

The Daily Transcript

THE WORLD OF ROGOV

Gary Shaw. June 25, 1990

Vladimir Rogov Molds A Touch Into The Tech

World-Class Industrial Designer Finds A Home That Lacked His Caliber

Leonardo da Vinci "has used all his acquired science of linear and aerial perspective to create an almost complete illusion to the eye, but an illusion that has in it nothing trivial."

---From a critic of "The Last Supper"

"As a day well spent gives joyful sleep, so does a life well spent, give joyful death."

---Leonardo

"Excellent!"

---Bill and Ted

Before one writes about Vladimir Rogov, it helps to read a good biography about Leonardo and watch a bad movie called "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure," lest the modern journalist forget what a mere mortal could do 500 years ago or what George Carlin could pull off in the future.

Given this perspective, one should not be overly impressed that Vladimir Rogov, lead singer for ARKITEX, Opened for the B-52's and Talking Heads in 1980.

And one shouldn't be too impressed that Vladimir Rogov, a San Diegan since 1984, was ranked among the best industrial designers in the U.S. last year. Had Leonardo been around, he may not have out-designed Vladimir who maintains offices of ROGOV Design in San Diego. Leonardo doesn't.

Born to Russian parents along the West German border three years after the close of World War II, Vladimir Rogov learned early how to make do. Russians were not loved in Germany.

Garbage Products

"There wasn't any food, any toys, any clothes," he recalls.

"I would just make things. My first experience with products was going down to the garbage dump.

"It was a beautiful sunny day, and there was a pond at the bottom of the dump. And I saw all this garbage thrown out by the Germans, flashlights, bicycle wheels, a razor. We didn't have those things. They looked like cool products. I would also get a piece of wood and whittle. I made a crossbow or a wooden knife. Pretty soon I was making a go-cart and took it home.

"We had a one-room place with seven kids and if you put a go-cart in that, there was not room to close the door. My mother threw it out. "I built another one the following day, based on what I learned the day before. She threw it out again. I started getting pretty good at building these things."

At age 11, Rogov got a scholarship that took him to England, where he

eventually studied mechanical engineering at a technical college and later three-dimensional design at the Guilford School of Art. His dream of owning a guitar was fulfilled at age 15 when he went to a music store, traced on paper the design of a guitar he liked, bought a piece of wood and began shaping it.

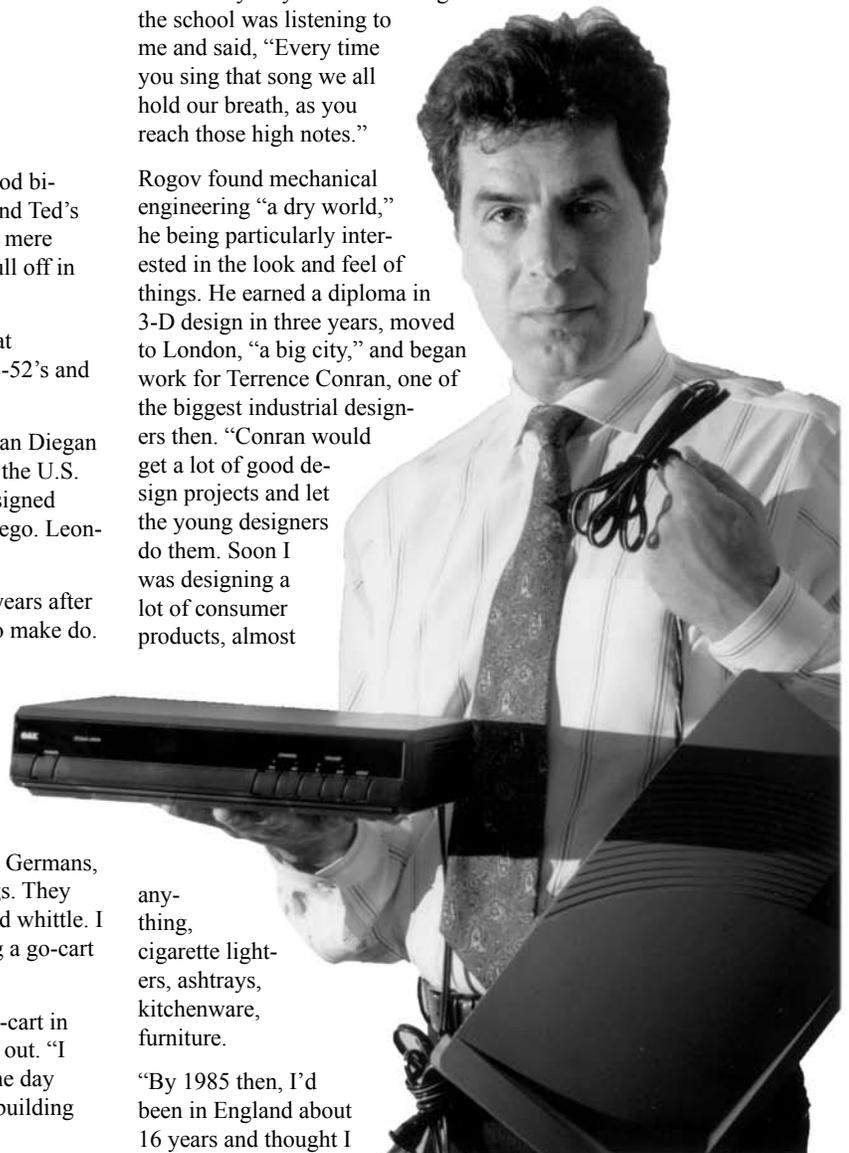
Impressing The Girls

"A couple of month or so later, I plugged it in and it worked! I still remember the first song I played on the guitar was 'In Dreams' by Roy Orbison. This girl at the school was listening to me and said, "Every time you sing that song we all hold our breath, as you reach those high notes."

Rogov found mechanical engineering "a dry world," he being particularly interested in the look and feel of things. He earned a diploma in 3-D design in three years, moved to London, "a big city," and began work for Terrence Conran, one of the biggest industrial designers then. "Conran would get a lot of good design projects and let the young designers do them. Soon I was designing a lot of consumer products, almost

anything, cigarette lighters, ashtrays, kitchenware, furniture.

"By 1985 then, I'd been in England about 16 years and thought I was English. I wanted



to see more of the world. If you're in England, you can develop a tight view of the world. I thought of going to Italy and become a sort of esoteric Italian designer and speak a about the "quality of life", you know what I mean?

"Or I could go to the "New World" - North America. I had some friends in Canada and they said, "Why don't you come?" I said, "Fine."

Working Hard, Feeling Used

And so he wound up in Toronto teaching and working for Kuypers Adamson & Norton, a good design firm, "but although I was still very young I felt that I was doing all the teaching there. About design anyway. The products were good.

With KAN he designed the interior and seating for the Aston Martin Lagonda, bathroom vanity products for Boeing Canada, coolers for Coleman Co., self-serve gas stations for Exxon, recreation trailers for Monarch, furniture for Krug and so on.

Being a Musician

As the 1970s merged into the '80's, Rogov spent time with music, though he worked on projects well into the '80's - more coolers for Canadian Coleman, Furniture for Croydon and Krug, as well as interior designs like beauty Salons.



His performance high point was probably Aug. 23, 1980, at the Heat Wave concert in Toronto, featuring the B-52's, Talking Heads, the Pretenders, Elvis Costello, Rockpile, and a local opening group, ARK I TEX, new wave punks with lead singer and guitarist Vladymir Rogov in a blue sweat suit, the rest of the band in gray sweat suits.

And they sang:

"I gotta job at the computer factory.

"Exactly what I do has never bothered me.

"I feel at home with my computerized toys.

"Don't need to get around,

"Nor do the rest of the boys.

"This ain't no hick town."

Rogov wrote the music and the lyrics, but don't hold that against him.

Impressing Stevie Wonder

By the spring of 1983, ARKITEX had put out a record, about the same time Rogov hit a musical design high point: His electronic synthesizer had won a Canadian national design award. "Stevie Wonder put his hands on (the synthesizer) and said, 'Man, I sure love the looks of this,'"

Rogov remembers.

Sick of the rain and cold of Toronto, Rogov looked for a warm climate, a laboratory with plenty of commerce. He moved to San Diego in 1984 and discovered "absolutely nothing we were used to in terms of a city structure, or a structure of any kind. There was just a beach and a few spotted suburbs. After three months, we stopped going to the beach."

A Specialist

"I like being a San Diego based designer. Since arriving in San Diego and founding Rogov Associates and ROGOV Corp., he has designed interactive video terminal for Advanced Touch Systems, an autopilot control for Benmar Marine Electronics, packaging and product design for Gen-Probe, a control panel and marine radio for Hull Electronics, a desktop acupuncture device and recharge unit for Intelligent Medical Systems, a portable computer for Kaypro Corp. (that they unwisely never used), a

joy-

stick input system for

Kraft Systems, a portable toxicity

analyzer for Microbics Corp., a control panel study

for Monitor Technologies, medical diagnostic packaging and graphics

for Nichols Institute Diagnostics, cable TV converter box for Oak Com-

munications, a portable spectrum analyzer for Scientific-Atlanta, and

surgical instruments for Vitalmetrics.

Attention To Packaging

ROGOV team has performed studies and recommendations for American Healthcare Systems, Eastman Kodak, RTE Deltec and Syva Co.

In the case of Kaypro, the ROGOV design called for molded plasticsomething Kaypro were against, and they lost their competitive edge. Often, a company may have a product that works fine, but looks dated. That was the case with Oak's Sigma decoder. While technical improvements had been incorporated, "the market feedback we've been getting recently told us it was time to pay some attention to the package," said Tony Wechselberg, an Oak senior vice president.

Benmar Marine's autopilot looked old-fashioned. ROGOV's redesigned Compu-Course 2000 autopilot became sleek, sexy and soft, and was entered into last year's Industrial Designers Society's Industrial Design Excellence Awards, a national competition. So were 370 other products entered. The ROGOV entry came in second place.

“came to me and said, ‘We’re the oldest company in the business. We’ve got the state of the art technology, but we’re not being perceived that way by the consumer. We have stringent competition from the English, Norwegians and the Japanese, of course.’”

Similar Elements

“So I looked at their product. Apart from some of their components, the other elements were what everyone else uses. It’s plastic, it’s molded, it was not a bad quality molding. But as a whole, it communicated something that’s old and clunky, not something that would hold a finely tuned course. Now compare it to this appearance.” And he holds up a picture of his refined design. Ahhhhh.

“I would like to design trains. What people need is to have the things around them brought in line with how they feel about themselves and feel about the world. Style reflects our world in progress. There are things like trains and airplanes and furniture that are looking very mundane. I’m tired of seeing that same train. I’m tired of seeing that same furniture. There are new materials and better ways of expressing how we feel and what we need. There are more economical ways too.

“Major players utilize a technology shared by all. A car is a package design that utilizes technology shared by all automotive manufacturers. It’s the way it is packaged that distinguishes a Ford from Toyota, or even more cunning, an Infinity from a Nissan. The same goes for high-tech electronics. I’ve

seen enough ICs and PC boards to see that the value is the interface between the technology and people’s needs. Zillions of well and enthusiastic product developers have disappeared because they thought that a box is just a box. Like it or not the box is the product.

The design of the

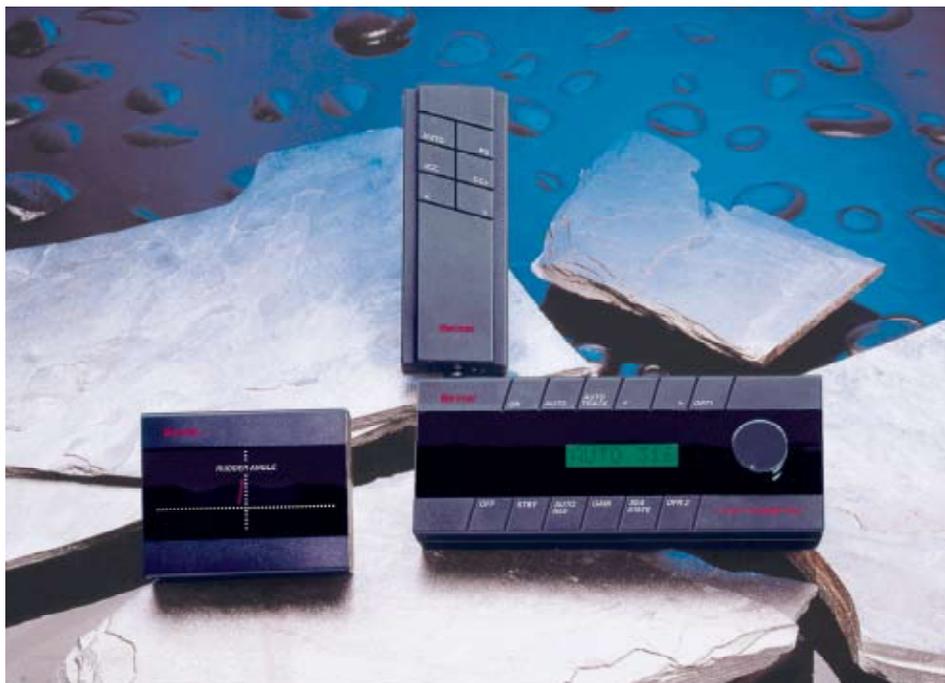
product must provide an uninterrupted corridor. The corridor between the technology and the emotional needs of people.

Corridor Investing

“What’s so funny is that foreign manufacturers understand this so well. If you look at a Japanese product and their heavy investment in tool-

ing, it’s heavily invested in the corridor between the technology and the people: how it’s perceived, the color, how it’s held in the hand, and what it represents to somebody.

The ROGOV team is working on eight or nine projects now in their new



3,000-square-foot offices on Sorrento Mesa, equipped with Macintosh computers capable of everything from word processing to engineering design.

Co-founder, Glenda Rogov brings a soft analytical touch, trained at McGill University. “She brings her analytical skills to user ergonomics issues.”

Imbuing Emotion

Despite the computers and market analyses, some of Rogov’s techniques are instinctive. “I design directly in 3-D. I start carving. It’s back to the whittling. Something beautiful comes first from personal expres-

sion. Of course there are product definitions. But the drama, the context, desire and expression is a very personal medium.”

Vladimir Rogov has a vision for San Diego. He wants to help establish a three-dimensional industrial design program at UCSD. “Can San Diego become to industrial design what San Jose is to the chip, or what Greenwich Village is to art?”

Why not?” he muses. “You can’t call yourself a leading city without a first class art college. The nearest design college is Pasadena or Newport Beach.

“My hardest problem is to import hired help. It’s hard to find help with any great cultural depth or relevant experience, this kind of work requires tolerance, understanding and empathy for other ways.

“The future of a lot of local electronics product companies is going to be in how they utilize their technology in solving problems. Design is not an after-thought.

“That requires a different kind of designer. It also requires a different kind of engineer. These are whole different challenges.”

