a [Frank Lloyd Wright](#) masterwork and a church in Barcelona that has been under construction since 1882.

Brew, a [New Yorker](#) and former San Francisco resident, talked with The Chronicle about her film and about design in general.

Q: When was the last time you were in San Francisco?

A: I haven't been there in 5 1/2 years. I'm using this film as an excuse to go back.

Q: Why the Vignellis?

A: The Vignellis are considered eminence grise in the design world - everybody knows the Vignellis, even if you don't know you know them, because you've seen something they've done. When it was getting determined where their archive was going to go (it landed at the **Rochester Institute of Technology**), they didn't want their archive in a basement - they wanted it on display, and the RIT built a design center in their name. So they approached Roberto about making a film.

Q: What's their working method?

A: They're very complementary. I'd say they're the parallel of how Roberto and I worked over all these years. ... Massimo's line in the film is "I'm the pencil, Lella is the criticism." He's the dreamer, Lella brings it into reality. Over 50 years of being together, Massimo will sketch something and Lella will put the brakes on and say, "Wait a minute here - is this pragmatic? Will it cost too much?" She's the one, actually, who has the architecture degree.

Q: What can the average Joe get out of these films about design?

A: It makes them look at the world a different way. The beauty of films about creative people is it's just like meeting them. You get inside their canon, get inside their head. You see how they work. It's inspiring.

Q: Tell me about your time in San Francisco. You spent 14 years here.

A: They were very formative years for me. I worked for KQED-TV from '81 to '84, then I migrated and worked more into the arts and basically worked in media and contemporary art the whole time I was out there. I worked for the Mill Valley Film Festival. I was on a jury for the San Francisco International Film Festival.

It changed my sensibility and gave me opportunities that I probably wouldn't have had here. It was important in my development as a filmmaker, artist and cultural producer.

If you go

Design & Architecture Films Showcase: Through March 30. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 701 Mission St., S.F. (415) 978-2700. www.ybca.org.

Design Is One: Lella & Massimo Vignelli: 7:30 p.m. Thursday (Feb. 27), Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday. Co-director Kathy Brew will attend Thursday's screening.

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