

## Strong Design Heritage - an Asset for Finnish Business

Finland has been a place where exceptional women in the design field have made exceptional achievements throughout the history. One of the early pioneers was architect Wivi Lönn, who started her own architectural office in the 1890's. She cooperated with the famous Armas Lindgren in architectural projects that are considered masterpieces of the Art Nouveau era. It should be mentioned that in the cooperation Lönn was in charge of the constructions and not the décor. Finland's well-renowned architect Alvar Aalto had significant input from his wife, also an architect and designer, Aino Aalto, when starting the now 70-year-old Artek, a manufacturer of classic and contemporary furniture. The latter years have seen a growing number of women in key roles in the Finnish society. For example the first Finnish female president, Tarja Halonen who is in the office for the second term running, has gained wide support from the Finns and international recognition for her global concern on issues like social equality and environmental consciousness.

In light of the history, where could one find a better place to come across female designers to create aesthetic and functional products combining the strong design heritage with the innovative new technologies?

The strong design heritage means that today, design permeates all aspects of Finnish life, from society and culture, to business and technology. The progressive and holistic nature of Finnish design brings design close to the everyday life, improving the quality of the everyday experience for all types of people.

## Designing for Women

What do women expect of products designed for them? It is not enough to shrink the product and make it pink. Women process information differently and have specific communication skills, needs and priorities. They appreciate ease of use and selective functions. They want a clear solution to their problem, not a vast list of product features they will never need.

Irina Viippola, a member of the design team comments the development project: *"We approached the concept design phase by creating user scenarios. The stories helped us to understand the needs and demands of very specific users. The target was clear: we should design a product that is as easy as possible to use, even without an instruction manual. Sketches and prototypes of the user interface, functionality, form and graphic elements were tested on several occasions in Finland and the U.S. through out the design process. The emotional side of the use situation was taken into account by interviewing and observing women of different ages. Several rounds of sketches were made to come up with a fresh and semantically appropriate form for this purpose"*

The lesson learned from this project was that if you meet the expectations of women, you exceed the expectations of men. Good industrial design is user-driven, not necessarily designer-driven. The designer's age, gender and nationality naturally influence product design, but inspiration and innovative ideas often spring from the user's life, experiences and environment.

## Desigence Design Philosophy

Desigence is one of the leading design service providers in Finland. The services offered cover a wide area, from the fuzzy front end of product development - where it is still unclear what the product should be like or for what target group - up until the launch of the product into international markets.

Desigence sees design as an important cultural adaptor in the global business environment. Designer is often the spokesperson of the user in product development. Our aim is to strive for better solutions for the user, the manufacturer and for the sales channel - good design is a strategic decision. Design can be a competitive tool, especially in cases where a company succeeds in creating a completely new product category and defines the semantics related to the physical product.