

DESIGN HISTORY APPRECIATED

Back in 1926, Kodak launched the third generation of its all-black Vest Pocket camera line, the Series III. It sold well, but the company wanted to expand the market and make the camera appeal to women as well as men. To help with this, Kodak turned to designer Walter Dorwin Teague. His concept was to release essentially the same camera but in five distinct and different colors packaged in color-matched satin-lined boxes. This version of the camera was released in April 1928 under the name the Vanity Kodak.

In 2003, Apple Computer launched the third generation of its all-white MP3 music player, the iPod. It sold well, but the company wanted to expand the market and make the iPod appeal to women as well as men. To help with this, Apple turned to its lead designer, Jonathan Ive. His concept was to release a smaller version of its MP3 player in five distinct and different colors. This version of the iPod was released in January 2004 under the name the iPod Mini.

One started from black, the other from white. The strategies were the same, the numbers the same, and the colors the same.

Walter Dorwin Teague was Chuck Berry to Jonathan Ive's Keith Richards. It was a matter of respect and inspiration, not plagiarism or copying. It was also an act that increases, rather than diminishes, the respect due to Ive, since designers are measured by who they quote in their designs, how and when.

Rather than an exception, this kind of quoting is the norm. Yet it is contrary to the myth of "the light bulb flashing in a vacuum by a solo genius inventor" that is all too pervasive in our *American Idol* cult-of-the-individual hero-worshipping culture. John of Salisbury wrote in 1159 in his *Metalogicon*, "Bernard of Chartres used to say that we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see



Courtesy of the London Collection and Apple

more than they, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size."

But we all have the potential to become *giants* on the shoulders of giants—to not only have the benefit of the vision that this affords, but also the sharpness of sight to see through different eyes—in Proustian sense—and in so doing lead a true voyage of discovery.

In his 1982 book *By Design*, Ralph Caplan (misquoting Santayana) said, "Santayana taught us that those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it. That surely is true in design as in anything else, but in design there is a corollary: those who do know history are privileged to repeat it at a profit."

There is a reason that design history needs to be emphasized in design education, practice and appreciation.

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If you have a commentary you'd like to share, send your 500 words to *Innovation's* managing editor at k.designs@cox.net.