

SPOON-PERFECT!

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It's the same every morning: barely awake, my hand rummages through the container of mini tea spoons to grab one for my wake-up tea or coffee, until... it finds the “*right kind*” of the two different designs which happen to be in there.



This has been going on long enough to become a habit, before I became aware of what I've been doing. I don't remember fretting over purchasing the “*right kind*” of spoon, and after all, they're all thrown in there together. But, I only lift the “*right kind*” out of there, the one on the left in the picture. In this case, a minute difference in design seems to make all the difference for my hand. What makes it feel “*right*”, and why does it matter? Both spoons function in exactly the same way, and do the job well. Yet, my preference is strong, and feels related to how the spoon functions, as well as how it looks.

My personal anecdote is echoed in the experiences of countless other people, no doubt, including you. Here's one told by Paul Goldberger, the long-time architecture critic of the New York Times.

In 1949, the Barcelona chair, pictured here, “... was a relatively unknown item when Philip Johnson, the architect installed them in his Glass House in Connecticut. Guests who liked



*the chairs visually would exclaim over their beauty... and sit down and say something like 'My, it's not only good-looking but comfortable too'. But guests who didn't like the way the chairs looked, would make a derogatory comment or two, and upon sitting down would invariably sneer, 'And these chairs aren't even comfortable, either.' Goldberger continues, "...every good object... speaks of a combination of beauty and utility." **

Indeed, we acknowledge that good design should look good and function well. Yet, we're also likely to trivialize esthetics as a superficial or unessential quality. If the above examples and the ones of your own experience reveal anything, it's this: **seeing is thinking!** When we evaluate the look of an object, we are not being shallow about it. On the contrary, we are thinking about it in a profound way: by drawing upon our conscious and unconscious mind. That is the power of our visual sense. We have been relying on it for our survival and success, from the moment we arrived on this earth, and certainly long before we developed a sufficient capacity for reasoning - critical thinking.

My morning tea or coffee ritual feels compromised if I use the spoon that looks mediocre. Philip Johnson's guests had to like the look of the chair to feel comfortable sitting in it. So, why do we connect how something looks with how it functions?

I'm convinced that seeing draws from depths of our mind that reasoning alone doesn't. Out of those depths, one of our strongest desires, perfection, emerges. We don't know why our sense of perfection is so powerful, but our consciousness - capacity to think and feel - is telling us that it is. Perhaps, because we carry a spec of the order/perfection of the cosmos in our genes, or, perhaps, it is instilled by culture in us. I think it is wise that we trust our sense of sight, as we continue trying to understand how it works.

* 1978 Article, *The Design Fallacy*, from the book, *On The Rise*, Paul Goldberger, Penguin Books, 1985.