

What's Inside Counts: Sex Toys and Design



How design is empowering us to feel good, from the inside out.

When we think about good design, sex shops—with their neon lights, blacked-out windows, and tacky-looking products—are not the first thing that come to mind. Sex toys have suffered similar bad design, thanks in part to social stigma that makes it harder for consumers to stand up and complain when they're unhappy with their purchases. After all, who is going to mount a public campaign if their vibrator is too awkward to hold for long periods of time, or if it isn't rotating fast enough for their taste?

Fortunately for women (and men) everywhere, a handful of innovative designers is hoping to push bad sex toys to the fringes by applying thoughtful design to the toys we use for pleasure. Consumer-focused companies like Jimmyjane and designers like the world-renowned Yves Behar are liberating sex toys from the dusty shelves of sleazy shops, elevating them to the mainstream and are, in the process, creating sex toys that look and feel as good as they should.

One man behind the movement is Ethan Imboden, the founder and chief creative officer at San Francisco's Jimmyjane, who is helping pave the way to a new future in the sex product category—and he's using his extensive industrial design experience to do it. Dismayed by sex toys' tawdry branding, short life spans, loud vibrations, and use of toxic materials, Imboden sought to provide for our private gadgets the same valuable design that we've come to expect from our public ones: replace the tacky with tactile, the clunky with ergonomic, the loud with subtle, and the slapdash with "stereo sensation." We may still be embarrassed about having a sex toy, but at least we can be proud of its sleek simplicity, intuitive design, and durable functionality.

"Design across the board can effect positive change," says Imboden. "And we're fortunate to have found an area where so much change can happen, and needs to happen."

Jimmyjane's first effort was its silent Little Somethings: short waterproof batons made of 24-karat gold, platinum, or steel: elegant, sleek, and versatile. Then came the Little Chromas: the Somethings' anodized aluminum sister. When the FORM 6 vibrator arrived, it shocked the market with its approachable aesthetic—it had two useable ends and a seamless surface—and its nontoxic materials: Instead of plastics, it was phthalate-free platinum silicone and stainless steel. To top it off, it was waterproof and its batteries were rechargeable.

To take this award-winning design even further, Imboden enlisted Yves Behar to help him. After years of casual conversation about partnering in some way, the two finally joined forces to completely reimagine the adult accessory space.

Imboden and Behar originally set out to deliver one groundbreaking product that was simple and intuitive but superlative in what it set out to do. But they quickly discovered several powerful design possibilities. One product with its own unique "power to please" turned into three, and thus their "Pleasure to the People" campaign was born.

"We didn't want to create a single vibrator that was like a Swiss Army knife and could do all sorts of things," says Imboden. "We wanted to create really specific and uniquely functional products."



(Picture of Form 2)

FORM 2 was the first of the three vibrators. The smooth and compact design had two flexible vibrating ears, each individually powered to provide more than twice the intensity of anything else its size. "Aesthetics, utility, and sustainability are exactly what we designed in FORM 2, in an expressive, simple form that says 'bunny,' with a bit of humor," says Behar, referencing the legendary Rabbit vibrator.

And while the details of FORM 3 and 4 are still under wraps, Imboden assures us that "each one of the products is completely unique unto itself. They are unified by using the same charging system and charging base. [In that sense], they create a great little set of vibrators, but they don't overlap in functionality. Each one has a very specific and innovative functional concept at its heart."

As part of their mission to take the raunch and risqué out of mainstream sex toys, Jimmyjane is not only overhauling vibrators' aesthetic and functionality but also their materials. For so long, consumers have been settling for the toys that contain toxins—like phthalates and lead—and were essentially disposable.

"Nobody had been asking, pushing for anything better, so who was going to make changes to a system that seemed to be working just fine?" says Imboden.

Simply by labeling their packaging with features like "body safe materials" and "phthalate-free," Jimmyjane has started a dialogue between the consumer and the retailer about why other products may not be safe choices. Consumers can question, contemplate and eventually vote with their dollars about what they do and don't want in and around their private parts.

"There is no reason to make these products in any less of a responsible manner than, say, an iPhone," says Behar, "and give them a true design sense that is about intimacy and personality."

<http://www.good.is/post/what-s-inside-counts-sex-toys-and-design/>

All images courtesy of Jimmyjane.



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