

Friday Five with Nasir Kassamali of Luminaire

08.09.19

Posted by Kelly Beall

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We all have a life-changing trip taken in 1970 by Nasir and Nargis Kassamali to thank for reinforcing their devout belief in the transformative power of design and the eventual founding of [Luminaire](#). They immigrated to the United States shortly after, and seeing the opportunity to close the gap of making good design available to a broader audience in 1974, opened Luminaire in a 500-square foot kiosk in North Miami Beach, specializing in European lighting. Within two years they were up to 4,500 square feet and had expanded into furniture and accessories, making high level contemporary international products directly accessible to consumers. Throughout the '80s, as other Luminaire locations were added, there was a shift from a focus on Scandinavian design to leading Italian brands, with the turn of the century bringing a further renewed interest in talents from other parts of the world. With the recent opening of a new Los Angeles showroom and additional locations on the horizon, Luminaire is poised to use Nasir's philosophy for worldwide growth. In sharing its message they remain focused on being the defining voice of the future of contemporary design. Today Nasir takes the time to share five of his favorites for [Friday Five](#).

De Stijl at the Bauhaus

The person most responsible for the final suppression of the Expressionist Bauhaus was Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg (il., p. 57), one of the founders of De Stijl. 'Expressionist art' was what he thought people were making at the Bauhaus. 'Everyone does what they feel like at the time, far removed from any strict discipline ... Where is there even an attempt to create a unified work of art, a unified configuration of space, form, colour?' asked van Doesburg's artist colleague, Vilmos Huszar. Van Doesburg founded the De Stijl group of artists together with Piet Mondrian in 1917. They believed art should reconcile the great polarities of life - 'Nature and the intellect, in other words the female and male principles, the negative and the positive, the static and the dynamic, the horizontal and the vertical'. The right angle and the three primary colours, supplemented by black, white and grey, composed the basic elements of expression. With the means of artistic creation thus specified, it would be possible to overcome the 'supremacy of the individual' and create 'collectivist solutions'.

Van Doesburg had already visited the Bauhaus in December 1920 and had followed its activities with great interest. Although he was unimpressed by its products, he recognized the school's enormous potential and prepared an article for his 'De Stijl' journal for which he asked the Bauhaus to supply material. In April 1921 van Doesburg moved to Weimar, where he hoped for a teaching appointment. In February 1922 he announced a new De Stijl course for young artists:

'Stijl' Course I

At the request of a number of young artists, I have decided to start a Stijl course to meet the general need for a positive, contemporary form of expression. The aims of this course will be:

- 1 To explain the principles of the new, radical style of design developed by 'De Stijl' in 1916 (Course A);
- 2 On the basis of these principles, which apply to all plastic art, to develop a total work of art (Course B).

Conditions of participation: Participants must already be working in a similar direction. Students will be charged 10 Marks per hour towards photography, equipment, light and heating costs, etc.

Duration: The course shall be composed of a theoretical part (Part A) and a practical part (Part B). The two parts complement each other. The entire course will last from 8 March to 8 July. 2 lessons a day. 1 theory lesson, 1 practical lesson. Wednesday evening from 7 - 9 p.m.

Location: Provisionally in Atelier Ruhl, Burkhardtstr. 12 B

Applications: Applications for the whole course can be made with Werner Grijff, Harderplatz 10, or with my wife, Weimar, 20 February 1922

Theo van Doesburg²⁴



Gerrit Rietveld Red and blue chair, 1917

Opposite page: Marcel Breuer: 'Wood-slat chair, second version, 1925'. Stained maple with horse-hair fabric.

Facing, previous page: Gertie Neufeld (left) and Adolf Meyer (right) in Weimar, 1925, photo 1926.



Photo courtesy of [Taschen](#)

1. The Book on the Bauhaus

I was born in Kenya, East Africa. When I was 14, my father gave me a book on the Bauhaus. It was life-changing. The Bauhaus Movement came to define a type of Modernism known as the International style. The simplistic in design, International art and architecture stressed functionality over all else, and sought to challenge the ways that buildings, art, and even decorative objects could be used. They believed that art could be beautiful without ceasing to be useful and that has been inspiring me in the way design at Luminaire impacts lives. This Taschen book visually tells that story.



Photo by Michael Allen

2. Nargis Kassamali

I met my wife Nargis 49 years ago, in college in Kenya. Over a few months of dating, she asked me to describe "Design". For me, it was a language not a style, and more importantly it was a way of life. We have been living this life married for 47 years and she is the mother of our two sons who are now in their late thirties. She is the Luminaire co-founder and a five-time cancer survivor that has always been guiding me to live every day as if it were my last. She taught me how to give back to the community and enhance people's lives. I could not have started Luminaire without her.



Photo by John Madere

3. Massimo Vignelli

I first met Massimo Vignelli in October 1987. We had invited him to give a design lecture at Luminaire. Massimo was a great mentor to me, helping shape my eye to see graphics in a particular way. Over the years, our friendship grew stronger until he passed away five years ago.



Photo by Sam Frost

4. Yohji Yamamoto

For years I've repeatedly faced curious eyes about my choice of garments and most of the time the answer is the designs of Yohji Yamamoto. His clothes are my second skin and his aesthetics have become my wardrobe staples.



Photo by Nobuyoshi Araki

5. Church of Light

I first met [Tadao Ando](#) in his office in Osaka, 22 years ago. What was meant to be a 30 minute meeting turned into almost two hours, he was so kind to give us his design assistant Kulapat Yantrasast to show us the Church of Light, his private residence. We spent the whole day there. Approaching the Church of light was a life-altering experience. Feeling that space was an adventure that I will never forget. This feeling has never left me, and every building I've visited by world-renowned architects all over the world has never surpassed it. It taught me so much about proportions, authentic material sensibility, and the realization of design as a third skin.

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Kelly Beall is a contributing writer to Design Milk. The Pittsburgh-based graphic designer and writer has had a deep love of art and design for as long as she can remember, and enjoys sharing her finds with others at [designcrushblog.com](#). When undistracted by great art and design, she can be found making a mess in the kitchen, hanging out in dive bars, or on the couch with her five pets.

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