The International Design Magazine

2006 Annual Design Review .... Consumer Products .... Graphics .... Packaging .... Environments .... Furniture .... Equipment .... Concepts .... Interactive

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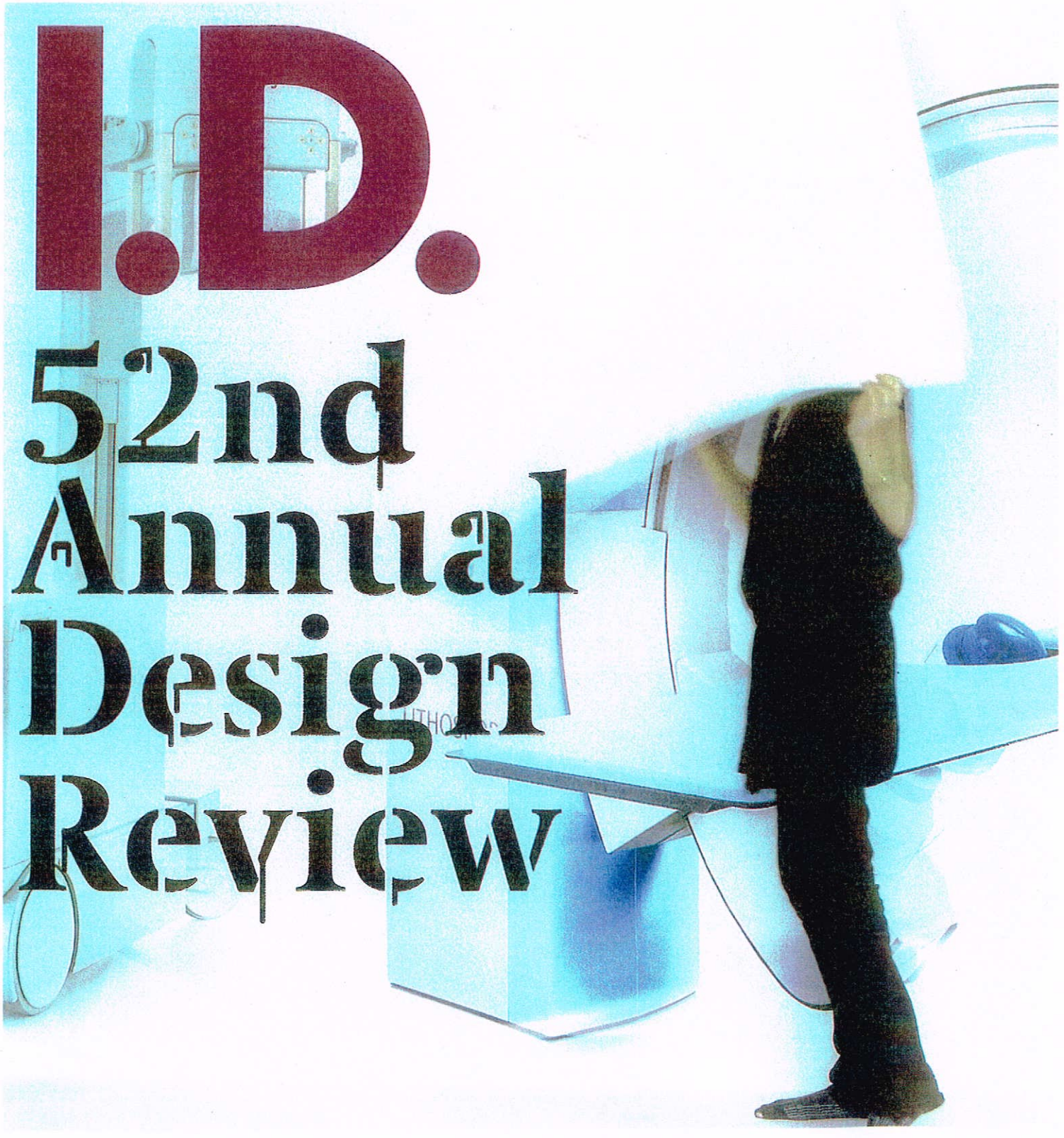
I.D.

52nd Annual Design Review



Equipment / Moderated by Akiko Busch

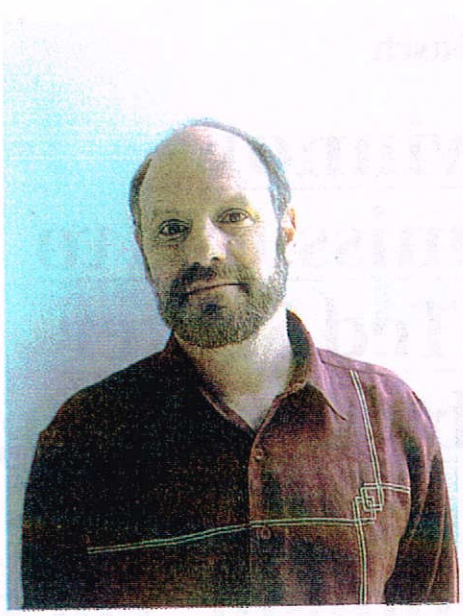
When the jurors were winnowing more than 100 submissions to a shortlist of about 30, Ted Selker opened the discussion by declaring: "All of these things have a real purpose and solve a real problem. These aren't consumer products that people are buying because of some ad. These things have to be reliable, honest, and serve a serious function."

The jurors recognized that in most cases, the product's technological innovation had occurred previously and elsewhere, so the honesty and reliability they were looking for often translated to how a product's form had been resolved and how easy it was to use. And in a category of complex technologies for complex needs, the jurors agreed that the more multifaceted a product, the greater its burden to announce itself, its function, and its manner of use.

Many times, though, that kind of material integrity was disrupted by an oversimplified form. Entries often seemed to lapse into a smoothed over blandness. As Selker noted, "One of the things I hate most about design is when a product can be anything." A handheld security device that, by the looks of it, could be an iPod or a calculator, for example. Or in the words of one juror: "You combine a bunch of boxes and wires and functions, add something swoopy, and you're done." Doug Patton observed, "Equipment design should be better because the budgets are bigger." From the beginning, then, our jurors sought out products whose uses were intuitive and that triggered some instinctive emotional response; what came to be recognized as the "sleek meter" or the "swoop factor" were not enough.

What marked the standouts? There was no uniform criterion. For James Ludwig, the search was for "things that are smart, desirable, viable." The first relies on technical facility, the second on human intuition, and the third on business reality. "So much of this stuff is lacking in one of these components," he said. Patton often looked for serenity: "As a designer, you begin with a sense of clutter, chaos, visual dissonance. And then you move on to some kind of tranquility, clarity, serenity. But I'm looking for visual emotion that goes beyond just harmony, some sense of rhythm that elevates and surprises." And often, he suggested, the process of arriving at that place reflects the yin and yang of design, of being totally immersed in a product's forebears versus forgetting everything you know.

"We are talking about how things progress," said Selker toward the end of the day. "All of these things are, to some degree, on their way." That pretty much summed things up. Shown here are products that address a serious need; radical innovation wasn't in abundance, but decisive steps forward were found in surprising places.

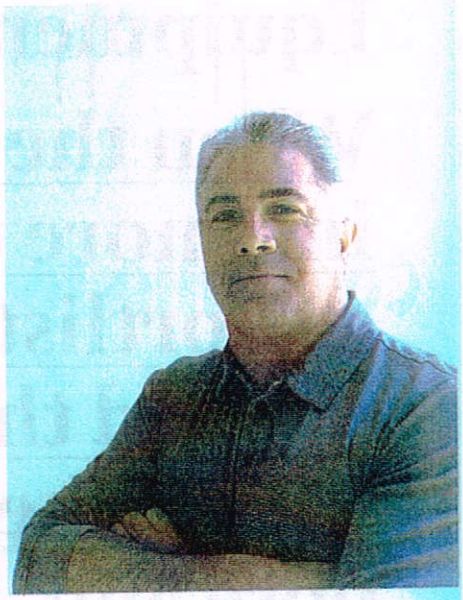


Ted Selker

Ted Selker is an associate professor at the MIT Media and Arts Technology Laboratory and director of the Context Aware Computing Lab, a group devoted to rethinking how we use computers. Selker is also director of Counter Intelligence, a forum of engineers and designers who use technology-rich platforms, such as kitchens, to examine the premise that our intentions can be recognized and respected by the things we design. As MIT director of the Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project, Selker is building and testing technology for improving security and accuracy in voting. Prior to joining the MIT faculty in November 1999, Selker directed the User Systems Ergonomics Research Lab at IBM, where he designed the TrackPoint III in-keyboard mouse, which is now in widespread use in laptop PCs. Selker additionally holds 18 patents and his inventions have received more than 30 awards from publications such as *PC Magazine*, *BusinessWeek*, and *BYTE*. He is a graduate of Brown University and holds a Ph.D. in computer science from the City University of New York.

James Ludwig

James Ludwig joined Steelcase in July 1999 and has been director of design for Steelcase North America since 2000. He also leads the Advanced Engineering Group, a project-management group of Steelcase-brand products, supports the Steelcase International design team, and is responsible for the design direction of all Steelcase showrooms and WorkLife Centers in North America. In 1992, Ludwig was the recipient of a Fulbright Grant, which prompted a move to Berlin, where he worked in the offices of Grüntüch/Ernst and Buseck Architects and was a founding partner of Bold:architects. designers, an interdisciplinary design consultancy. From 1993 to 1998, Ludwig also taught in the architecture and industrial design departments at Berlin's University of the Arts. Prior to his move to Berlin, he worked independently with the design consultancy Design-Logic for clients such as Details, Dictaphone, Hayes Microcomputer, RC Computer of Denmark, and Viewmaster-Ideal. He holds a Bachelor's degree in architecture from The Cooper Union in New York City and a BFA in industrial design from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He lives in East Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Doug Patton

Doug Patton founded the Irvine, California-based Patton Design in 1983. Since then, his firm has created 200 products in 40 categories, including medical equipment and radars, for clients ranging from Fortune 50 firms to start-ups. Some of the products have been accepted into the permanent collections of the Smithsonian Institution and MoMA. Patton has also received numerous engineering patents and design awards, and he has served as a consultant to the movie industry, sketching out futuristic product ideas for science-fiction films such as *Contact*. He graduated from California State University of Long Beach in 1983 with a B.S. in industrial design. He is a member of the Industrial Design Society of America, the Tech Coast Venture Network, TechNet, and the American Film Institute Advanced Technology Group.