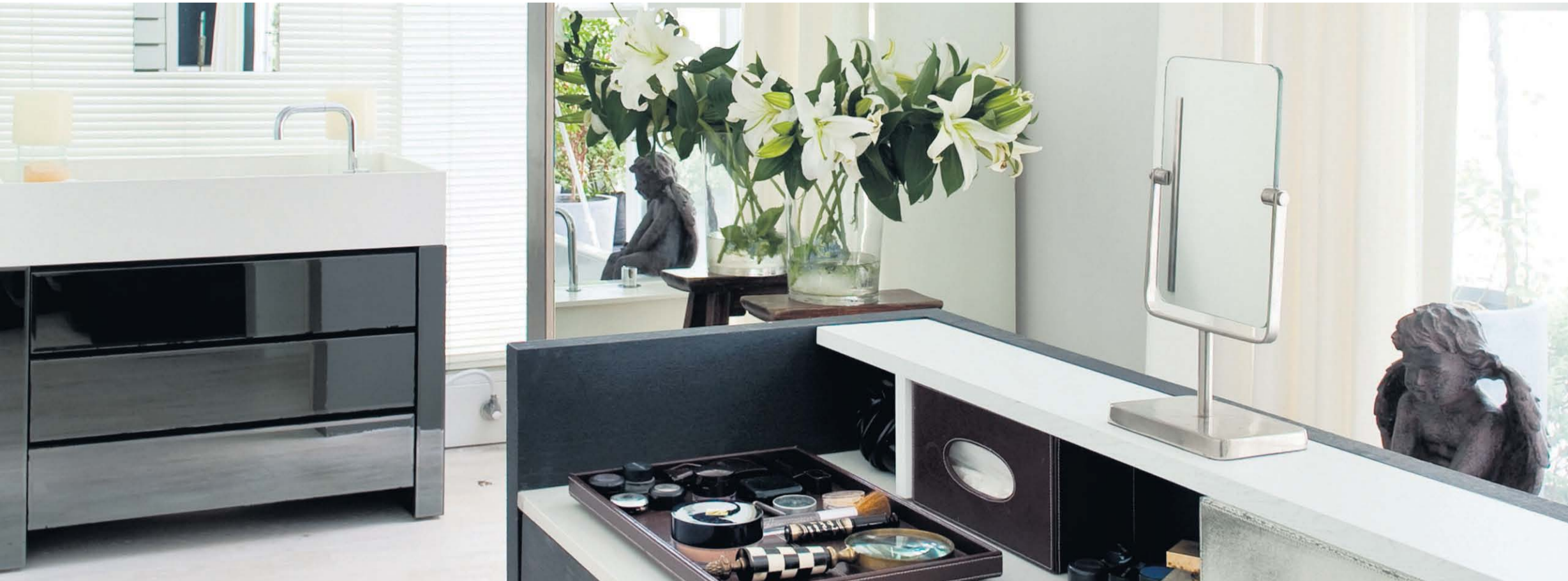


A decorator personalises her living space [hh4](#)



house & home

Well-designed household goods make life easier and are a pleasure to use – no wonder they stand the test of time [hh3](#)



click & buy

Forget nightlights. Phosphorescent wall stickers are a way to provide your child with a bit of comfort at night. Moonshine is just one of the funky glow-in-the-dark options available at www.dezignwithaz.com



Tasks mastered

As the new sourcebook *Tools for Living* illustrates, well-designed household objects are efficient and offer lasting value and style – plus they are a pleasure to use, writes Yvonne Courtney

The average house contains hundreds, possibly thousands of objects, many of them not particularly useful or even really wanted. Because the market is aligned to the financial bottom line – and because we are easily seduced by advertising – our homes are crammed with stuff that isn't very well designed or well made.

Instead of accumulating endless domestic dross, from useless gadgets and kitsch gimmicks to poorly made knock-off “designer” furnishings that will last only a few years, wouldn't it be better to declutter our homes and instead enhance our lives with fewer possessions, all of which are functionally and aesthetically refined?

You may agree but find yourself stumped about where to buy good, honest products. That's precisely the domestic dilemma that prompted the design authors Peter and Charlotte Fiell to compile *Tools for Living: A Sourcebook for Iconic Designs* (Fiell Publishing), published last month. This hall of fame of everyday essentials, from beds and bowls to staplers and sofas, is an indispensable manual for kitting out your home.

“Over the years, friends and family repeatedly asked us, ‘Where can I get really well-designed cutlery?’ ‘What is the best shelving system?’ ‘Which door handles can you recommend?’,” explains Peter Fiell, “so we decided to go room by room, looking for the best-designed products available.”

The items they identified range from Japanese knives and Finnish saucepans to Italian lighting and English teapots – the only proviso being that everything must be in production so that it can still be purchased. (The book handily features contact information for each object's manufacturer.)

Everyday tools have shaped human existence – in fact, the creation and use of tools is what distinguishes human beings. Tools truly maketh man – they enable us to shape the environments and cultures that make us who we are.

The Milanese architect Ernesto Rogers believed that by studying a spoon it should be possible to understand the culture that created it and to extrapolate the type of city that such a society would build. Surveying the sea of shoddy household goods on sale today doesn't say much about our present cities and, given the finite nature of the world's resources, it's about time we chose responsible quality over mindless quantity.

In today's world – where Philippe Starck has his own reality television show and people ascribe messianic significance to the arrival of the latest smartphone – the bling-tastic must-haves quickly become the tarnished junk of a yesterday marked by celebrity obsession and cultural void. This makes it easy to forget life's classically simple products, the true icons of design.

Yet design is all encompassing, solving human problems from the

smallest to the largest scale, affecting everything from pattern-making to scientific research. Innovative design needn't be revolutionary or glamorous; whether a coffee maker or a door handle, the requirements are pretty consistent: simple, functional and smart. Good design doesn't need bells and whistles; sometimes it just has to turn out a good cup of coffee.

There is a growing awareness and appreciation of “ideal” objects that are functional, durable and timelessly beautiful. Such purposeful objects inspire the mind and nourish the senses, becoming cherished tools in the workshops of our daily lives.

Good design is intrinsic to the Fiells' lives. Fifteen years as design editors for the publisher Taschen have brought them extensive knowledge of the design world. They own many of the products featured in the book and believe that choosing well-designed products is one of the most important strategies at our disposal for solving the world's environmental problems.

Many would argue that Ikea has brought good design to the masses. Charlotte Fiell is quick to respond:

“Ikea has undoubtedly brought the idea of good design to the attention of many consumers, but the problem is that often Ikea furniture is purchased as a short-term fix... a sort of ‘it will do until we can afford something better’ mentality. When you buy something for the home that you are going to use on a daily basis it makes sense to buy the best quality you can afford.”

Tools for Living is based on the simple premise that well-designed objects can enhance our daily lives. Being more pleasurable to use, they give joy by helping to accomplish a task more quickly and efficiently, and are less susceptible to the vagaries of fashion. They usually last longer too – which can only be better for the planet. The old saying “buy cheap, buy twice” remains true. Cheaper, poor-quality items are more likely to fail or become obsolete and end up having to be replaced.

But the book isn't a celebration of expensive objects; it comprises the best items of their kind, irrespective of price.

Wallet-friendly hits include Fiskars scissors and the Le Parfait kilner jars. Many of the products are innovative, some are designed

by today's leading creative talents, and others are classics that have stood the test of time. They range from Le Creuset's Volcanic casserole, the Dualit Combi Toaster and Eero Saarinen's Tulip Chair to Ross Lovegrove's Istanbul bathroom pedestal. Some historic designs – such as the Brown Betty teapot and Bulldog's hand-forged gardening tools – have been honed over the decades, even centuries. No object is too trivial to ignore: the book duly includes such utilitarian items as dustbins and toilet brushes.

The Fiells' two years of research took them into some unfamiliar territory: “One of the great discoveries was the beautiful houseware designs of Sori Yanagi – an absolute maestro of form and function,” says Charlotte, “and I love the white porcelain Melitta coffee pot and filter, which I didn't realise was still being made.”

Just as interesting as the products themselves is their provenance: the Zeroll ice cream scoop is made in the US by a family business three generations old, and is the only product they make, yet it's found in all the best *gelaterias* in Italy and beyond.

What else do the Fiells particu-

larly rate? “Artifort – for its really comfortable furniture, and FSB for some of the best door handles money can buy,” responds Peter. “David Mellor for excellent cutlery,” adds Charlotte, “and Rösle – amazing for kitchen equipment.”

These design icons are an investment: they not only last longer than their shoddier counterparts but repay us with a sense of well-being. A duff tool can be a frustrating misery, but something that does what it says on the tin, can bring a little ray of sunshine – and in these recessionary times, celebrating the luxury of useful things is surely more appealing than focusing on frugality.

Tools for Living will speak to everyone who is conscious of design or wary of consumerism, helping us to navigate our way through a mass-produced world. It serves to remind us what good design is really about – and, by encouraging us to reassess everyday items, creates the possibility of looking at our lives in a new way.

As well, it helps to teach us how to eliminate wasteful frippery and choose items that we can use – and love to use – every day of our lives. What could be better than that?



*top 10

Peter and Charlotte Fiell's household essentials

1. Margrethe mixing bowls
2. Tools cookware for Iittala
3. Global knives
4. Rösle kitchen tools
5. Alvar Aalto Vase
6. Any chair by Pierre Paulin – especially the Ribbon
7. Wall clock 367/6046 by Max Bill
8. Folle 24/6 stapler
9. Stelton Classic watering can
10. Allround-høvel cheese slicer



Top, the historic Brown Betty teapot design has been honed over the decades. Above, from left, Le Parfait kilner jars are practical and affordable; the American company Zeroll makes one product, an ice cream scoop; because the sides can be removed from springform pans are used for delicate cakes and cheesecakes; the Swiss-made handheld Rex vegetable peeler was invented in 1947. On the cover, the Dualit Combi Toaster is a design classic that has withstood the test of time.