

I.D. Magazine
Outtakes
February 2002

RKS Design, a product design firm in Thousand Oaks, Calif., occasionally taps into young design genius in a three-day "Life in the Fast Lane" workshop. In a recent workshop, the RKS team and student designers came up with a novel concept for the firm's latest product, the Urban Griller. I.D. spoke with president/CEO Ravi Sawhney to gain insight into the firm's idea-generation process.

Where does the concept process start for your team at RKS?

Most of the concept process here at RKS starts with product and user definition, which we accomplish through the use of something we call a Psycho-Aesthetic Map, trend boards and competitive bench marking and analysis, in addition to role-playing by the team in order to develop a first-person perspective of the user/consumer. We also take the product and consumer through a "day in the life" to uncover key opportunities and insights. Once these stages are accomplished, we use team-brainstorming sessions, consisting of six to 10 designers working in bursts of two to three hours at a time for multiple days in high-security war rooms. The rooms are devoid of phones but fully stocked with music, soft drinks, candy, etc; they're designed to be Spartan and reminiscent of the rooms in design school.

How does the Psycho-Aesthetic ideology come into play when brainstorming new ideas for products?

Our Psycho-Aesthetic methodology, whereby a product's design creates a promise of physical and emotional benefit to the user and then delivers on those promises, guides us to address the key attributes the consumer desires. We use our findings, combined with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and key understandings of how our minds process stimuli, to design products that exceed customer expectations. We then script out a design experience that parallels the "hero's journey," in which the consumer is the hero and the product has become a mentor, leading to a positive brand experience.

What were the main challenges in concepting the design of the Urban Griller?

The main challenge we faced was finding an innovative way to change the current design and usage paradigm associated with portable hibachi cooking. Once we started the process and shared our personal experiences with outside grilling, we found that two of the six students had no such experience. Through role-playing day-in-the-life scenarios that helped develop a first-person perspective, we all became consumers/users of the potential design. The resulting Urban Griller breaks free from traditional, portable barbecues, offering consumers a refined appearance and a better way to carry, use and store the grill.