

A photograph of the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College, designed by Frank Gehry. The building features a highly sculptural, undulating facade made of reflective, metallic panels. The structure is illuminated from within, creating a warm glow that contrasts with the deep blue twilight sky. The building's form is dynamic and organic, with large, curved overhangs and a complex, multi-level structure. The foreground shows a paved walkway and a small yellow maintenance vehicle parked near the entrance. The overall atmosphere is one of modern architectural innovation in a natural setting.

DESIGNING AMERICA

By Michelle F. Solomon

Frank Gehry's Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts on the campus of Bard College epitomizes a modern structure existing in a natural space.

In a different time, Frank Gehry's swooping performing arts building on the grassy campus of a private college in the Catskill Mountains would have appeared sorely out of place. The dramatic creations by the daring architect, which include the Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles and the Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Chicago's Millennium Park, to name only a few, most often find comfortable homes among the steel and glass of large cities. But with Gehry's Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, the striking metal edifice is a reflection of how modern design has made its way into the American landscape. "The American public has become design-conscious in a way that we were not 20 years ago," says Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, dean at the School of Architecture at the University of Miami.

Because of the relative newness of the nation, the United States has been slower to catch on to contemporary design than other countries with vast centuries of history, theorizes Plater-Zyberk. Yet Gehry's works and others by influential industrial designers are beginning to define American culture and, in fact, are designing America. "There is a definite growing awareness of design. There is almost a sense of people wanting to have design incorporated into their own lives," says Caroline Payson, director of education at Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York City.

To that end, industrial designers like Karim Rashid are radically changing the aesthetics of everyday products and, in doing so, the very nature of consumer culture. "It was 20 years ago that it occurred to me when I was designing products for Black and Decker, Toshiba, Brita, and others, that our everyday objects should be well-designed, inexpensive, and accessible," says Rashid. He says he came up with the eye-catching look for his Method line of dish soap products with the concept of "sensual minimalism."

Modern technology has also altered the way designers approach everyday products. Jonathan Ive, the man responsible for the design of Apple's iPod, iPhone, and iMac, has single-handedly created staples of life that are now ingrained in social consciousness.

With a philosophy of usability coupled with a desire to create art, modern designers are tapping into the human psyche and reacting to the complexity inherent in a 21st-century world. Their designs "make complexity simple and sleek," says Plater-Zyberk. "Everything looks clean and new, and all the things that bother you about daily life seem to disappear."



“Design is important in every aspect of daily life,” says *Karim Rashid*, who created the signature Method dish soap bottle that made everyday dishwashing liquid a display piece.

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(LTL) won the prestigious Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award in 2007 for this avant-garde interior design for Fluff Bakery in New York City.



Antenna Design puts a spin on necessary objects, such as New York City subway cars and ticket kiosks, connecting them to the urban landscape as public art.





The iPhone's often-copied design is one of **Jonathan Ive's** most iconic creations for Apple. Nature is one of his chief sources of inspiration and is reflected in several of his products.

Contemporary designer **Philippe Starck** designs a wide range of products with the belief that they are meant to be durable goods with longevity, as evidenced by the Miss Lacy Armchair, manufactured by Driade Kosmo.





"Cars are art and the sculptures of our daily lives," says **Christopher Bangle**, chief of design for BMW, MINI, and Rolls-Royce. Bangle's work is polarizing yet very influential.