

THE FUTURE OF DESIGN POST COVID-19

by Catherine Francis
April 2020



With lockdown and weekly shopping trips becoming the new normal, the effects of social distancing and the growing uncertainty of life after COVID-19 made me question what the future of design might look like. Thinking about specific design traits wasn't enough. I needed to look back at how design has behaved over time - the key influences and indicators - and how they have helped direct design change.

This article explores where design is at in today's world and begins to look at what response we can expect from design after the coronavirus epidemic.

DESIGN BEGINS WITH CULTURE

Historically, innovation was engineering-led, which in turn influenced design. Between 1925 and 1937 we saw the rise of the Art Deco movement. The Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building in New York are examples of this decorative fashion, which allowed craftsmen to combine with modern elements to create a luxurious and glamorous style.

The Art Deco movement was influenced by the Machine Age of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Steam engines began to be replaced by gas turbines, internal combustion engines and electric motors. We also saw the beginning of gigantic production machinery and the mass production of high-volume goods. Steel-framed buildings allowed architects to design with height, as we started to see the emergence of 'skyscrapers' as they were newly named.

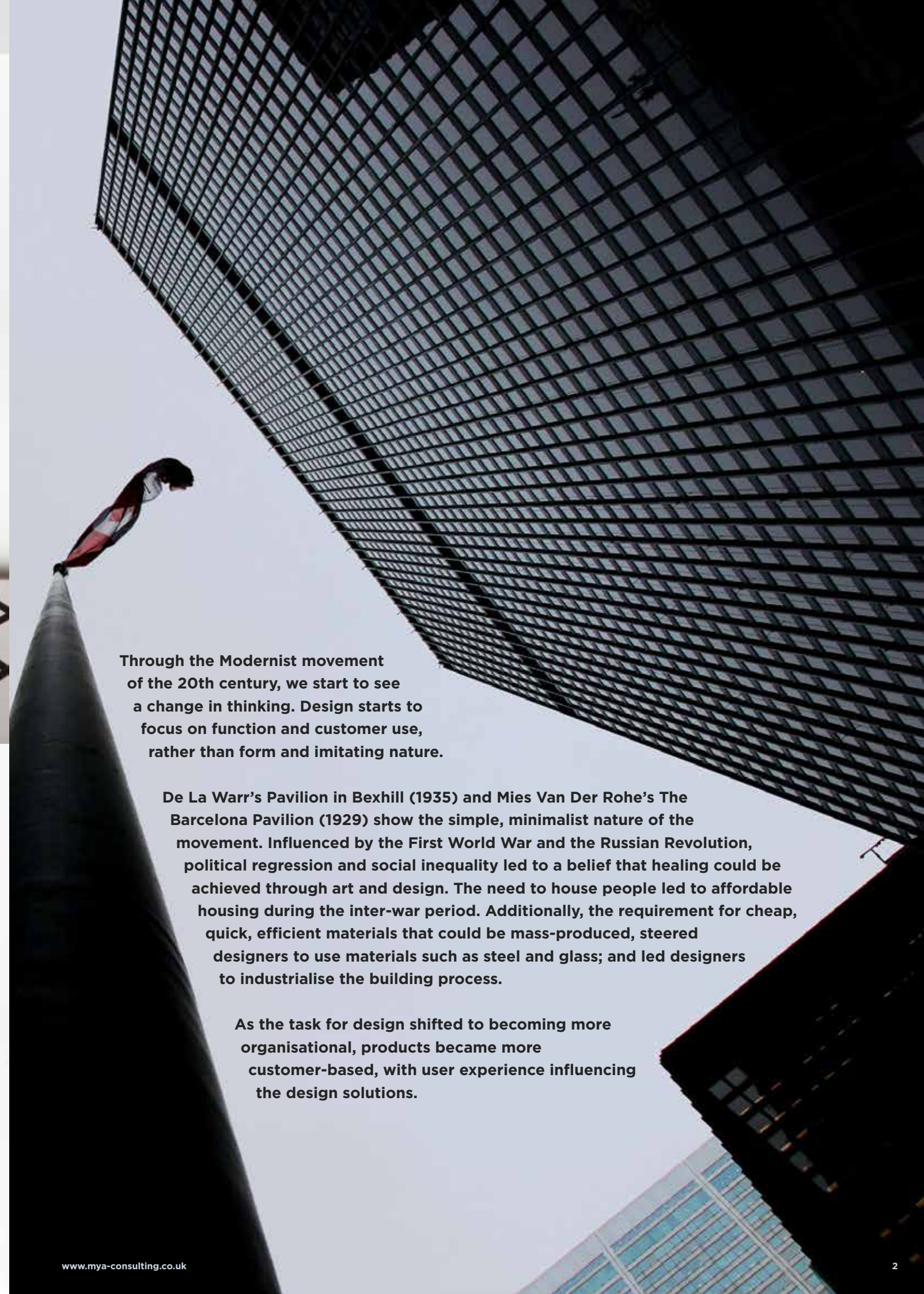
This advancement in engineering allowed designers of this movement to think more innovatively, creating modern interpretations of ancient historical patterns.



Through the Modernist movement of the 20th century, we start to see a change in thinking. Design starts to focus on function and customer use, rather than form and imitating nature.

De La Warr's Pavilion in Bexhill (1935) and Mies Van Der Rohe's The Barcelona Pavilion (1929) show the simple, minimalist nature of the movement. Influenced by the First World War and the Russian Revolution, political regression and social inequality led to a belief that healing could be achieved through art and design. The need to house people led to affordable housing during the inter-war period. Additionally, the requirement for cheap, quick, efficient materials that could be mass-produced, steered designers to use materials such as steel and glass; and led designers to industrialise the building process.

As the task for design shifted to becoming more organisational, products became more customer-based, with user experience influencing the design solutions.



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The driving force behind design and innovation is the accelerated change in business and society caused by advances in technology which, in turn, have transformed the way leading companies create value. This is more evident in recent times, with innovation becoming design-led and more customer-centric. At every stage, design needs to think about the customer experience and how to create the best user solution.

The first iPhone was launched in 2007 and was marketed as 'Apple reinvents the phone'. How did it do this? With instant internet access, a good quality camera, and the first touchscreen. By looking at how to improve the customer experience, Apple was able to create a product that clearly demonstrated solutions that were customer-focused. In a growing, fast-paced world, being able to access the internet only at work or at home became a hindrance. Apple's solution? Mobile, accessible internet, wherever you go.

Fast-forward to 2018 with the release of the iPhone XS/XMAS and the design has been influenced by all the applications ('apps') that the customers now use. Photo social media apps, such as Instagram, massively boosted the proliferation of the infamous 'selfie' (which only came about thanks to the invention of the front-facing camera lens). Now the ubiquitous use of social media has increased the demand, one could even say the 'need', to have even better quality photos and video. The latest iPhones have increased mega pixels, multiple lenses, an arty 'Portrait Mode' and produce photography of such high quality as to make a separate camera an unnecessary encumbrance for most people, in most situations.

DESIGN TODAY

When you look back throughout history, design has always responded to the world that we live in. However, the rate at which technology and innovation develop is often linked to periods of significant cultural and societal changes brought about by massive upheavals such as the two world wars, and the Great Depression.

COVID-19, the coronavirus disease, has already had a global impact which many predict will prove more significant than the financial crisis of 2008-2009.

Design was traditionally driven from a marketing focus.

A way to gain the attention of the target audience. Now, and post COVID-19, we will continue to see design being driven from a user experience focus - how design can improve the value of the service. During this interim period, as social distancing continues after 'lockdown' is lifted, one way that design will seek to improve the value of the service is by creating safer catering and eating environments for the customer.

We are likely to see an immediate reduction in self-help bars, additional spacing between tables in restaurants and a decrease in pre-packaged 'grab-and-go' products, as design will try to limit the amount of touching and feeling by multiple customers. 'Grab-and-go' items will change, becoming individually wrapped at the point of sale and self-help bars will be adapted to become an operated service. We will also see a more shielded service, with more covers over the food on offer and at the till points, creating social distance as much as possible. Design increases the value of the service by looking after the customer and also allowing the users to look after each other.

To be able to continually improve the user experience, and raise expectations, design has to be more than what something simply looks or feels like - it has to be about the way it works. Technological advancements constantly allow designers to challenge and improve user interaction. It's often overlooked but the driving force behind design is the accelerated rate of change in business and society caused by advances in technology, and it is transforming the way that leading companies create value.

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WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM DESIGN POST COVID-19?

A crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic will only accelerate technological advancement. Pre-COVID-19, we had already started to see the first uses of touchscreen ordering and contactless payments were well established. Post COVID-19, customers will want safer solutions; for example, a fully touchless customer service offer. Many of these things would probably have arrived in the future anyway, but this crisis will mean that we have them sooner.

The world is starting to see that working from home can be successful via video calls. The COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the adoption of communication solutions such as Zoom and SLACK as well as the further exploitation of social media.

As we move beyond global lockdown to a 'new normal', the technology we use will develop quickly, delivering more and resulting in a fundamental shift in the way we live and work. As the lockdown restrictions begin to ease, we will see fewer people returning to the office. The implications of a significantly reduced working commute will have an impact on a wide variety of businesses; local transport, coffee shops (who may now be missing out on the morning commute, office coffee breaks and lunch, to name a few examples).

Businesses will have to change their approach based on the new user expectations. Will we see the coffee shop move towards a working hub, offering much more private spaces for video calling?

The 'new normal' will not only accelerate a change in the way we live and work; it will drive a new generation of design and thought leadership. We won't be going back to how things used to be! Catering and hospitality will be one of the key sectors that leads the way with new and exciting customer experience design solutions:

- Re-imagine your lunch break based on a touchless customer service, including technology such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) that shape and deliver a new customer experience.
- Re-think your food choice to include new and exciting health-conscious menus that could also include dietary supplements.
- A new and reduced dining room footprint with takeaway and delivery services.

We will also start to see a shift in customer focus regarding food safety versus sustainability.



The global impact of COVID-19 has already resulted in huge improvements in the world's climate. The smog has lifted from China and marine life has been spotted in the canals in Venice. Reducing waste is at the forefront of everyone's minds, as both food companies and households come to grips with surplus food stock. As the virus continues to affect countries around the world, we will see dining facilities move towards using seasonal produce from local farms.

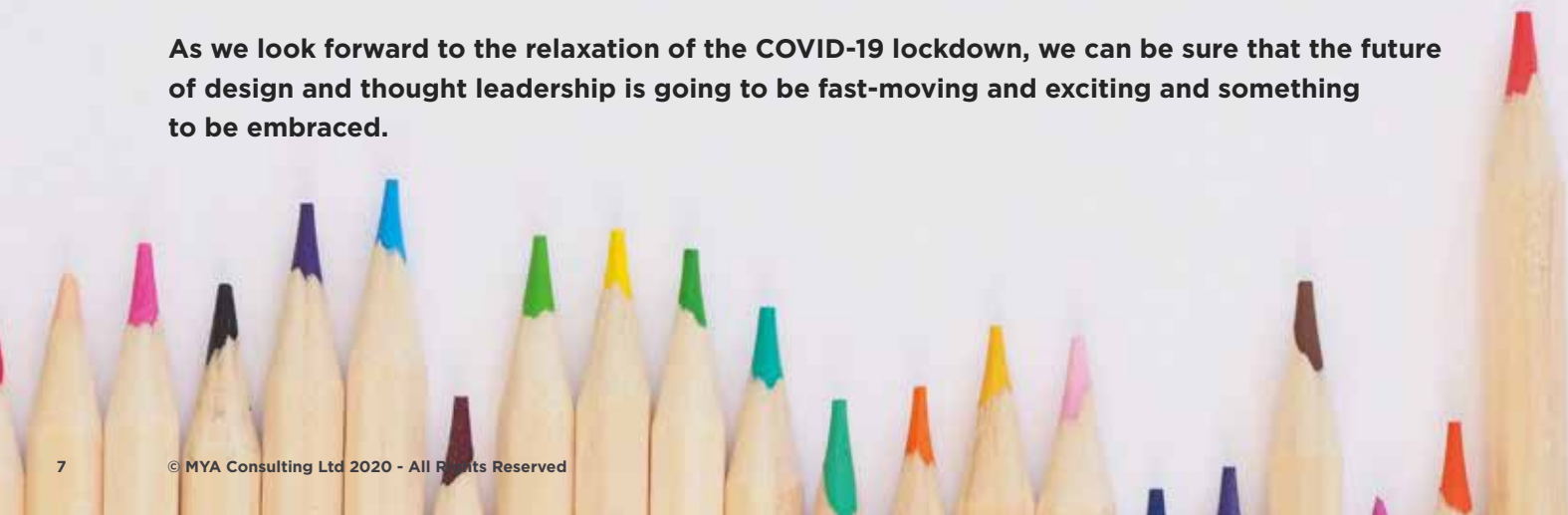
Travel restrictions will see a dependence on using home-grown, local produce and the product available will depend massively on seasonality. Design, focusing on the customer, will reflect this change by increasing the amount of dedicated decant and preparatory space, food-wash basins and fresh product storage facilities, as kitchens start to work with food straight from the soil.



It's not just new design solutions for the customer experience that will change the way we live and work. There will be other changes to the way catering and hospitality businesses work and reach out to customers; for example:

- Micro social media marketing, focused on community advertising, will likely grow.
- Pre-shift employee temperature and wellbeing checks implemented as a safety process.
- Drive-through or pick-up window options.
- Re-engineering your own menu.

As we look forward to the relaxation of the COVID-19 lockdown, we can be sure that the future of design and thought leadership is going to be fast-moving and exciting and something to be embraced.



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AUTHOR BIO

Catherine Francis is Head of Studio at MYA Consulting Ltd. Catherine is responsible for the process of design and innovation, and works closely with her clients to capture the 'wow' factor. With exacting standards and an exceptional eye for detail, Catherine brings design leadership and innovation to any project team.

Catherine earned a degree in Interior Design from Kingston University, and then gained experience working in an architecture practice before joining MYA Consulting.



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