

Professor Sebastian Conran, Designer, Design Advocate and ACID Ambassador

ACID's 25th Anniversary Celebrations at Furniture Makers' Hall

"We all have ideas and admittedly some of mine are better than others, and some are so good that we are willing to invest significant time and resources into them to make them happen.

Ideas, that meet an unknown unmet need, resolve a known problem, are aesthetically unique or just a better mousetrap can often evolve into successful designs that with significant amounts of personal resource and intellectual effort and make it onto the market. My father used to say to me that "developing product for sale was 5% inspiration and 95% perspiration or hard work".

It is successful designs, particularly if they are outstanding and commercially viable that are the ones most likely to be stolen particularly if they prove profitable.

There are laws in place intended prevent blatant copying to take place, but they are often expensive and cumbersome to enact. Also, if the copyist is well funded, there can be huge personal risk to for a small entity to take them to court to gain compensation. I had one client who had to remortgage her house to win such a claim.

But often design is not a binary black or white activity, it is much more nuanced. What is theft and what is inspiration? As Isaac Newton once said 'we stand on the shoulders of giants' by using the ideas of others to make intellectual progress.

Designers, engineers, and artists are all influenced by each other and often have similar ideas at the same time as we are influenced by the zeitgeist. This often means that similar solutions can come from different people in different places at the same time - this is clearly not theft, but coincidence and happens quite often.

We all operate in what is essentially a global market and historically about 75% of my creative output has been for overseas clients, therefore international registration of designs and patents needs to be straightforward and inexpensive to archive and browse in order to establish true ownership of a design.

Blatant copying is clearly theft and should be a criminal matter, however 'lifting' of ideas, like a riff from a piece of music, needs a different but simpler arbitration approach that keeps legal costs to a minimum and rewards the original creator."