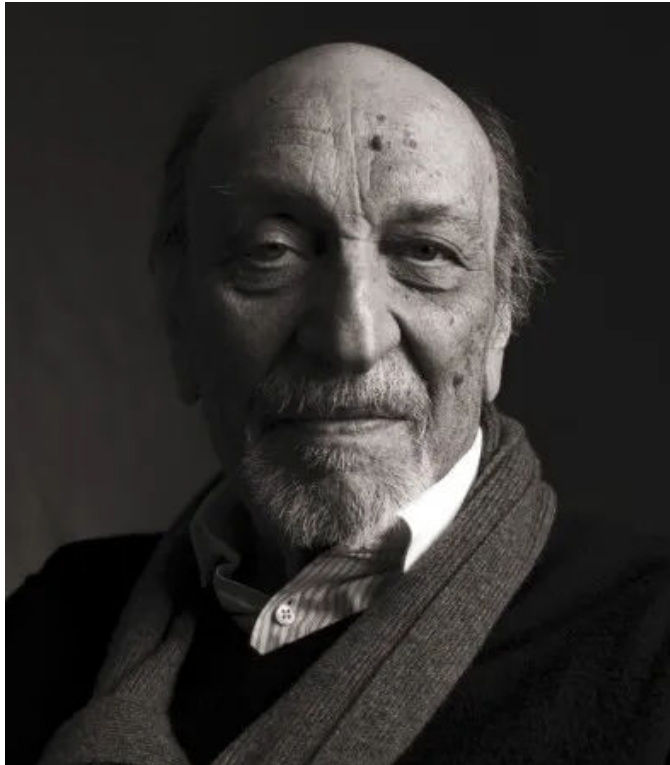


Milton Glaser on Massimo Vignelli

by **PrintMag**

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Editor's Note: When we were working on PRINT's 75th anniversary issue in 2015, I approached Milton Glaser to kick off a new column—"Love Letters," in which one designer riffed on another in epistolary form. Glaser responded with a piece about Massimo Vignelli, who had recently died. Though short, for some reason it remains one of my favorite articles that ran in print PRINT. As fate would have it, while Glaser was penning the piece, Dan Bates of Milton Glaser Inc. discovered a sealed envelope wedged between his predecessor's desk and file cabinet. The envelope read, simply, "Happy Birthday, Massimo." Inside, Bates found the illustration that appears at the end of this piece.



Michael Somoroff

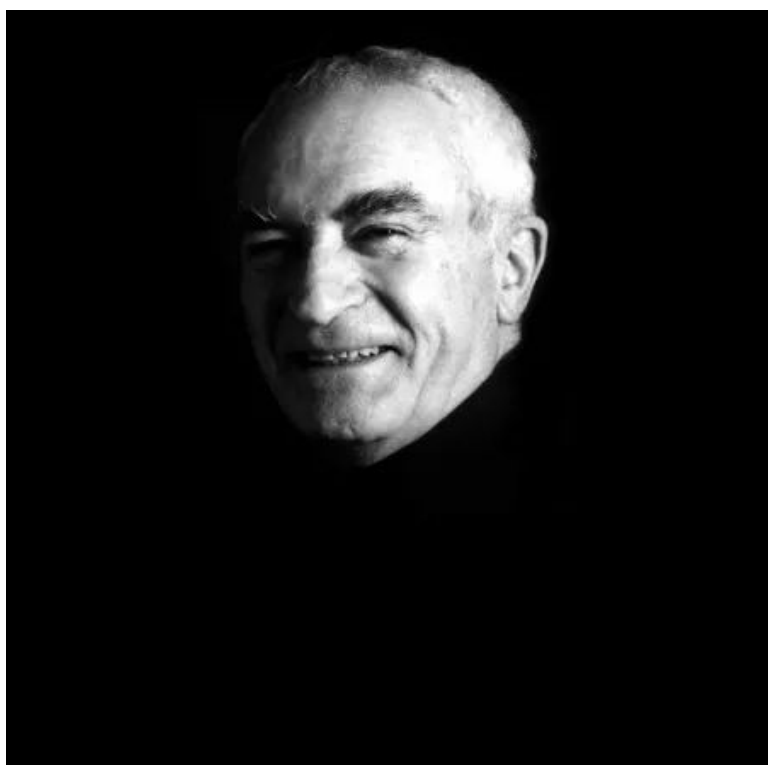
by **Milton Glaser**

is, as one might suspect, an assembly of large, austere and beautifully arranged rooms. Since I myself am quite old, I've had a series of these final conversations in recent years. The need for closure is never more obvious at any other time. Massimo greeted me from behind his desk. Never heavy, he had lost some weight, seemed paler, but still erect and focused. His sweet smile remained undiminished. I sat down and we grasped hands.

"I wanted to thank you for this trip we've made together," Massimo said, and smiled.

For over half a century, Massimo and his equally brilliant wife, Lella, have been defining what quality can be in the world of design. If our biology shapes us, then the Vignellis' deep Italian roots reveal their debt to Borromini, Piero della Francesca and other geniuses of the Renaissance. How else could one understand the lucid clarity and conviction that they've produced in their work?

Massimo's graphic work, his identity systems, posters, typography, are always reductive and have a sense of inevitability that comes out of the scrupulous, formal relationship of every component. It almost always seems to be inevitable, the characteristic of work of a high order in the dialectic between form and content. Massimo usually seems to be most comfortable with the objectives of craft and beauty. When it comes to a narrative, he seems less engaged. Everything about Massimo has always struck me as being made of the same essential cloth: his haircut, his clothes (black), the rhythm of his conversation and, of course, the classic elegance of the work itself.



Massimo institutionalized and articulated the tenants of Modernism as well as any other designer in the world: Like all ideas about style—yes, in addition to other, accompanying ideas, Modernism is also a style—the profession and the world had begun to move in other directions. Ornamentalism had returned, along with endless self-indulgent and frequently witless typographic exercises.

We all know things change, but in recent years Massimo seemed unprepared for the return of graphic expressionism—these changes that struck him as vulgar and ill-informed. His beliefs remained constant. His work remained impeccable.

