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Packages Go Sophisticated

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Packages
Go Sophisticated

It’s a streamlined era for cosmetic wrappers, says Ruth Jensen

A CCUSTOMED TO the rows and rows of cosmetic packages on the shelves of retail stores, customers often miss the art in them. Does it occur to you that a package might have been designed just to catch your eye? The average person probably notices only the product, but applied artist Barbara Hoffman, who received her master’s degree from Iowa State in 1936, looked at these same packages and found material for a graduate thesis. It was modern design as found in the commercial packaging of cosmetics that she used for her subject.

Miss Hoffman conducted a survey on modern cosmetic packages. Her jury consisted of applied art students and instructors. The first step was to obtain a group of packages as representative illustrations of modern cosmetic packages. Thirty-five products out of a hundred were chosen and from these a still more select group. Five applied art instructors gave a final group of ten packages the distinction of best expressing modern design.

Upon investigation, Miss Hoffman found that the coverings of today’s products have undergone a streamlining—an elimination of out-moded and unwanted elaboration. Cosmetic and toilet-goods companies were judged leaders in commercial packaging as it is known today.

Modern packaging was born on that day, back in the 1920’s, when a manufacturer realized the importance of presenting his product in packages that were attractive to the eye and suitable to the needs of the public. About 20 years ago little attention was paid to beauty in packages—the main idea being to make them stand out by crowding them full of violently contrasting colors.

Once modernization was begun, the stress was placed on beauty of design. Functionalism, too, has been emphasized, which has turned design into a slightly different channel. The new designs are simple, direct and appropriate. By size, shape, tempo, name and trademark, packages are silently but forcibly establishing confidence in their contents, creating a desire for possession.

Characteristics of modern design include the principles of art that have always held, plus a few that seem to be strikingly new. Simplicity is the keynote, emphasized by continuity of line, contrasting colors and sharp definition of light and shadow. Simplicity, according to Miss Hoffman, is essential to both style and smartness. The modern design also has a definite rhythm, usually created by repetition of simple designs.

The factor of function has given rise to an important change in modern design. In many instances function determines the shape of the package. When an object,
through its form, completely expresses the purpose for which it was created, it is well-designed and capable of assuming the dignity of an art.

Form, not only important to efficiency, suggests proportion, balance, color and even rhythm. Color plays a dynamic role in any package, for it must attract attention and produce such a feeling toward it that the consumer will keep the package long after the contents have been consumed.

Present day packages shun imitations of material. Cosmetic packagers believe in using materials with their original qualities of beauty. Thus cardboard is not disguised as wood, plastic is not made to imitate ivory, copper shines forth in a new glory, aluminum is valued for its lightness and adaptability and glass is glass and not an imitation of crystal. And so, at last, honesty and integrity in design and use of materials have become an important part of commercial packaging.

Sophistication is prevalent in the modern use of textures in cosmetic packages, effected by simplicity in the use of the materials. If the texture is to be emphasized, the form and color are subdued to make the textures more effective. Most of the materials are machine-produced, and so have the shimmer of metal, the sparkle of glass, the gleam of wood, the smoothness of plastic or the roughness of leather.

Once more the word “simplicity” enters—this time into the question of line in package designs. Lettering is one of the most effective examples of line. The new stream-lined alphabets make use of an extreme clarity of line.

Notan, the variation of light and dark, is used in modern design for attention-value, as an aid towards a more striking package. It frequently determines the legibility of the lettering on the package and the psychological effect on the purchaser.

Good proportion is necessary for a good design and can be the making of the package. Balance in modern packages is bi-symmetrical and is usually found in the surface decoration. A fine balance between the designs of the top and bottom halves of a surface area is important in securing a sense of stability in the cosmetic package.

To attract attention, any good design depends on the proper emphasis on important areas and the sub-ordination of unimportant details. The design must serve to accent the name of the product, without being too blatant.

Miss Orange Peel

Place-card Pepper Upper

For colorful place cards select firm, thin-skinned oranges. Tie a crepe paper bonnet on each, or paper frill to frame the “face”. Makes eyes by cutting out two oval pieces of white paper and affixing to orange with blue thumb tacks, used for eye-pupils. Cut a mouth of red paper, and affix with a tiny red thumb tack or map-pin. Rouge the cheeks by rubbing a little lipstick into "cheeks". Write the name of your guest on the card and place under “chin”. If you like, add eyebrows or hair by cutting strips from properly colored paper, and affixing with straight pins.