

# SUSTAINABLE IS GOOD

lifestyle & design



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## Fragility vs. Utility ~ Less Packaging is more acceptable to consumers

BY JACKIE DeLISE

Packaging is a utilitarian necessity. The egg is a delicate and fragile item.

Then how can an egg be safely and economically packaged in a light weight Styrofoam, or recycled paper board carton, designed to carry/transport, store and protect the "product"?

Sturdy objects such as a kitchen faucet, shower head or stapler for example, are packaged in thick, hard, plastic shells that generally take a knife or scissors and too much time and effort to open! To some degree, the weight of the product should not dictate the heft and weight of the package.



I can understand that type of packaging for a kitchen knife, or object that can potentially be harmful to the consumer unless properly handled, but many of today's products are over packaged in this era of 'less is more' and 'eco-friendly'.

Designers need to explore and introduce other forms of packaging, and present to their clients the concept of "non-traditional" as an approach, in an effort to challenge common associations between product and packaging.

Recently, designers have tried to respond to the perception that plastic is environmentally unfriendly. But, the fact is that decreasing the amount of material in packaging, is usually more important than the composition of the package, to get the most environmentally friendly form of packaging.

### LESS IS TRULY MORE

At the Art Center College of Design in California, students take courses in "Unpackaging" - learning to simplify and use more recycled materials.

Consumers do not want a lot of excess waste in packaging, and often times will avoid buying products that they think are over-packaged ~ not only for the obvious waste of materials and negative impact on our environment ~ but also because of the perceived notion that they are paying a premium for the additional packaging, above and beyond what the product is worth.

Typically, consumers make clear distinctions between product and packaging ~ except for the case of a banana, where the product is the packaging and visa versa ~ and so unobtrusive that it is not even noticed.

Today, marketers are looking for ways to more effectively understand the consumer psyche and experience with their brand.

They are employing state-of-the art neuro-science, semiotics (study of signs) and facial coding (for example), to identify "hidden emotional triggers" ~ that through design ~ will more accurately connect the customer with the brand at retail.

But now there is another key challenge consider: how to successfully market eco-friendly products, that are designed with minimal yet appropriate packaging, to protect and promote the brand.

And, since aesthetics are a primary consideration in our style conscious society, there is a fine line when marketing these "green" products in more eco-savvy wrappings. They have to still look great to sell!

So, remember the power of the package and all it's glory in less truly being more!

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