

RETRO IN SIX

Retro Design in Hi-Fi Audio and Televisions



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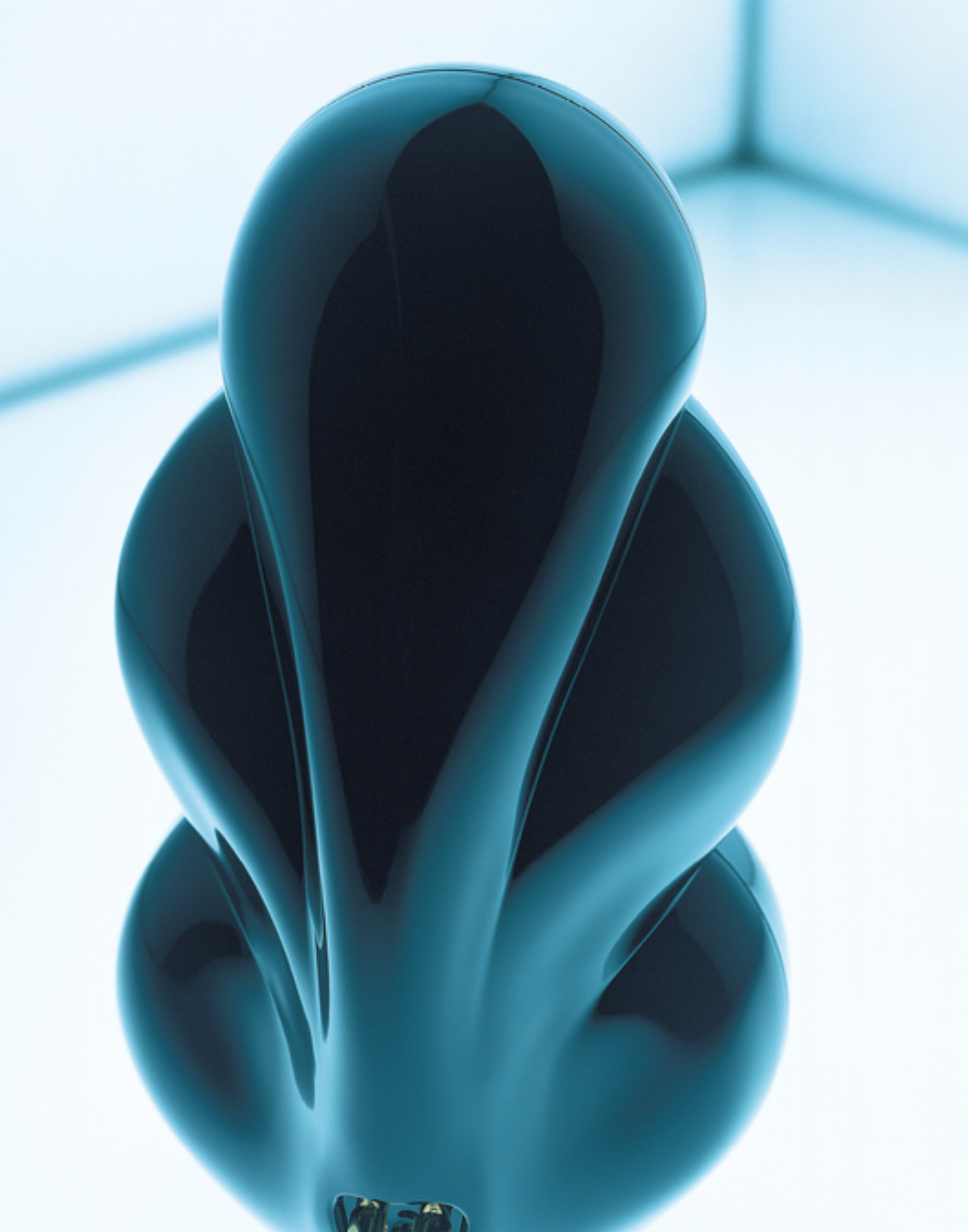


Fig. 1. Original marketing material for the PodSpeakers MiniPod, 1998.
Photo: [futureshapeofsound.com/#blue-room-loudspeakers-relaunched](https://www.futureshapeofsound.com/#blue-room-loudspeakers-relaunched).

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Fig. 2. Still of a film about the new Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant.
Photo: youtu.be/j2zRkK4imql.

Introduction

Last year, when I stepped into a store for secondhand vintage chairs, lamps, couches and desks something caught my eye. Next to the counter was a vintage record player. It stood on four long legs, was bright red and it played a record of Billie Holiday. I was impressed, it looked beautiful. I remember thinking how shockingly new it seemed for such an old turntable. That was because it was new, brand new. When the shop owner opened the lid, I saw *Crosley* written on the inside. While she enthusiastically explained that it had built-in speakers and you could connect a laptop to it, I started to think about retro design in modern electronics. I completely took this new Crosley record player for one that was at least fifty years old, like much of the furniture that was in this store.

I already knew Crosley brand from seeing their products in magazines and stores. I was also aware of their competitors: other brands that design retro turntables and radios. But more and more, retro and vintage styled products have started to become available more and more, in all industries. The Volkswagen New Beetle has been around since 1998 and the Fiat 500 is a popular car. Television shows like AMC's *Mad Men* (2007-2015) and more recently HBO's *Vinyl* (2016) show us designs and products from the decades after World War II. According to Adrian Franklin's *A Guide to the Mid-20th Century Design Revival* there has been a resurging interest in original mid-century lamps, chairs, cabinets and other furniture.¹ And while those original products fetch high prices on the secondhand market, many of these designs are still manufactured today by companies like Knoll and Vitra. Even the art world uses its own history to make itself relevant. First of all, every year there are multiple big retrospectives in large museums, showing masterpieces by famous artists alongside new work of contemporary artists inspired by these old masters. Secondly, older exhibitions are reprised to be current again. The 2013 Prada Fondazione exhibition 'When Form Attitudes Become Form' was a remake of the famous exhibition in the Bern Kunsthalle by Harald Szeemann in 1969.² The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam remade their 1969 exhibition 'Op Losse Schroeven' when they reopened after a renovation in 2011.³

The trend of new retro styled products is everywhere, even in the consumer electronics market. To me, this is counterintuitive. Technology is something that progresses, technology will always be better tomorrow. One would expect that the design of this better and more advanced technology is also forward-looking. Instead, there are many new products on the consumer electronics market that look like they were designed decades ago. It is this phenomenon that I aim to analyse in this research. Retro and nostalgia are no small phenomena, they are visible in all industries. And while there has been research on the history of retro and its use in marketing and branding, there appears to be no literature on a more formal research of the style in products. In this study, I will focus on the formal design of retro hi-fi audio and television products in a historical context. I will also look at the use of retro in marketing used for these products. These devices play a large role in our daily lives and are now more advanced, more clever and more prevalent than ever. High Street retailers show us retro record players and radios, but the audio market is larger than that, there are more examples. Sales of physical music formats are growing, in spite of the popularity of streaming services.⁴ Vinyl sales are at their highest level since 1988. The number one bestselling home audio product on Amazon in the holiday season of 2016 was a *turntable*, instead of a wireless speaker or a soundbar.⁵

¹ Adrian Franklin, *Retro: a guide to the Mid-20th Century Design Revival*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013, p. 9.

² WHEN ATTITUDES BECOME FORM: BERN 1969/VENICE 2013 <fondazioneprada.org/project/when-attitudes-become-form/?lang=en> (May 23, 2016).

³ Stedelijk museum presents: recollections – op losse schroeven <stedelijk.nl/en/press-releases/stedelijk-museum-presents-recollections--op-losse-schroeven> (May 23, 2016).

⁴ Joshua P. Friedlander, *News and Notes on 2015 RIAA Shipment and Revenue Statistics in* <riaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RIAA-2015-Year-End-shipments-memo.pdf> (May 23, 2016).

⁵ Amazon Celebrates a Record-Setting Holiday for Prime, Amazon Original Series and Amazon Devices <phoenix.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=2125057> (May 23, 2016).

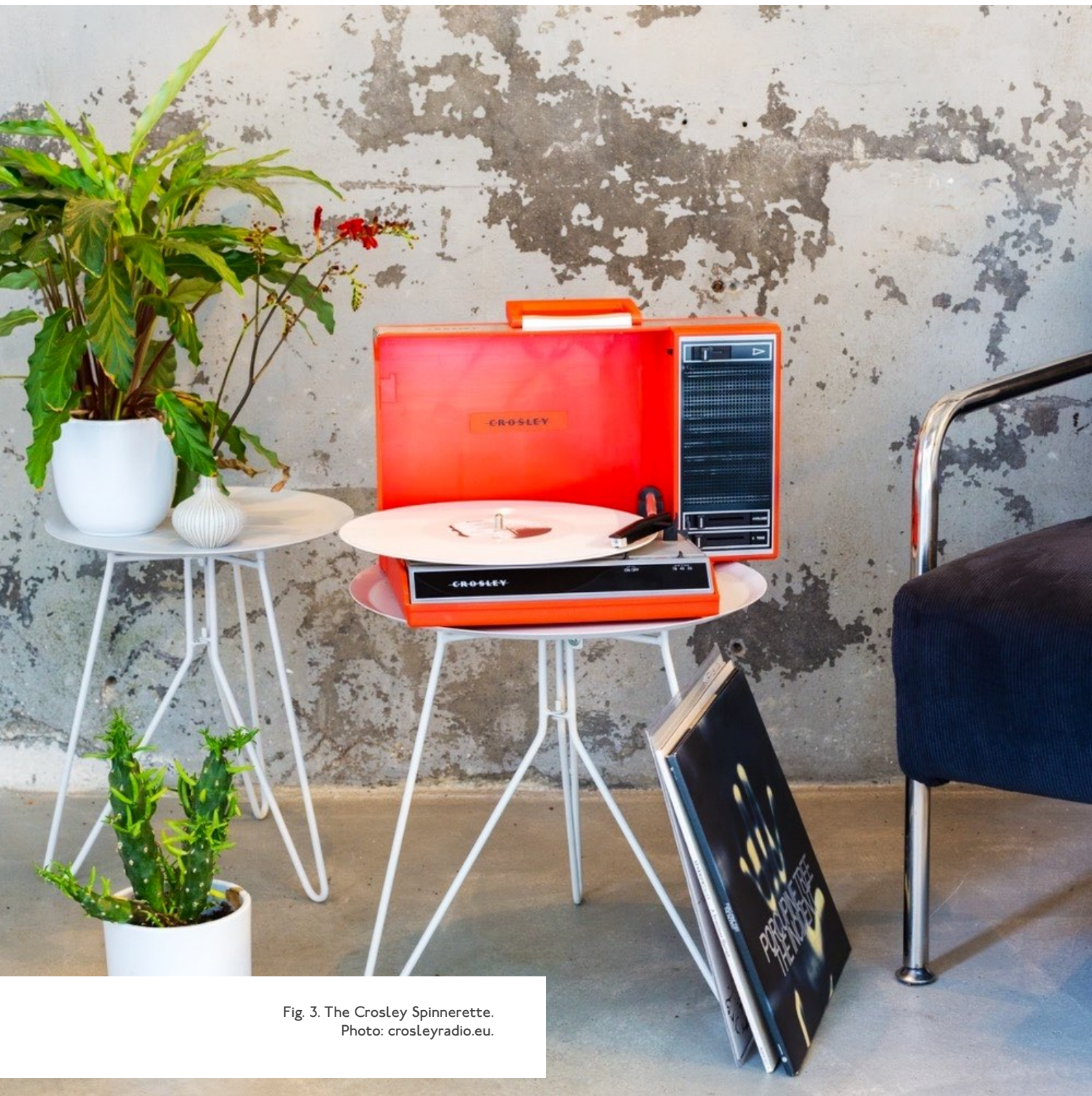


Fig. 3. The Crosley Spinnerette.
Photo: crosleyradio.eu.

Vintage and retro products play a significant role in my own life as well. My fascination with hi-fi audio started with a 1976 Luxman L-30 amplifier I bought secondhand (fig. 12). For two years it was the centre of my stereo system, until I bought a modern, better sounding amplifier. The Luxman looks beautiful though, so now I have it proudly displayed on a shelf. My turntable is a Thorens TD-166, introduced in 1975 (fig. 23). To make it sound as good as a modern turntable, I upgraded the plinth, rewired the tonearm wire and fitted a heavier platter. In my own system, I enjoy the looks of classic 1970s hi-fi, but sound quality is more important. Working in a hi-fi store opened my eyes to modern products. I also discovered that those modern products really do sound better, despite the fierce pride many people have for their own older systems. “My Brand X amplifier from 1975 was top of the line and it still sounds amazing”, is a common phrase. However, upon hearing a modern amplifier and speakers, these people would usually replace their old system. That shows that for many performance and functions trump nostalgia.

This is why I replaced my Luxman and why I improved my turntable. I value modern-day performance, although in many ways I choose old-fashioned technology for my music. I like using large analogue amplifiers where digital devices are smaller and have more features. I prefer to listen to vinyl, rather than digital files or CDs. That is because I think LPs sound much better. On top of that, I enjoy having physical copies of my favourite music. I love the look and the feel of vintage products, but in the end I choose the products that offer me the best balance between looks and performance. My own love for retro has little to do with nostalgia. It hardly can have, because I am too young to have actual memories of my 1970s turntable. So while my own memory plays no part, the nostalgia of others does. My father told me he had always wanted a Luxman L-30, so I thought that would be good starting point for my own hi-fi adventure. When I recently wanted to buy an analog camera, nearly every article I read mentioned the first Leica cameras. Not only because they are design icons, but also because they are technological marvels and still perform beautifully today. The same applies to the products in the case studies: a lot of people who will purchase these might not feel nostalgic, but that does not stop them from wanting these products.

While this research is not meant to find a definite reason as to why companies design and sell retro designed products, I will be able to give possible explanations. The designs used and the marketing behind the products can shed light on ways companies use retro design. My research question is thus:

How does retro design exist in audio equipment and televisions and how did that start?

To answer this question I will start with an overview of the existing literature on retro in design and art history and in academic marketing and branding literature. Then I will select several contemporary products from six different brands that serve as case studies for the retro trend in audio equipment and televisions. These are the Bang and Olufsen BeoVision Avant television and the Samsung SERIF television, the IFI Stereo 50 amplifier and speakers and the Podspeakers MiniPod speakers and the Crosley turntables and the Philips OTT2000 turntable. In the following chapter, I will explain why I chose these products. After analysing the case studies, there is a small chapter on the retro design trend in the camera market, in kitchen appliances and some examples from the rest of the high-end audio industry. This serves as illustration for the larger retro trend. After the conclusion I will discuss further research.

What is retro and what is retro design?

Literature

Historically, retro has nearly always been a force in art and design. The nineteenth century saw an enormous interest in designs and styles from the past. Far from blatantly copying these, artists and designers of the time sought to learn from them and use them to create forward-looking modern art. Studying the patterns of the past resulted in a clear view of the future, a better understanding of where the world and therefore art was going, as Mienke Simon Thomas writes in *De Leer van Het Ornament*.⁶ Architecture in a Medieval, Classical or Egyptian style allowed people to showcase the (supposed) ideologies that these historical periods had. These neo-styles were also used for commercial products and were popular at the time.

In the academic discussion of retro, Elizabeth Guffey, editor of *Design & Culture*, played a pioneering role. She wrote *Retro, Culture Of Revival* in 2006, in which she explores the history and social role of retro. She placed the beginning of the style in 1966, when the Victoria and Albert Museum held an exhibition on prints of Aubrey Beardsley (1839-1909). Against all expectations, the exhibition was immensely popular and it started a revival of Art Nouveau across Europe. The now iconic design style of Psychedelica in the 1960s was greatly influenced by the prints of Beardsley, Guffey argues.⁷ This shift was colossal. Modernism was challenged for the first time. Suddenly, the past was open for reinterpretation. The need to move forward, to constantly create new forms and to break traditions was no longer there; it became possible, even fashionable, to create a world that was inspired by old tastes and mundane things from the past no-one thought would be the pinnacle of fashion one day. Unlike the neo-styles of the nineteenth century where people would study the past for a better future, it was now perfectly acceptable to just use our history for whatever purpose. This was liberating, a protest against established aesthetics and design.

According to Guffey, one of the important revivals in the twentieth century is the Fifties revival of the 1970s.⁸ In a climate of social decline, economic crisis and the Vietnam War the 1950s seemed innocent and carefree in comparison. Along with the pop group the Sha Na Na's and the 1972 Broadway musical *Grease* there was a large revival of the culture from the 1950s. People who had lived through that decade couldn't understand why the younger generation thought of that time as carefree. For them, the 1950s meant the Cold War, the ever-looming atomic bomb and the rebuilding after the Second World War, not some romantic idea of a time when things were simpler.⁹

In the 1980s the Punk movement used elements of Russian Constructivist design aesthetics in their graphic designs (album covers, posters, magazines etc.).¹⁰ The anti-establishment connotations of both punk music and communism in Western world were combined in these designs. Guffey explains different uses for the word 'retro'. In one 'retro' is just a synonym for old-fashioned, in another it means much the same as 'timeless' and 'classic'. She also states that "(...) the word can also serve as shorthand for a period style situated in the immediate post-war years."¹¹ Lastly, she notes that the term can also be used to describe technological obsolescence, like the first cellphones and cash registers.

Adrian Franklin wrote the article 'Consuming Design, Consuming Retro' in which he uses the word retro to describe secondhand goods originally produced between the 1950s and 1980s: "(...) the golden ages of modernism

⁶ Mienke Simon Thomas, *De Leer van het Ornament, Versieren volgens voorschrift - 1850-1930*, Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw 1996. pp. 24-25.

⁷ Elizabeth Guffey, *Retro: the culture of revival*, London: Reaction Books, 2006, p. 8.

⁸ Guffey 2006, p. 279.

⁹ Guffey 2006, p. 116.

¹⁰ Guffey 2006, p. 140.

¹¹ Guffey 2006, p. 9.

(...).¹² Franklin wrote the article in 2002 and today I believe that products from the 1990s should also be included, the decade is far away enough that those products could be retro too. Interestingly for this research, he does not mention retro-styled products: modern products that are designed to look like something from years before, like the products used in my case studies. Neither does Guffey. Much of the other literature on retro also focusses on secondhand products. Sarah Elsie Baker studied retailers and collectors of original retro furniture and products in her book *Retro Style: Class, Gender and Design in the Home*.¹³ Instead of focussing on retro from a design history perspective like Guffey and Franklin, Baker looks at the phenomenon from the perspective of its consumers and collectors. As with Guffey and Franklin, Baker acknowledges modern retro-styled objects, but does not study them.

Retro style and retro branding has, however, been studied in marketing and branding research. As far back as in 1999 Stephen Brown noticed a distinct retro trend in marketing and in products.¹⁴ In his article 'Retro-marketing: yesterday's tomorrows, today!' he explores retro-marketing. He notes the new Volkswagen Beetle that had just arrived, but also a remake of a Bush radio, an example of retro audio. According to him retro goes further back. Josiah Wedgwood's bestselling pieces were reinterpretations of classical motives and themes, Apple's 1984 ad for the MacIntosh computer was "was an evocation of the 1980s as viewed through a 1950s Cold War lens",¹⁵ Stephen Brown notes many companies use retro-marketing to show their heritage.¹⁶ He argues this is the case because nowadays all products have the same extraordinary top-notch performance and the only thing a company can use to distinguish itself from the competition is by showing it has a long history of making great products.¹⁷

Is there any difference between the perceived newness and performance of two pairs of headphones, one with a modern, contemporary look and one with a retro design? That's the question Laurence Fort-Rioche and Claire-Lise Ackermann study with a group of two hundred people in 'Consumer innovativeness, perceived innovation and attitude towards "neo-retro"-product design'.¹⁸ This research studies modern products with a newly conceived retro design, a concept that Fort-Rioche and Ackermann call *neo-retro*. Fort-Rioche and Ackermann focus on the reception of headphones that have a design that refers to 1930s Streamline Design and ones with a modern design.¹⁹ I will call this concept *Synthetic General* (see chapter 3). Other products or categories are not mentioned, so the results of the study cannot speak for every retro design. For the studied (photographs of) headphones however, people did not appear to perceive the performance as any different for the retro version than the modern one. Perceived newness however was greater for the retro styled headphones. Fort-Rioche and Ackermann argue this is because the retro design looks different from the competition, making the product stand out.²⁰

In 'Grandma's fridge is cool - The meaning of retro brander young customers' Andrea Hemetsberger, Austria Christine Kittinger-Rosanelli and Barbara Mueller show that younger people may prefer older established brands, because they can help them create a distinct identity for themselves.²¹ According to them, younger consumers are also very nostalgic, but in a different way than older people.²² Whereas older people would like to 'bring back the good old days', younger people want to give a counterpart to social developments that they don't like. The fast materialistic way of life is something young retro consumers protest against, according to this research.²³ One quote from one of the

¹² Adrian Franklin, 'Consuming Design, Consuming Retro' in Alison Anderson, Kevin Meethan and Steven Miles, *The Changing Consumer: Markets and Meanings*, Oxford: Routledge 2002. pp. 97-98.

¹³ Sarah Elsie Baker, *Retro Style: Class, Gender and Design in the Home*, London: Bloomsbury 2013.

¹⁴ Stephen Brown, 'Retro-marketing: yesterday's tomorrows, today!' in *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 17 (1999), pp. 363-376.

¹⁵ Brown 1999, p. 371.

¹⁶ Brown 1999, p. 366.

¹⁷ Brown 1999, p. 366

¹⁸ Laurence Fort-Rioche and Claire-Lise Ackermann, 'Consumer innovativeness, perceived innovation and attitude towards "neo-retro"-product design' in *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 16 (2013), pp. 495-516.

¹⁹ Fort-Rioche and Ackermann 2013, p. 502.

²⁰ Fort-Rioche and Ackermann 2013, p. 509.

²¹ Andrea Hemetsberger, Austria Christine Kittinger-Rosanelli, Barbara Mueller, "Grandma's Fridge Is Cool" – the Meaning of Retro Brands For Young Consumers, *Advances in consumer research* 38 (2012), pp. 242-248.

²² Hemetsberger et al 2012, p. 244.

²³ Hemetsberger et al 2012, p. 244.

respondents is especially interesting. She feels that she was 'born too late' and by buying and using products from, or resembling, that earlier period she can get some of the feeling of having lived in that earlier period.²⁴ This research specifically goes into the way brands profile themselves as retro. Some companies can draw from their long history and iconic designs that are still (or again) popular. Other companies just invent new retro designs, modern products with an old styling.

In Stephen Brown, Robert V. Kozinets and John F. Sherry Jr.'s 'Teaching Old Brands New Tricks: Retro Branding and the Revival of Brand Meaning', retro branding is defined as "the revival or relaunch of a product or service brand from a prior historical period, which is usually but not always updated to contemporary standards of performance, functioning, or taste"²⁵ In this article, the writers address retro-styled products, calling them "brand-new, old-fashioned offerings".²⁶ The research focusses on two retro brands: the Volkswagen New Beetle and the prequels of Star Wars, in an effort to understand how retro brands function and how people react to them. They interpret Allegory (brand story), Arcadia (idealised brand community), Aura (brand essence), and Antinomy (brand paradox), four themes coming from Walter Benjamin's writings.²⁷ Briefly summarised, Allegory studies the stories of a brand or product that consumers tell one another, together with brand history and heritage. Arcadia, a word used for paradise, is in this case used to describe the utopian sentiment of the past that brands try to use, together with modern-day technology. According to Brown et al. this Arcadia is an integral part of retromarketing's appeal.²⁸ Aura is the term used for authenticity, something that according to this research, many people search for in a brand. Lastly, Antinomy is the paradox between never slowing technological and scientific progress and the desire of people to return to simpler and less stressful times.

Donald Norman's *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things* and *The design of everyday things* provide very useful and logical guidelines for designers and designer critics on designing good products. In *Emotional Design*, he supposes that attractively designed objects will work better, because they make us feel better when we use them.²⁹ Usability faults in a very attractive product will likely go unnoticed, or we will forget about them very quickly. Because the product itself brings us in a happy state, in which our error solving capabilities provide quick solutions for any problems we encounter. In 'ugly' products, we grow irritated and anxious when something does not work and because the product does not look aesthetically pleasing, this feeling only grows stronger. The book also details why having an aesthetically pleasing designed product is necessary and why designers should not focus only on function in their designs. In relation to technology, the argument for beautifully designed and thus superbly working products is interesting. Ever progressing technology might be scary to some people; making a beautiful product possibly makes the threshold to try new technologies lower.

In this research I will analyse different retro-styled electronic products for the consumer market. The products I have chosen are all recent products, containing modern technology. This does not necessarily have to be state-of-the-art technology. While their technological capabilities are contemporary, their design and styling can be described as retro. This retro-aspect can come in different ways. While the Crosley Cruiser, discussed in Case Study 5 has a look very much based on pickups from the 1960s, the Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant (Case Study 1) has a design that is much more modern and forward-looking. The fact, however, that the Avant shares its name with its predecessor from 1995 makes the product a relevant example in this research. Sometimes products made today and those made years ago look very similar, because of their function. This is especially true for speakers and separate turntables (designed to be used with an amplifier and speakers). Their inherent technological specifications dictate a certain design and this does not immediately make them retro. While there are many speakers today that utilise many different form factors, the larger part of the market still uses rectangular boxes to house the drivers, which are cheaper to produce. While these

²⁴ Hemetsberger et al 2012, p. 245.

²⁵ Stephen Brown, Robert V. Kozinets and John F. Sherry Jr., 'Teaching Old Brands New Tricks: Retro Branding and the Revival of Brand Meaning' in *Journal of Marketing*, 67 (3) 2003. p. 20.

²⁶ Brown et al 2003. p. 20.

²⁷ Brown et al 2003. p. 21.

²⁸ Brown et al 2003. p. 21.

²⁹ Donald Norman, *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things*, Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2004, p. 47.

boxes may look somewhat like speakers made in earlier decades, generally there is no distinct connection between the designs. There are exceptions, as I will explain in Case Study 3 about the IFI LS3.5.

I have selected products that were introduced from 2000 and onwards, to make a clear distinction between these products and their inspirations from the twentieth century. These fairly recent products also have obviously different technologies than their historical counterparts, making the differences between them clear.



Fig. 4. Above: a 2014 Volkswagen Beetle.
Photo: motortrend.com.
Below: a 1971 Volkswagen Beetle.
Photo: bugbus.net.



Three different categories of retro design

Terminology

In an article written on the website *Jalopnik*, writer Jason Torchinsky defends retro cars.³⁰ He places them in three categories of retro design. Although the article was written for a popular science website, these three categories are useful in describing not only these retro-styled cars, but retro design in general. These three categories have more or less been determined earlier by Brown as *repro*, *retro* and *repro-retro*.³¹ His categories as he explains them, are tailored to marketing and branding. Torchinsky's focus on formal design makes his terminology more suitable for this research. We can then use these three categories to describe the products in the case studies. This way, we have a better understanding of retro-styling as a design language in consumer electronics and the forms it takes.

The first category is *Transitional*. Torchinsky uses this category for cars that are based on popular earlier versions by the same brand. One good example is the BWM Mini, originally produced from 1959 until 2000 by the British Motor Company. Later, BMW bought the company and introduced the New Mini in 2001, a car with modern technology but with a design based on the original by Alec Issigonis (1906-1988), albeit very loosely. Other cars that fit the same category are the Fiat 500 (originally designed in 1957, reintroduced in 2007) and the Volkswagen New Beetle (originally designed 1938, reintroduced in 1998) (fig. 4). According to Torchinsky, the design of these new cars uses the same language as the original design once did, the look and feel of the car is kept as much as possible. Key details, like mirrors, lights and grilles are given a modern update. The idea of this redesign is to give a classic design new life, with a contemporary engine, contemporary driving and handling and a level of comfort and eco-friendliness that is up to today's standards. Torchinsky notes that "In general, the design vocabulary for these vehicles is modern, and the overall form is the throwback."³² It is important to note that these designs almost always go back to earlier models of the brand. An interesting point can be made that these cars are only retro by virtue of their names or marketing narratives and not necessarily because of how much they actually look like their historical counterparts. For the purpose of this research, I consider both the figurative and literal retro version of *transitional* equally valid, although definitely not the *same*.

Synthetic General is Torchinsky's second category, in which he fits cars that do not have a specific older car that they are based on, but instead are based on a general idea of what a car from the past would look like. Chrysler PT Cruiser or the Chevrolet HHR are good examples. They have the notion of older cars, but there is no historical precedence for their design. Smaller details, such as mirrors, buttons and bumpers, are made in modern style.

The third category is what Torchinsky calls *Synthetic Comprehensive*. Here, the cars are still based on an idea of older cars, rather than on a specific model. The difference with *Synthetic General* is that even the smaller parts are translated into a retro design. In the US and Europe, these cars aren't common, but the Japanese brand Nissan made two of these designs in 1989: the *Pao* and the *Figaro*.³³ Another Japanese company, Mitsuoka, has made this style of design their trademark, they only make *synthetic comprehensive* retro cars.³⁴ The designs in this category do not have any specific historical precedence, but do have a retro design that includes key details such as mirrors, headlights, buttons and windows styling.

These three categories of retro car designs do leave out some interesting cars. The Porsche 911, for instance, was introduced in 1963 and the general design of the car has not changed since that time (fig. 5). It has had however

³⁰ Jason Torchinsky, In Defense Of Retro Design <jalopnik.com/in-defense-of-retro-design-477559788> (April 3, 2016).

³¹ Brown 1999, p. 365.

³² Jason Torchinsky, In Defense Of Retro Design <jalopnik.com/in-defense-of-retro-design-477559788> (April 3, 2016).

³³ Jason Torchinsky, In Defense Of Retro Design <jalopnik.com/in-defense-of-retro-design-477559788> (April 3, 2016).

³⁴ Models Line-up - Mitsuoka Motor <mitsuoka-motor.com/global/lineup/> (April 3, 2016).



Fig. 5. Above: a 2010 Porsche 911 Turbo.
Photo: topspeed.com.
Below: a Singer Porsche 911.
Photo: singervehicledesign.com.



multiple reiterations, updating the technological side of the car. The look of the car has retained its very famous and recognisable form in these updates, although changes have been made to the design to make the Porsche 911 a truly contemporary car. I do not think this car falls under any of Torchinsky's three categories, because the current Porsche 911 was designed from a different philosophy than retro cars. Porsche never set out to reintroduce the 911, they just evolved the car over the decades.³⁵ They are in such command of the design that every change could be made without upsetting the original 911 body too much, even though today's 911 is very different from the one from fifty years ago. More importantly, every iteration was made to create a better performing car. The longer wheelbase and the broader back of the car today were designed to create better handling in a race, which was the original purpose of the Porsche 911. There was no need to grab a design made for the 1960s and try their hardest to fit it to today's standards and requirements. Porsche did not set out create an homage to their 1963 icon, the 911 simply evolved with the times. It is because of that starting point that a Porsche 911 is not a retro car. That doesn't mean retro 911s don't exist. *Singer Vehicle Design* creates 911 cars that look like older versions, but they use carbon fibre bodies, improved engines and modern electronics, with a 1989-1994 Porsche 911 as the basis.³⁶ In short, they created the perfect retro Porsche 911: the classic look with contemporary performance.

³⁵ For an elaborate history of the Porsche 911, see: Randy Leffingwell, *Porsche 911, 50 Years*, Minneapolis: Motorbooks 2013.

³⁶ Singer Vehicle Design | Restored. Reimagined. Reborn <singervehicledesign.com/specifications/> (February 27, 2017).



Fig. 6. The new Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant.
Photo: sectionz.nl/cms/KOUDIS14/media/img/BViAV-14BH-Lo01.jpg



Fig. 7. The original Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant.
Photo: Alastair Philip Wiper, *The Art Of Impossible: The Bang & Olufsen Story*, London: Thames & Hudson 2015. p. 64.

Six Case Studies

The Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant

The Danish company Bang & Olufsen revealed the BeoVision Avant (fig. 6) in 2014 and it received the same name as the television set from 1994. The original BeoVision Avant (fig. 7) was the first widescreen television by the company, cleverly built into a console, making it look like the TV was hanging on a wall.³⁷ It stood on a round motorised stand that would turn towards the viewer when the TV was turned on. It also featured four active loudspeakers and a built-in VCR recorder (and later a DVD recorder). It was the first time Bang and Olufsen had produced a widescreen television and by naming it after *avant-garde*, they really brought that technological feat to the forefront.

The new BeoVision Avant is a television with an Edge-LED panel with 4K resolution. The screen is made of coated glass and has an anodised aluminium back. It comes in three sizes, 55, 75 and 85 inch and its most important feature is an aluminium speaker array that slowly moves from behind the screen, expanding to the sides when the television set is turned on. When the Avant is turned off, the speakers are not visible and this graceful movement of the speakers is shown prominently in its marketing. Movement is also there in the three optional stands. There is a table stand, which raises the screen while tilting to its optimal viewing position. The floor stand slowly turns the screen towards the viewer. It has the same brushed aluminium round shape as the original Avant stand. With just one touch on the hefty solid aluminium remote control, the BeoVision Avant turns to the viewer.

The designer of the new Avant is Torsten Valeur (1966). He is now the head of David Lewis Designers, the company that designed the original Avant.³⁸ The designs of the two sets are subtly connected. The same sharp lines that delineate the speaker unit in the original are there in the new one. The most obvious similarity, however is the small black shape on top of both televisions, where the sensor for the remote is placed. Another part that the two televisions share is the way the screen is turned on. When the original *Avant* was turned on, two black screens moved away like a curtain to reveal the image on the screen. Subsequent Bang & Olufsen televisions have since used this feature, including the new Avant.

However, the reason that both televisions are called Avant is not their designs, it's the way they represent a *first* for the company. In 1994, the BeoVision Avant was Bang & Olufsen's first 16:9 widescreen television set.³⁹ The new Avant is the first 4K UltraHD television the company has designed.⁴⁰ Tue Mantoni (CEO from 2011 to 2016) also referred to the original Avant as the bestselling television in the history of the company, hoping that the new Avant would set a new standard.⁴¹ Coming from *avant-garde* that name tells us this is a pioneering design in the company's line-up. Using *Avant* implies the innovation in 2014 is just as big as it was in 1994.

Movement and the way the television blends into the environment plays a large part in its marketing. 'Precision choreography' is the title of the Design section on the Avant-website.⁴² It shows various videoclips of the television gliding in and out of position, highlighting the speakers and the different stands. But this focus on movement also serves a bigger purpose: it shows the craftsmanship and expertise that went into making the television. One of the

³⁷ Beoworld - BeoVision Avant 28 VCR <beoworld.org/prod_details.asp?pid=570> (March 25, 2016).

³⁸ David Lewis Designers <davidlewisdesigners.com/mr-david-lewis/> (March 25, 2016).

³⁹ Beocentral - BeoVision Avant 28 <beocentral.com/BeoVisionavant28> (March 25, 2016).

⁴⁰ Bang & Olufsen Press Release May 2014

⁴¹ Bang & Olufsen Press Release May 2014

⁴² Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant - Design <bang-olufsen.com/en/picture/televisions/BeoVision-avant/design> (25 maart, 2016).

headers on the website reads ‘One beautiful movement, 89 years of craft.’⁴³ It shows a short film of a man, dressed in a 20s era suit, sitting on a Wassily chair (Marcel Breuer, 1925) (fig. 2). Next to him stands the 1934 Hyperbo 5 RG Steel, an audio system Bang & Olufsen designed after Breuer’s Model B33 Chair.⁴⁴ The man looks at the BeoVision Avant and as the television moves, we see older products being used, all incorporating movement. There is the Beolit from 1939, with its moving tuner dial. The 1960 Mini 607 K Ultra is also seen and then the legendary Beogram 4000 (Jacob Jensen, 1972), a turntable with a tangential arm. Lastly, someone uses the BeoCenter 2500 (David Lewis, 1991), the glass doors sliding open as a hand approaches. All the while, the furniture in the room slides away and when the BeoVision Avant is completely in position, we see a girl sitting in the position of the man. The room is changed into a contemporary room, with modern furniture. A BeoLab 18 (Torsten Valeur, 2013) speaker is visible in the background.

While highlighting the extraordinary movement involved in the new Avant, this short film also serves as a way to showcase the earlier famous products of Bang & Olufsen and their heritage as a brand that has design and innovation as its pillars. The history of its brand is something Bang & Olufsen is keen to show. In the book *The Art Of Impossible: The Bang & Olufsen Story* photographer Alastair Philip Wiper shows not only photos of the manufacturing processes, but also the way products are designed.⁴⁵ Different phases of the design are shown, cardboard models, rejected ideas and prototypes. While Wiper has worked together with Bang & Olufsen, the book gives an honest insight into the identity of the brand. It should not be seen as objective however, B&O showrooms also sell it; it is where I got my copy.

Several other of the company’s recent products have been looking back at earlier designs. The Beolit 12 Bluetooth radio shares its name with the 1939 original and the BeoLab 18 speaker looks almost exactly the same as the 1992 BeoLab 8000, according to B&O their most popular speaker ever.⁴⁶ Designer Torsten Valeur called the BeoLab 18 a homage to the original.⁴⁷ Bang & Olufsen also introduced the ‘Cool Modern Collection’, a collection of products made with gold-colored brass. Bang & Olufsen traditionally uses aluminium, but this collection “is inspired by contemporary interior design and Art Deco also known as Style Moderne. And just like Art Deco did almost a century ago, this permanent collection fuses technology and decorative art in a celebration of colourful living.”⁴⁸ Interestingly, Bang & Olufsen explains the collection like this: “Just as Art Deco was a conscious move against the prevailing style of Art Nouveau, the return of warm metallics and sleek streamlining can be seen as a turn away from past”⁴⁹. I would argue that this collection is exactly the opposite; it is a turn towards the past, although not Bang & Olufsen’s own. In a much more subtle way, Bang & Olufsen not only uses its own history, but also alludes to the history of design in general. The new BeoVision Avant is included in this brass collection.

The new Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant falls into the *transitional* retro design category, because it shares its name with the 1991 Avant. Its design references this, most importantly in the small bar on the top-right corner and the overall stark look of the television. The BeoVision Avant is not a reissue or a remake of the older television, but they share the way they represent a first time for the company. The retro in this design goes back only to 1994, as opposed to retro designs by Crosley and IFI. Where the retro aspect really comes into play however, is in the marketing of the Avant. The advertising film depicting several iconic products in a retro-styled setting shows the connection between the new television and the history of Bang & Olufsen. I think it is clear that the BeoVision Avant is not only a new technological achievement for the brand, but also a way to show people that Bang & Olufsen is a company with a ninety years old heritage. People buying this television aren’t simply buying a new product, they are buying a piece of that history.

⁴³ Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant - Innovation <bang-olufsen.com/en/picture/televisions/BeoVision-avant/innovation> (25 maart, 2016).

⁴⁴ Alastair Philip Wiper, *The Art Of Impossible: The Bang & Olufsen Story*, Londen: Thames & Hudson 2015, p. 91.

⁴⁵ Wiper 2015, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Bang and Olufsen - Beolab 18 <bang-olufsen.com/en/sound/loudspeakers/beolab-18> (March 25, 2016).

⁴⁷ Wiper 2015, p. 190.

⁴⁸ Bang & Olufsen - The Cool Modern Collection - Contemporary brass design <bang-olufsen.com/en/collection/cool-modern-collection> (February 20, 2017).

⁴⁹ Brass is back | Bang & Olufsen <bang-olufsen.com/en/stories/art-deco-brass-back> (February 21, 2017).



Fig. 8. The Samsung SERIF. Photo: [gadgetynews.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/samsung-serif-curtain-mode.jpg](https://www.gadgetynews.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/samsung-serif-curtain-mode.jpg).



Fig. 9. The DuMont Model RA-103.
Photo: bertibenis.it.



Fig. 10. The I-profile of a Samsung SERIF.
Photo: www.bouroullec.com/.

The Samsung SERIF

“SERIF TV closes the gap between technology and environment”⁵⁰

In 2015, designers Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec designed the SERIF (fig. 8) for Samsung, a modern Full HD/4K LED television with a distinctly different design than Samsung’s other televisions. The name SERIF comes from the frame of the TV, which flares out at the top and bottom, making the sides look like a capital I with serifs⁵¹ (fig. 10). The design however, also takes cues from early television sets, with their elaborate furniture-like cabinets. The wooden cabinet of the SERIF does not have a direct descendant from the history of television, but the flaring top and bottom look like the large television sets of the 1940s. In addition, the SERIF features a cloth cover on the back, to obscure cables and connections from sight. The cloth looks very similar to the speaker cloth used in old radios and televisions. Its optional angled feet bare resemblance to the feet on mid-century modern furniture. The remote control however has a very clean and flat design, focussing on user experience. The same goes for the design of the user interface of the television, which uses Samsung’s SmartTV functions in a much cleaner interface than their other televisions.

Even the philosophy of the design is similar to those first radios and televisions. According to Samsung, the television “blends in harmoniously with the modern living space”⁵² Erwan Bouroullec said in an interview that “one of the key points was to move away from ultra-thin screens. There was no more language – a black flat screen is a black flat screen.”⁵³ It is a way of thinking that can also be seen in the early television and radios from the 1920s and onward. Large monolithic cabinets like the DuMont Model RA-103 (fig. 9) from 1948 incorporated the new technology of television without looking out of place in the interiors of the time.⁵⁴ In fact, the RA-103 has flaring top and bottoms ridges, just like the Serif.

In Samsung’s marketing, they make no mention of any vintage or retro styling or to the fact that the SERIF is reminiscent of early televisions. Ronan and Erwin Bouroullec never refer to the design as retro, instead focussing on the interaction it is supposed to have with the environment. The inspiration for the design of the SERIF comes from the idea of a frame surrounding a painting, according to Erwan Bouroullec.⁵⁵ The environment depicted in marketing photographs and videos are all modern and contemporary, with no distinct retro objects or furniture to be seen. Looking at the marketing and other information Samsung and Erwan and Ronan Bouroullec provide, it is clear that the SERIF is not meant to be a retro design for the sake of being retro. The overall character of the design however, is still nostalgic. Because of this, the SERIF falls into the *synthetic general* category. Its cabinet has the notion of old televisions and its feet look like the feet commonly seen in mid-century modern furniture. The back cover made of fabric resembles speaker cloth on old televisions, but the inside of the television is very contemporary. The remote control is also a modern design that has no retro connotations at all, just like the design of its internal user interface is flat and modern. The reason I chose the Samsung Serif TV as an example for retro designs is that Samsung is one of the largest companies in consumer electronics. The fact that even a large mainstream company like Samsung decided to design a television that looks retro shows how prevalent the style is. The SERIF also stands out amid Samsung’s other product designs, which are all very sleek and high-tech. In point of fact, the SERIF is significantly different from the rest of the tv market, where the every tv has to be bigger and thinner every year and where the chunky SERIF is refreshingly nonconformist amid all the black, metal monolith screens.

⁵⁰ Introducing Samsung SERIF TV <samsung.com/global/seriftv/uk/> (March 26, 2016).

⁵¹ *Serif* is a typography term for the lines above and underneath the stroke of a letter or symbol.

⁵² Introducing Samsung SERIF TV <samsung.com/global/seriftv/uk/> (March 26, 2016).

⁵³ Dezeen.com - Bouroullec brothers design new TV for Samsung as a piece of furniture <dezeen.com/2015/09/17/exclusive-movie-bouroullec-brothers-design-new-tv-samsung-furniture/> (March 26, 2016).

⁵⁴ Ron Moy, *Sonic Architecture: Home Hi-fi and Stereo(types)* in Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft, *Our House : The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture*, Amsterdam : Brill Academic Publishers, 2006, p. 199.

⁵⁵ Ignant.de - Behind The Bouroullec Brothers’ Samsung Serif Design <ignant.de/2016/04/26/behind-the-bouroullec-brothers-samsung-serif-design/> (May 7, 2016).



Fig. 11. The IFI Stereo 50 and the LS3.5.
Photo: akkelisaudio.com/ifi-audio/ifi-retro-stereo-50.html.



Fig. 12. My own 1976 Luxman L-30.
Photo: author.

The IFI Stereo 50

The high-end audio world has always seemed less concerned with looks, instead focusing on the best sound quality in a form-follows-function sort of way. Recently, however, even the audio enthusiast market has introduced retro-designs. One of those designs is the IFI Stereo 50 (fig. 11), a small 2 x 25 watts all-tube amplifier with built-in Bluetooth, an MM/MC phono-preamp and digital inputs.⁵⁶ It was introduced in 2015. It is in every way a modern amplifier for a modern user. Its cabinet, however, has a silver aluminium front with large round knobs and flip switches and it sits in a wooden case. It looks just like an amplifier from the 1970s. The fact that the Stereo 50 uses vacuum tube technology is not remarkable in itself, considering that there are many modern tube amplifiers on the high-end hi-fi market today. There are however strong retro connotations with valve amplification. On its website, the Stereo 50 is proudly described as “exuding classic retro styling” and it is grouped under the ‘RETRO’ header in the top menu.⁵⁷ IFI is a young company, that was founded in 2012 as a subsidiary of Abington Music Research, a high-end audio company that was founded in 2000. Because of this, IFI does not have long history of audio products to draw upon, making it all the more interesting that they designed the ultra retro IFI Stereo 50. Their other products all have modern designs, making the retro look stand out.

Together with the Stereo 50, IFI makes the LS3.5 loudspeaker. Loudspeaker designs have not changed much since their invention in 1915, the basic form of a square wooden box with woofers on the front is still being used by most loudspeaker manufacturers. However, on their website IFI touts the LS3.5 as a “reboot of the classic LS3/5A which is still now, half a century after its launch still in high demand and revered.”⁵⁸ The LS3/5a was a studio monitor designed for the BBC in 1975 and is considered one of the most important loudspeakers ever.⁵⁹ The original speaker is now produced in license by different companies, but IFI only references its design. While the speaker looks a little like the original BBC monitor, the similarities are mostly because of basic inherent speaker design. The technology (crossover design, frequency response, driver materials, etc.) used in the IFI LS3.5 is also entirely different from the original BBC specifications.⁶⁰ ⁶¹ All technology is proprietary; designed by IFI itself.⁶² Because the original LS3/5a is still such a popular speaker, mentioning it in the marketing implies that the IFI LS3.5 has the same qualities as the original.

The IFI Stereo 50 is one of the few examples of a *synthetic comprehensive* design. While the Stereo 50 looks like amplifiers from the 1970s, there is no specific historical design upon which it is based. And apart from its contemporary technology, the look of the amplifier is retro down to every small detail. The IFI LS3.5 is based on the BBC monitor according to IFI, but considering there are only general resemblances in the design, I still categorise the speakers as a *synthetic comprehensive* design. IFI is not a company that can draw upon a long history. Instead, they evoke a general feeling of nostalgia by making a product that looks and feels exactly like one from the 1970s. A particular, well-chosen type, because certainly not every stereo component from that time had the simple, understated design of the Stereo 50. From the start of the 1970s, audio companies like the American *Marantz* or Japanese *Pioneer* outfitted their amplifiers and receivers with dozens of separate buttons, switches, meters and indicators, giving their products a professional and thus trustworthy look. The IFI Stereo 50 does not look like those brands, instead it takes

⁵⁶ RETRO - Stereo 50 <ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/retro-stereo-50/> (April 3, 2016).

⁵⁷ RETRO - Stereo 50 <ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/retro-stereo-50/> (April 3, 2016).

⁵⁸ RETRO - LS3.5 <ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/retro-ls-3-5/> (April 3, 2016).

⁵⁹ BBC LC3/5a Loudspeaker | Stereophile.com <stereophile.com/standloudspeakers/361/index.html#RMUjY4SOxdFX5xLp.97> (April 3, 2016).

⁶⁰ Detailed in: H.D. Warwood, M.E. Whatton and R.W. Mills, *The Design Of The Miniature Monitoring Speaker Type LS3/5A*, Research Department, Engineering Division British Broadcasting Corporation 1976.

⁶¹ RETRO - LS3.5 <ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/retro-ls-3-5/> (April 3, 2016).

⁶² RETRO - LS3.5 <ifi-audio.com/portfolio-view/retro-ls-3-5/> (April 3, 2016).

much of its design language from a Japanese company called *Luxman*.⁶³ The Stereo 50 looks quite exactly like the Luxman L-30 (1976-1978) (fig. 12). These amplifiers come from a time when hi-fi audio was popular and the market for high performance audio equipment was booming.⁶⁴ Up until then, it used to be perfectly commonplace to hide the sound system in a cupboard, along with the record player and television.⁶⁵ It was not until the end of the 1960s that separate components became in demand. Specialist hi-fi stores opened their doors, usually several per city. In special listening rooms decorated as living rooms, stereo sets were perfectly set-up for critical listening, with a variety of records to appeal to everyone's tastes. These shops sold moderately priced equipment and more expensive exclusive brands and Luxman was one of them. Now, the IFI Stereo 50 refers to the high end amplifiers of that time. Many people who bought their first hi-fi system in the 1970s will recognise the design of the Stereo 50 and will probably still associate it with the advanced, expensive amplifiers they had then (or craved for). As to why IFI chose this unadorned, serene aesthetic for the Stereo 50, I think it integrates better in today's interior designs, with the stark clean lines of modern furniture. This way, the IFI Stereo 50 contrasts beautifully in a twenty-first century home and it blends in at the same time.

⁶³ In fact, Luxman is producing their own retro-styled amplifiers with their Classic Line of contemporary, retro-looking components: Classic Series | Luxman <luxman.com/product-list.php?cid=15> (April 3, 2016).

⁶⁴ David Attwood, *Sound Design*, London: Octopus Publishing Group, 2002, p. 70.

⁶⁵ Dianne Harris, *A Tiny Orchestra in the Living Room, High-fidelity stereo and the postwar house*, 2015. <placesjournal.org/article/a-tiny-orchestra-in-the-living-room> (December 5, 2017).



Fig. 13. The matte PodSpeakers MiniPod with wooden spikes.
Photo: hifiklubben.nl.



Fig. 14. The high gloss PodSpeakers MiniPod with aluminium spikes.
Photo: mb.cision.com/Public/433/9291486/9f33ea193d1ce2c5_org.jpg.

The Podspeakers MiniPod

In 1991 Simon Ghahary (1972) designed the PodSpeaker. He lived near the factory of loudspeaker manufacturer Bowers & Wilkins and would search through their garbage for speaker parts for his own designs.⁶⁶ By combining discarded components with his own cabinet designs he caught the attention of Bowers & Wilkins' then acoustic engineer Laurence Dickie, who was working on their Nautilus speaker. Together, they decided that Bowers & Wilkins would help make the speaker components, while Ghahary made the cabinet.⁶⁷ The company that Ghahary started was Blue Room Loudspeakers and it became a subsidiary of Bowers & Wilkins. Its original speaker was called the HousePod and it had a curved cabinet made of fibreglass. The curves followed the drivers and the round shape made sure no standing waves and reflections existed within the cabinet, significantly improving the speaker's sound. The design of the HousePod was thus made for technological reasons, a form-follows-function design, but the speakers were explicitly described as "an antidote to the convention of square, box type enclosures".⁶⁸

In 1994 Blue Room designed a smaller and improved speaker: the MiniPod (fig. 14).⁶⁹ It was designed to be made out of fibreglass, but later designs were based on easier to make plastic.⁷⁰ In 1996 Blue Room became separate of Bowers & Wilkins and worked together with a company called Scandyna to continue the production of the (again improved) MiniPod, along with other speakers.

Today, Scandyna still makes the entire PodSpeaker range and in 2015 they changed names to PodSpeakers. The range now consists of the MiniPod, the smaller SmallPod and the bigger BigPod, along with home cinema models.⁷¹ All these speakers still use the same basic design as the original MiniPod, only differing in size. The manufacturing methods and materials were changed however, in 2016. According to Lise Vestergaard, the Global Brand Manager of PodSpeakers, these new versions were designed without input from Ghahary.⁷² The new versions improved greatly in sound quality, with the use of modern Kevlar drivers, a more advanced cross-over filter and a new cabinet material (fig. 13).⁷³ The original cabinet design has been retained, but there are significant differences. The drivers are black, instead of the trademark yellow. A second important difference is the interchangeable ring around the drivers. In previous versions, this ring was part of the driver itself, but now it is removable and available in different colours. In addition to black, there is a gold version and two wooden versions. The iconic 'Sputnik' spikes are available in the same finishes as the rings.⁷⁴

These aesthetic changes give the speaker a much sleeker, very modern look. The yellow cones, inherited from Bowers & Wilkins, were iconic, but by choosing black for the new design, PodSpeakers show they look towards the future. It also gives the speakers their own identity. The yellow Kevlar cones have always been a trademark of Bowers & Wilkins speakers (although they too have changed this in their new 800 D3 Series speakers). The most striking difference is the matte finish that the speakers now have. It loses the retrofuturistic feel of the high-gloss version: the matte finish and black cones are meant to allow the MiniPod to blend into its environment. At the same time, the slanting wooden feet evoke the feet used on mid-century modern cabinets. The new version of the MiniPod matches better with our contemporary, somewhat retro taste.

⁶⁶ A History Of The Blue Room - In The Beginning <futureshapeofsound.com/#1991in-the-beginning> (April 14, 2016)

⁶⁷ A History Of The Blue Room - The Proposal <futureshapeofsound.com/#the-proposal> (April 14, 2016)

⁶⁸ A History Of The Blue Room - Our Mission <futureshapeofsound.com/#our-mission> (April 14, 2016).

⁶⁹ A History Of The Blue Room - 1995 Birth of the MiniPod <futureshapeofsound.com/#1995-birth-of-the-minipod> (April 14, 2016).

⁷⁰ A History Of The Blue Room - Rebirth of the MiniPod <futureshapeofsound.com/#rebirth-of-the-minipod> (April 14, 2016).

⁷¹ Products - PodSpeakers <podspeakers.dk> (April 15, 2016).

⁷² In conversation with Lise Vestergaard, Global Brand Manager of PodSpeakers on August 18, 2016.

⁷³ PodSpeakers MiniPod MKIV <podspeakers.com/product/minipod-mk4/> (February 17, 2017).

⁷⁴ PodSpeakers Spikes <hifklubben.nl/accessoires/luidspreker-accessoires/podspeakers-spikes-loudspeaker-parts> (February 17, 2017).

The marketing material for the original Blue Room speakers was designed by Simon Ghahary as well. The company was also a label for underground electronic music and the marketing material fits this aesthetic.⁷⁵ Much of the marketing shows clear influences of the alternative music scene of the 1990s, showing the speakers as if they are extraterrestrial organisms or UFOs (fig. 1). Together with the grungy typography, it brought home the fact that this brand was different from other audio brands of that time. The design of the PodSpeakers and Blue Room's marketing holds close ties with British Design from that era. The same do-it-yourself philosophy that drove Simon Ghahary to pick discarded parts from the trash had compelled Ron Arad (1951) to create his *Rover Chair* (1981) and later his *Concrete Stereo*, a hifi system made out of poured concrete, in 1985.

The current website uses large photographs of modern interiors where the PodSpeakers are set up.⁷⁶ The photos do not focus on the speakers, instead they disappear in the trendy living rooms and kitchens filled with matte surfaces and natural wood furniture. There is no retro message and the alternative vibe of the original material is gone. PodSpeakers no longer tries to be a hi-fi brand; instead it has become a lifestyle brand. PodSpeakers does however highlight the fact that the PodSpeakers were designed by Simon Ghahary.⁷⁷ This is still an important selling point for the speakers. The PodSpeakers are not meant to be high performance hi-fi, but instead as an attractive looking alternative for traditional speakers. From the beginning, they tend to be sold to people who like them for their appearance, so the update to appeal to our contemporary taste was a necessary one.⁷⁸

The basic design of the PodSpeakers MiniPod has not changed since 1996, but PodSpeakers has updated the components and given the speakers different finishes. The high gloss plastic of the original was futuristic when they were designed and because they were sold up until 2016, that finish became associated with a nostalgic, retro vibe. The new matte finishes are much more contemporary, but with the wooden spikes and wooden ring, the PodSpeakers bring to mind the Eames DAW chairs. PodSpeakers gave the MiniPod and the rest of the line-up a contemporary feel, which ironically means they look a little retro. A *transitional* design.

⁷⁵ A History Of The Blue Room - The Launch Of Blue Room Released <futureshapeofsound.com/#the-birth-of-blue-room-released> (April 14, 2016).

⁷⁶ PodSpeakers <podspeakers.dk> (April 15, 2016).

⁷⁷ PodSpeakers <podspeakers.dk> (April 15, 2016).

⁷⁸ In conversation with Cas Oostvogel, Country Manager at Hi-Fi Klubben Netherlands on May 17, 2017.



Fig. 15. The Crosley Bermuda.
Photo: fiftiesstore.com.



Fig. 16. An original Dansette Bermuda, refurbished by Ebay seller 'The Dansette King'.
Photo: The Dansette King, <https://www.ebay.co.uk>

The Crosley Turntables

In June 1955 American company Philco introduced the first all-transistor pickup turntable and from there, technology became advanced enough to create affordable and reasonably portable record players.⁷⁹ Many people in the USA and Europe, especially teenagers, had one and it would have been the primary device on which they listened music other than the radio. This type of turntable is making a comeback recently. They don't require extra devices to work and they are relatively cheap, making them an easy choice for people who want to play a record once in a while.

The Crosley Radio turntables were the reason for starting this research into retro designs in consumer electronics. Since their introduction, they have been incredibly popular. The original Crosley company was founded in 1907 and made cars, radios and home appliances, but no turntables. In the early 2000s, CEO Bo LeMastus bought the name to be used for electronics, after having a license before that.⁸⁰ LeMastus had worked for a company called *Thomas Collector's Edition* that sold retro radios in 1984, which must have been one of the first companies to do so.⁸¹ The Crosley Radio that exists now has nothing to do with the original company. In fact, there is another Crosley company that specialises in home appliances (and no, they do not have retro products in their line-up).⁸² Crosley Radio started out making large wooden radios based on the cathedral designs popular in the 1930s, like the 1931 Philco Model 90.⁸³ Their first turntable was introduced in 1992.⁸⁴ There are no official sales figures for Crosley, but in an interview with European Crosley importer Marlein Parlevliet, she said sales in Europe over the last three years have been around 50.000 units.⁸⁵ While Crosley certainly is not the only brand of retro designed electronics, Parlevliet thinks it is the best-known.⁸⁶ For this study I have chosen three designs to analyse. Crosley makes many products, but these three each have a unique design story that explains how Crosley uses retro in their designs. Crosley makes retro designed radios and turntables, using popular designs that have no copyright anymore.⁸⁷ I do not think nostalgia for these record players is the reason they've become popular over the last few years. Rather they are an exceptionally convenient, all-in-one solution for playing LP's, combined with cute, cheerful styling.

Their Bermuda model (fig. 15), a turntable standing on long legs, is a near-exact copy of the Dansette Bermuda, originally released in the 1960s (fig. 16). One of the most popular brands of record players in the UK in the 1960s, original Dansette models still command a high price on the second-hand market. The new Crosley Bermuda model follows the original design to great detail. They even added a Dansette logo on the front, although it is not the same logo as the original had. Crosley added an auxiliary input and a headphones output on the front. Crosley mentions on its own website that the Bermuda was "based on vintage Dansette sets", promoting its retro design.⁸⁸ Crosley also makes a faithful copy of the Dansette Junior turntable, in this case actually calling it 'Dansette Junior'.⁸⁹

⁷⁹ 'MIDGET RECORD PLAYER: Philco Device Runs 150 Hours on 4 Flashlight Batteries' in *The New York Times* June 28, 1955, p. 40.

⁸⁰ Jeffrey Lee Puckett, 'Crosley Radio turns music nostalgia into big business' in *The Courier Journal* November 22, 2013 <courier-journal.com/story/money/2013/11/22/crosley-radio-turns-music-nostalgia-into-big-business/3681415/> (May 18, 2016).

⁸¹ Jeffrey Lee Puckett, 'Crosley Radio turns music nostalgia into big business' in *The Courier Journal* November 22, 2013 <courier-journal.com/story/money/2013/11/22/crosley-radio-turns-music-nostalgia-into-big-business/3681415/> (May 18, 2016).

⁸² Crosley Appliances <crosley.com> (May 18, 2016).

⁸³ Alexis Petridis, Harriet Gibsone and Pete Paphides, 'The Crosley generation: the record player that has the kids in a spin' in *The Guardian* April 21, 2016.

⁸⁴ Who We Are - Crosley Radio <crosleyradio.com/about/> (May 18, 2016)

⁸⁵ Interview conducted with Marlein Parlevliet, importer for Crosley Radio for Europe, on May 13, 2016.

⁸⁶ Interview conducted with Marlein Parlevliet, importer for Crosley Radio for Europe, on May 13, 2016.

⁸⁷ Jeffrey Lee Puckett, 'Crosley Radio turns music nostalgia into big business' in *The Courier Journal* November 22, 2013 <courier-journal.com/story/money/2013/11/22/crosley-radio-turns-music-nostalgia-into-big-business/3681415/> (May 18, 2016).

⁸⁸ Bermuda Turntable - Crosley Radio <crosleyradio.com/turntables/product-details?productkey=CR6233A&model=CR6233A-RE> (May 18, 2016).

⁸⁹ Dansette Junior Portable Turntable - Crosley Radio <crosleyradio.com/turntables/product-details?productkey=CR6234A&model=CR6234A-BT> (May 18, 2016).

“Based on the old Philips turntable, this compact briefcase has a surprising stability and high sound quality” says the website of Dutch Crosley importer Swordfish and Friends Distribution.⁹⁰ The Crosley Spinnerette (fig. 3) is a Philips 22GF403 (made from 1969 to 1972⁹¹) turntable with a different logo. Interestingly, the official US website of Crosley does not mention Philips, instead calling the Spinnerette a “slick vintage inspired deck.”⁹² The similarities between the two products are very obvious, however. Yes, the speaker of the Crosley is black instead of painted silver, but details like the small chrome triangle on the side are still there on the Crosley. The sliders for volume and tone control are also maintained. Crosley added an USB-port on the side for digitalising LPs and an auxiliary input and a headphones output. They offer a blue and a red version. Unlike on the Dansette players, there is no original brand logo of Philips on the Spinnerette, most likely because Philips is still an existing company.

The best-known and best-selling Crosley turntable however is not the Bermuda nor the Spinnerette, it is the Crosley Cruiser (fig. 17).⁹³ This was one of the turntables clothing store Urban Outfitters started to sell in 2007, which probably accounts for a large part for its popularity.⁹⁴ The Cruiser is a portable turntable in a suitcase. It is available in a large range of different colours and Crosley also has special editions of artists like the Rolling Stones, One Direction and Jack White.⁹⁵ There have been many suitcase pickups in the history of turntables and it is difficult to pinpoint an exact design inspiration for the Cruiser. The suitcase itself, with its rounded edges and its metal latch and corner protectors, is much more a traditional old-fashioned suitcase than any suitcase turntable ever was. It is an original design by Crosley, modernising the kind of vintage design language they use in their other products.⁹⁶ The Cruiser feels retro, maybe just because it is a turntable. The colours and patterns it is available in, however, are very fresh and modern. The Executive for instance, the other suitcase record player Crosley makes, takes much more design cues from the Fifties style, like the white stripes and large patinated metal latches. The same goes for the Nomad. The Crosley Cruiser is a prime example modern record player with a retro feel.

Although many Crosley models feature modern technology, like USB and bluetooth, the sound quality of these turntables has not been updated to today’s standards. The styli used in the cartridges are very basic, in some cases leading to people complaining about skipping, in many cases to people complaining about sound quality.⁹⁷

Crosley uses a few different design strategies for their turntables. Their Dansette Bermuda en Bermuda Junior both have the same design as their originals, so these two products use a *transitional* design. The same applies to the Crosley Spinnerette, which is in design a copy of the Philips GF403. The Crosley Cruiser however, along with many other designs in the line-up, is not a historical design, but instead a *synthetic comprehensive* design. The turntables look like they were made decades ago, down to the materials used and the small details such as latches and knobs. Only the technological parts are modern (platter and turntable, amplifier and speakers).

In its marketing Crosley Radio promotes its line of turntables and radios as “analog sound for a digital generation.”⁹⁸ The company does not focus on people who want the best sound quality from their turntables, instead their products work best for people who like to play their records with one simple device. There are no amplifiers, speakers or cables involved and Crosley has portable ones too, designed to be dragged to the park and the beach. On the History section of the official website it is briefly explained that the Crosley name came from “Powell Crosley, a pretty radical guy from the 1920s who knew music was for the people and created a radio for everyone. In keeping

⁹⁰ Products - Crosley Radio Europe <crosleyradio.eu/product/> (May 18, 2016).

⁹¹ Nederlands Grammofoon Genootschap <grammofoon.com/frameset.htm?grammofoon.com/Philips/Philips_22GF403.htm&ContentFrame> (May 18, 2016).

⁹² Spinnerette - Crosley Radio <crosleyradio.com/turntables/product-details?productkey=CR6016A&model=CR6016A-BL> (May 18, 2016).

⁹³ Interview conducted with Marlein Parlevliet, importer for Crosley Radio for Europe, on May 13, 2016.

⁹⁴ With Vinyl's Resurgence, Here's How Brands Are Capitalizing on Music's Most Analog Medium - AdWeek <adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/vinyls-resurgence-heres-how-brands-are-capitalizing-musics-most-analog-medium-170016> (May 19, 2016).

⁹⁵ Alexis Petridis, Harriet Gibsons and Pete Paphides, ‘The Crosley generation: the record player that has the kids in a spin’ in *The Guardian* April 21, 2016.

⁹⁶ Interview conducted with Marlein Parlevliet, importer for Crosley Radio for Europe, on May 13, 2016.

⁹⁷ Alexis Petridis, Harriet Gibsons and Pete Paphides, ‘The Crosley generation: the record player that has the kids in a spin’ in *The Guardian* April 21, 2016.

⁹⁸ Crosley Radio <crosleyradio.com> (May 19, 2016).



Fig. 17. The Crosley Cruiser
Photo: zola.com.

with his tradition and entrepreneurial spirit, we decided the vinyl experience was also for everyone.”⁹⁹ There are no further mentions of the old company, Crosley Radio positions itself as a new company. The history of the old Crosley brand does not matter. In nearly every product description on the official website the designs are said to be vintage, retro or nostalgic, but overall Crosley is a lifestyle brand and not necessarily as a manufacturer of retro products. In fact, their most recent product is a collaboration with high-end turntable manufacturer Pro-Ject.¹⁰⁰ It is the C10, a very modern high-tech separate turntable for people who want serious sound. Its design has nothing retro or nostalgic, it is a new direction for Crosley.

⁹⁹ Who We Are - Crosley Radio <crosleyradio.com/about/> (May 18, 2016)

¹⁰⁰ C10 - Crosley Radio <crosleyradio.com/turntables/product-details?productkey=C10A&model=C10A-MA> (May 19, 2016).



Fig. 18. The Philips OTT2000.
Photo: philips.nl/c-p/OTT2000_12/classic-microgeluidssysteem.

ELEKTRO-GRAMMOFOONS met diamantnaald

Handige, compacte grammofoon-apparatuur in één geheel: speler of wisselaar met versterker en luidspreker(s) in luxe koffer. Geschikt voor mono-en/of stereo-weergave. Een elektro-grammofoon is bij uitstek geschikt, wanneer men niet gebonden wil zijn aan een vaste opstelling.

NIEUW!

Elektro-grammofoon - f 149,- (links)

Elektro-grammofoon met 1,5 watt-versterker en ook de luidspreker in de koffer. Volledig getransistoriseerde versterker, dus direct speelklaar! Stereo-opnemerement met diamantnaald. Twee draaisnelheden. Gewicht 3,3 kg. Stereo-aansluiting. Afm.: 30,5 x 26,3 x 11,8 cm. Keuze uit drie kleuren: grijs, rood of blauw.

Elektro-grammofoon - f 228,- (onder)

Elektro-grammofoon: speler met krachtige 2,5 watt-versterker. Grote luidspreker in afneembaar deksel, dat tevens dient als klankbord. Lagering op nylonkogel waardoor een gelijkmatige gang is verzekerd. Stereo-opnemerement met diamant- en saffiernaald. Afzonderlijke regeling voor hoge en lage tonen. Stereo-aansluiting. Gewicht 5,8 kg. Afm.: 400 x 295 x 191 mm. Kleuren: groen/grijs-wit, wit/blauw-wit.

Elektro-grammofoon - f 258,-

Elektro-grammofoon: wisselaar met krachtige 2,5 watt versterker en grote luidspreker in afneembaar deksel. Stereo-opnemerement met diamant- en saffiernaald. Continue hogetonen-regeling. Aansluiting voor stereo. Gewicht 6,8 kg. Afmetingen: 370 x 320 x 180 mm. Koffer in grijs/antraciet.



Fig. 19. Above: the Philips AG4131 in the 1965 brochure.
Photo: mfbfreaks.com/documentatie/hifi-folders/philips-nederland/1965-audio-en-videoprogramma/.

The Philips OTT2000

In 1965 Philips introduced the AG4131 (fig. 19), a turntable with built-in speakers. It played 33 and 45 rpm records. In 2014 Philips introduced the OTT2000 (fig. 18) turntable. It features a CD-player, FM radio and even bluetooth. Just like the AG4131 it has built-in speakers, making it easy for people start enjoying their records, without purchasing additional devices. Philips marketed this modern take on a pick-up turntable as a spiritual successor to the “legendary” AG4131.¹⁰¹ Spiritual indeed, because the designs of these products have little in common.

Both the OTT2000 and the AG4131 are designed as a tabletop device and they both have a plastic lid to cover the platter when not in use. Just like the AG4131, the OTT2000 is slightly smaller than a 12 inch LP, so the edges extend over the side when playing. On both turntables, the speakers are on the front, protected by a plastic dustcover. The two control knobs are on the left side on the AG4131, on the OTT2000 these are placed on the left and right, making place for an LED screen in the middle. The new Philips also takes small details from its older brother. The speakers are covered with a hood that looks like the windshield visor of a car, one of the characteristic parts of the AG4131. The rounded corners of the earlier model also come back in the OTT2000, but in a somewhat softer styling. One of the more important aspects of the AG4131 is its speaker front made of plastic blinds, but these are not used in the OTT2000. In mentioning the AG4131 in its marketing, Philips implies that the actual designs are similar. I don't see that. The design of the OTT2000 does however look very similar to one record player Philco made in the 1950s. Philco was an American electronics company, but was bought in 1981 by Philips.¹⁰² The Philco F1404 from 1957 looks just like the new Philips.¹⁰³ The corners of this American pickup are sharper, but the front has the same raised top where the lid closes. The look of the speaker on the front of the OT2000 also matches more closely with the speaker cloth of the Philco F1404. The Philco F1404 had a faux leather finish in a two-tone blue, like the OTT2000, whereas the AG4131 was designed in white.¹⁰⁴

The similarities between the three designs are obvious, but the Philips OTT2000 itself is not outspokenly retro. There is a distinct connection to Philips' general design style in 2016. They also make a range of retro radios, called the 'Original Radio'. They look like the Philetta 254 Philips made in 1955/1956, incorporating features like the two buttons on the front and a curved wooden case.¹⁰⁵ Philips acknowledges the heritage of these turntables and radios in their marketing, saying “Het ontwerp is een eerbetoon aan de beroemde Philips-radio's uit de jaren 50”,¹⁰⁶ In the '90 Years Of Design' website, this connection is further explained.¹⁰⁷ The company does have a long and important history as the one of the largest electronics companies in the world, especially in the first decades after the second World War, so their retro styled devices are a way to return to their roots, a way to show their heritage.

Why would Philips market this turntable as inspired by one of its own pickup while the actual design has very little in common with that pickup? For one, it is unlikely anyone buying the OTT2000 today would still remember the

¹⁰¹ “De originele platenspeler doet denken aan de legendarische Philips AG4131-platenspeler uit 1965 en beschikt over een hoogwaardige luidspreker en een dynamische, uitgebalanceerde platenspeler.” <philips.nl/c-p/OTT2000_12/classic-microgeluidssysteem> (March 20 2015).

¹⁰² Gregory Malanowski, *The Race For Wireless*, Bloomington: AuthorHouse 2011, p. 81.

¹⁰³ Philcoradio.com - Philco for 1958 <philcoradio.com/gallery/1958.htm#v> (March 20 2015).

¹⁰⁴ Philcoradio.com - Philco for 1958 <philcoradio.com/gallery/1958.htm#v> (March 20 2015).

¹⁰⁵ Philips - 90 Years Of Design - Philetta and Original radios: Modern classic in the making <90yearsofdesign.philips.com/article/72> (March 23 2015).

¹⁰⁶ Author's translation: “The design is an homage to the famous Philips radios from the 1950s.” Original-radio OR7000/12 | Philips <philips.nl/c-p/OR7000_12/original-radio> (3 maart, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Philips - 90 Years Of Design - Philetta and Original radios: Modern classic in the making <90yearsofdesign.philips.com/article/72> (March 23 2015).

AG4131 pickup, let alone when it's only described by its model number. It also seems unlikely anyone would look up the AG4131 before buying, nor would they care if this new turntable did not exactly resemble the supposed original. Interestingly, a quick search on Google reveals nearly every article about the OTT2000 copies Philips' own lines about the AG4131, without questioning the actual similarity of the design. Even though Philips bought Philco in 1981, it seems strange that they would choose to return to a design that was not their own. I think the reason is simple, really. Looking at the Philips AG4131 from 1965, nothing about it is especially memorable. Certainly not compared to the Crosley turntables that have gotten popular. The Philco F1404 looks a lot more like those from Crosley, while the design aspects of the rest of the Philips Original line could be incorporated in this new OTT2000 turntable. Meanwhile, Philips was trying to show its heritage by mentioning the AG4131. It would have been awkward if they had mentioned a product from a different company.

It is at all possible that Philips decided to make the OTT2000 only after Crosley's retro turntables became popular. By putting its own history front and centre, Philips could at least make a claim that they were earlier in making these kind of record players and have a lot more experience than Crosley will ever have. (Although Crosley actually makes a faithful copy of a Philips turntable, unlike Philips).

The Philips OTT2000 turntable seems at first glance a *transitional* design, based on their marketing claim that it was based on the AG4131. As we have seen, however, the similarities between the two designs are scarce and it is more likely the designers of the OTT2000 have looked at other 1960s turntables, most likely the Philco F1404. But because Philips never mentions the Philco in their texts about the turntable, a designation as *synthetic general* is more fitting.



Fig. 20. The new Technics SL-1200GAE.
Photo: technics.com.



Fig. 21. The KitchenAid Stand Mixer.
Photo: multivu.com/players/English/7766751-kitchenaid-artisan-mini-stand-mixer/image/kitchenaid@artisan@mini-stand-mixer-1-HR.jpg.

Cameras, Kitchen Machines And Other Examples

In 2010 the Fujifilm Finepix X100 was one of the first modern-day cameras to look like it came from 1975.¹⁰⁸ Unlike its competitors with small click buttons, touchscreens and long range zoom lenses, the X100 had dials to set the shutter speed and aperture and it had a fixed lens. Its body was made of silver coloured metal and wrapped with black artificial leather, making it look like old rangefinder compacts. It did however have a 12.3 megapixel DSLR sensor and a hybrid electronic viewfinder, along with filming capabilities. The camera was immensely popular and subsequent retro models from Fujifilm have enjoyed the same accolade. Inspired by Fujifilm, other companies have since released modern cameras with a retro design.

Olympus remade its PEN series, originally made from 1959 to the late 1980s. It now comes in the form of the PEN E-P, available in different colours and configurations but all with the characteristic lines of the original. The official Olympus PEN website highlights the design similarities between them.¹⁰⁹ Nikon introduced a 'classic' camera too, the Nikon Df in 2013. It is a DSLR designed to work with Nikons older ranges of lenses and to look like the analogue Nikon F series, but with a modern full-frame sensor. In the weeks before its introduction, Nikon released teaser trailers in which a photographer roams Scotland, telling how good photography takes time. The camera is never shown until the last film, but we can hear clicks and whirs as the man adjusts settings, calling attention to the retro manual controls.

Kodak debuted the new Kodak Super 8 Camera in 2016, which uses the 8mm film format that was introduced in 1965.¹¹⁰ The camera itself shoots analogue film on a Super 8 cartridge, but it also has a digital viewfinder to see what you're filming.¹¹¹ Unlike the original Super 8 cameras, the new one also records sound. The new camera is designed by Yves Behar, but is still recognisable as a typical 8 mm camera.¹¹² Behar's style is recognisable in the design, but he did not completely overhaul the classic camera. The sharp corners of original 8 mm cameras remain, the characteristic pistol grip is an option. To make editing the films easier, Kodak will develop and scan the films when you send it to them. Of course, Kodak offered the same service in 1888 with its first box cameras, saying 'You press the button, we do the rest'.¹¹³ Kodak speaks of an "Analog Renaissance" and quotes various Hollywood directors as proponents of the format.¹¹⁴ Judging by the number of films that were shot with film in 2015, there is a serious interest in film again. Is this then a retro analogue camera for retro's sake? No, Kodak seems determined to create a complete ecosystem around the new Super 8, facilitating students who want to learn how to shoot analogue film professionally.¹¹⁵

Another camera company has simply never significantly changed the design of its cameras. Leica made their first Leica M camera in 1954 and while it has had many different iterations since then, its design has never dramatically changed. Their latest M camera is the M10, which still features the rounded metal body with the viewfinder at the top-right first used on the Leica M3, along with the now famous red dot logo (fig. 24).¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ DPReview - Fujifilm FinePix X100 In-Depth Review <dpreview.com/reviews/fujifilmx100> (April 12, 2016).

¹⁰⁹ Design - Olympus Pen <cameras.olympus.com/pen/nl-nl/design/> (April 12, 2016).

¹¹⁰ The Verge - Kodak's 'new' gadget is a Super 8 film camera, and it kind of warms my heart <theverge.com/2016/1/5/10719012/kodaks-new-gadget-is-a-super-8-film-camera-and-it-kind-of-warms-my> (April 12, 2016).

¹¹¹ Super 8 - Kodak <kodak.com/ek/US/en/Consumer/Products/Super8/Super8-camera/default.htm> (April 16, 2016).

¹¹² Design of Kodak Super 8 Camera - Kodak <kodak.com/ek/us/en/Consumer/Products/Super8/Super8-camera/Super8_Design/default.htm> (April 16, 2016).

¹¹³ Milestones - Kodak <kodak.com/ek/us/en/corp/aboutus/heritage/milestones/default.htm> (April 16, 2016).

¹¹⁴ Analog Renaissance - Kodak <kodak.com/ek/us/en/Consumer/Products/Super8/Super8-camera/Analog_Renaissance/default.htm> (April 16, 2016).

¹¹⁵ Kodak Launches Super 8 Filmmaking Revival Initiative at CES 2016 - Kodak <kodak.com/ek/US/en/corp/press_center/Kodak_Launches_Super_8_Filmmaking_Revival_Initiative_at_CES_2016/default.htm> (April 16, 2016).

¹¹⁶ Leica M10 // Leica M // Photography - Leica Camera AG <en.leica-camera.com/Photography/Leica-M/Leica-M10> (February 2017).

The iconic KitchenAid stand mixer (fig. 21) is also a product that never really changed since it was first designed in the 1930s by Egmont Arens (1889-1966). Its original name was Model K.¹¹⁷ The mixer has been produced, and has been popular, since its introduction. Today it exists in different versions, with different engines and different sizes, but the general design has remained the same. It is an icon: TV chef Julia Child (1912-2004) famously used a bright blue KitchenAid machine in her television shows.¹¹⁸ Recently its design has been used to create an entire line of KitchenAid appliances. Even though the KitchenAid stand mixer has always been on the market, its recent popularity and its prevalence on cooking shows like *The Great British Bake Off* show that retro design is being used in other markets than audio and video electronics. Likewise, the famous SMEG fifties style *FAB* refrigerators were introduced in 1997 and since then SMEG has created a large range of appliances in the same very retro design.¹¹⁹

Companies in the high-end audio market have also been reintroducing models from the past with new technology. Significant is the Technics SL-1200GAE (fig. 20), a new iteration of the famous SL-1200 turntable.¹²⁰ The original SL-1200 was introduced in 1972 and has since been popular with DJs, because of its fast motor and the heavy build quality. At the CES, 2016 Technics owner Panasonic debuted the SL-1200G and the limited edition SL-1200GAE. They are modern turntables in every respect, but the design remains the same. More importantly, Panasonic has given them the same name as the original SL-1200. French loudspeaker manufacturer Elipson created a new version of the iconic BS 50 from 1953, this time not executed with plaster but with a fibreglass strengthened resin.¹²¹ It is called the BS 50 Tribute. Turntable manufacturer Rega announced the new version of their 1975 Rega Planar 2 turntable.¹²² The minimalistic simple design approach remains, but it loses the wooden plinth and gains an updated tonearm. German manufacturer Thorens too has reintroduced their classic suspended turntables, like the iconic TD-160 and TD-166 (fig. 23) they made from 1972 to 1988.¹²³ The new turntable is called the TD-350 and it “revives the legendary Thorens tradition and concept of the suspended chassis,” according to the Thorens website.¹²⁴ The classic look of the Thorens turntables and the Linn Sondek LP12 was copied by Pro-Ject for their The Classic turntable (fig. 22).¹²⁵ One last notable brand is Brionvega. The original Brionvega company does not exist anymore, but two separate brands now manufacture the original designs.^{126 127} An updated version with contemporary electronics of the famous Radiofonografo (1965) is available, just like the portable television called Algol (1964). The Algol still uses the 11 inch CRT monitor it was designed with, so technology-wise there are no improvements, this is just a reissue.¹²⁸ Proof that retro radios have been around for some time is the Cecina Classic Overdrive radio I saw in the Radio-Televisie-Design-Museum in Haarlem recently. The museum dates this radio in 1988, although collectors on the internet appear to date it at 1991.¹²⁹ The radio resembles the dashboard of a '58 Corvette and looks like it belongs in an American diner. The LA Times wrote an article about it in 1992, calling it “a true thing of automotive beauty, and a guaranteed magnet for the eye.”¹³⁰ Crosley may have been an early player in the retro radio market, they certainly weren't the only one.

¹¹⁷ William Lidwell and Gerry Manacsa, *Deconstructing Product Design: Exploring the Form, Function, Usability, Sustainability, and Commercial Success of 100 Amazing Products*, Beverly: Rockport Publishers 2011, p. 180.

¹¹⁸ Technologies Old and New - National Museum Of American History <americanhistory.si.edu/food/julia-childs-kitchen/technologies-old-and-new> (May 2, 2016).

¹¹⁹ SMEG US <smegusa.com/press-release/the-fab-refrigerators-distinctive-50s-styling/> (May 2, 2016).

¹²⁰ Grand Class Direct Drive Turntable System SL-1200GAE Hi-Fi Audio - Technics <technics.com/global/introduction/hifi-direct-drive-turntable-system-sl-1200gae/> (May 21, 2016).

¹²¹ Elipson - bs 50 Tribute <elipson.com/en/model/234_bs-50-Tribute.html> (May 21, 2016).

¹²² Rega - The Planar 2 turntable returns to the line-up available Mid May 2016 <rega.co.uk/planar-2-2016.html> (May 24, 2016).

¹²³ Thorens - TD 350 <thorens.com/turntables/drives/td-350.html> (May 24, 2016).

¹²⁴ Thorens - TD 350 <thorens.com/turntables/drives/td-350.html> (May 24, 2016).

¹²⁵ Pro-Ject Audio Systems <project-audio.com/main.php?prod=theclassic&cat=turntables&lang=en> (May 26, 2016).

¹²⁶ Company - Brionvega <brionvega.it/en/company/> (May 21, 2016).

¹²⁷ Brionvega - TV With Love - Background <brionvega.tv/background.php> (May 21, 2016).

¹²⁸ Algol - Brionvega <brionvega.it/en/shop/outlet-en/algol/> (May 21, 2016).

¹²⁹ Cicena Overdrive Boombox <radvet.com/Cicena_Overdrive_Boombox.html> (May 26, 2016).

¹³⁰ Patrick Mott, 'Decorating Along Automotive Lines' in *LA Times* February 29, 1992.



Fig. 22. The Pro-Ject The Classic.
Photo: turntablelab.com.

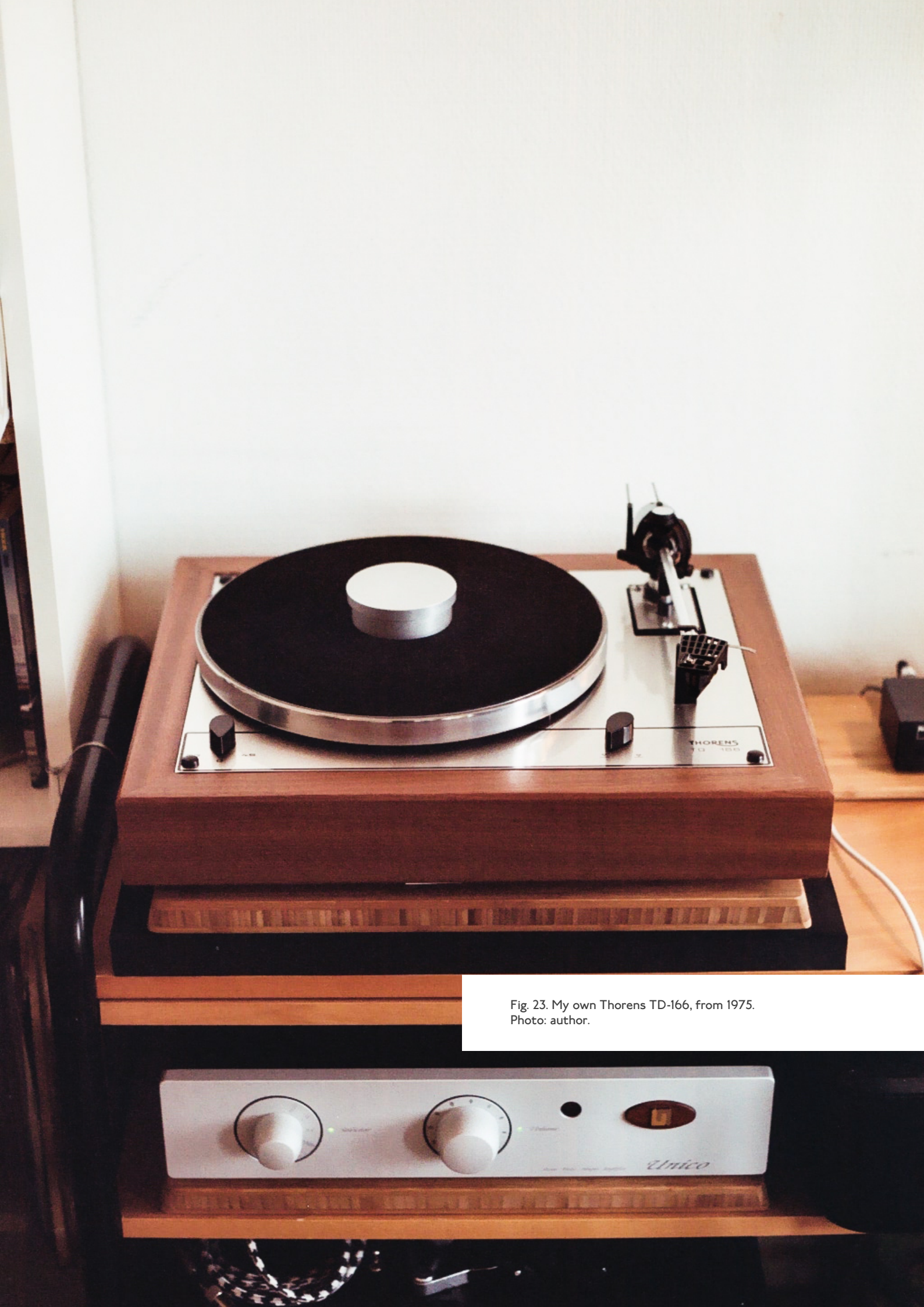


Fig. 23. My own Thorens TD-166, from 1975.
Photo: author.



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Fig. 24. Above: the Leica M3, introduced in 1954.
Below: the Leica M10, introduced in 2017.
In these photos, the same lens is fitted on both cameras.
Photo: Ken Rockwell.



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Conclusion

How does retro design exist in audio equipment and televisions?

The aim of this research is to analyse modern, contemporary hi-fi audio and television products that use retro in their design or in their marketing. Retro has been around for most of the twentieth century and its sentiment, looking back at earlier periods, is something we can see from Antiquity right up to now. Taking the come-back of drawings by Beardsley as a starting point in the 1960s, academic research has traced retro throughout the twenty-first century. Retro design in consumer electronics is something that already started in the early 1990s, with Cicena making Fifties automobile radios and Crosley gearing up to become one of the biggest retro manufacturers in the world. But how does retro design work in these contemporary audio and video products? What kind of designs are being used and what is the story that manufacturers tell with these products? To answer this question I chose several different retro designed products from six different brands. I analysed their designs, their inspirations and the marketing behind these products. I then categorised every case study: *Transitional* for designs that go back to an earlier product, usually from the same company. *Synthetic General* for designs that do not have an actual historical precedent, but adapt design languages of the past for a modern product and *Synthetic Comprehensive* for designs that not only use a design style from the past, but are also meticulously detailed in their retro design. You'd be forgiven for thinking that a *Synthetic Comprehensive* product was actually decades old when you looked at it. To give context to the case studies, I also briefly summarised retro design in the camera market, in kitchen appliances and from other audio companies.

A subtle approach to retro was taken by Bang & Olufsen with the introduction of the BeoVision Avant in 2014. The television set shares its name with the BeoVision Avant from 1995. The two designs have little in common, mostly because of the difference in technology (for one, the display panel in the new Avant is much larger and much thinner). The clear stark lines of the original remain though and the typical, small rectangular IR receiver on the top of the device is kept as well. On a deeper level the two Avant televisions have a better reason for sharing a name. Both TVs are the first time Bang & Olufsen used a technology. Where the original BeoVision Avant was the first Bang & Olufsen TV to use a widescreen panel, the new Avant is the first to feature 4K UHD. The name Avant suggests the innovation in 2014 is just as big as it was in 1995. Another big aspect of its retro designation is the marketing behind the TV. The new Avant uses a lot of movement; its speakers move from behind the television, its motorised stand turns towards the viewer and its screen opens up like a curtain when the TV is turned on. In a short marketing film, Bang & Olufsen shows how that motion has played a role in many of its products. We see products from the company's rich history surrounded by period style interiors and surroundings, bringing home the message that the new BeoVision Avant is a new step in a long line of innovative product design and craftsmanship. I put the new Avant into the *transitional* category of retro design, because of the common design features that exist between the two televisions and because of the implied message behind the name.

Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec designed the Samsung SERIF in 2015. The television looks very different from other products in Samsung's line-up. Sleek slim lines are nowhere to be found, instead the SERIF has a large wooden bezel that looks like an 'I' from the sides. It was designed to blend into the environment, to look like a frame surrounding a painting. Neither Samsung nor the Bouroullec brothers mention the word retro and the accompanying marketing material only shows the television in pristine modern interiors. The TV does have retro design elements. Its large frame with its flaring edges looks like early television sets, with their furniture-like cabinets. Because of its retro connotations in a modern design the SERIF is a *synthetic general* retro design.

The IFI Stereo 50 amplifier and the IFI LS3.5 loudspeaker both look exactly like audio products in the 1970s. The Stereo 50 amplifier has all modern inputs and functions for the modern listener, but its cabinet, with its aluminium

front, large knobs and wooden exterior, looks like many amplifiers made decades ago. Its amplification through vacuum tubes is an old technology (though definitely not *old-fashioned*). Its design falls into the *synthetic comprehensive* category, because it is in every detail a retro-styled amplifier. The LS3.5 is marketed as a remake of the legendary BBC Monitor LS3/5A and so looks like this speaker from 1975. The speakers' internal components are proprietary design though, so it is only a remake in spirit. I categorised this design as *synthetic comprehensive* as well.

The PodSpeakers MiniPod was designed in 1994 and updated in 1996. Today that same design is still being sold, in the same colours and finishes, though with more advanced drivers and crossovers. The original high-gloss version with the aluminium feet looks very retro-futuristic today. That is why the PodSpeaker range is now available in a matte finish with wooden (and golden) spikes. This makes the speaker look much more contemporary, although the use of wooden spikes could be seen as a retro design detail. The design is still original, but the matte finish is new: *transitional*.

Crosley Radio was among the first to produce retro-styled radios in the 1990s. When they designed a turntable in 1992 and closed an exclusive selling contract with Urban Outfitters in 2007, Crosley became the best known retro audio manufacturer in the world. They are the case in point in this research. I choose three different record players to analyse, in order to give a short but comprehensive overview of their line-up. The Crosley Bermuda is an almost exact copy of the original Dansette Bermuda, with the addition of an auxiliary input. It is a *transitional* design. The Crosley Spinnerette is *transitional* design too, this time carefully copying the Philips 22GF403 record player. Crosley added a 3.5 mm input and a USB port. They also changed the colour of the speaker grille from silver to black and they offer a blue and a red version. The Crosley Cruiser is Crosley's most important turntable, the most well-known and the bestselling. Although its small details give the Cruiser a very retro appearance, there is no obvious historical precedent for the small suitcase with its rounded corners. The Cruiser is an original design by Crosley and it modernises the vintage look they feature in their other products. Therefore, the Cruiser is a *synthetic comprehensive* design.

On their own website and in their marketing Crosley Radio does not call itself a retro company, but the descriptions alongside their products frequently mention words like retro, vintage and classic. Their name comes from an American company that was founded in 1907, but considering the company today has nothing to do with the original, there is no direct history Crosley can relate to. So they don't, instead taking their own or iconic and trademark-less designs to create their products.

The Philips OTT2000 turntable is, as we have seen, marketed as being inspired by an older Philips record player, the AG4131. One look however, at these two products shows us the design similarities are very small. It is much more likely Philips looked at other record players from that period for inspiration for the design of the OTT2000. One design stands out: the Philco F1404 from 1958 looks just like the new Philips, in materials and in colour. Based on the overall modern look of the OTT2000, I categorised this design as *synthetic general*. The question remains why Philips took a seemingly random model number for its marketing. For customers not intimate with Philips' product history, the reference to a "legendary" model from the past suggests a rich heritage and great craftsmanship infused in this new turntable. We can't ignore the idea however that Philips only decided to make the OTT2000 and their Original Radio-line after Crosley Radio had become successful with their retro turntables and radios. By claiming a (rightful) history with record players, Philips could show they had more experience, leading to better products.

In analysing these products, their design, retro inspirations and marketing messages, I found a few common themes. For one, hi-fi audio and television products with a retro design tend to be based on or inspired by designs that were prevalent before around 1980. Crosley makes a few radios and turntables with a 1930s look, but most of their designs come from 50s and 60s. The Philips OTT2000 also looks like record players from the late 1950s and 60s. The IFI Stereo 50 amplifier and speakers are detailed copies of hi-fi made in the 1970s. Even the Samsung Serif has it undercurrent of retro from the 1940s. Only the Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant and of course the Podspeakers MiniPod use a design from after 1990. Looking at the rest of the audio market, Technics, Thorens, Epsilon, Brionvega and Rega all reintroduced products that were originally designed before 1980. This may be a coincidence, those classic designs were all created before that time. Another explanation is that designs from after 1980 still feels too new and therefore looks dated when reintroduced as retro. Retro works best with distance. This means it is entirely possible that we will see design from the last three decades emerge as retro in a few years.

Most of the retro-styled products in the consumer electronics market are reinterpretations or reissues based on historically important products for the company. In the design itself and in marketing material, companies constantly refer to a rich heritage. Bang & Olufsen does this via a film showing their iconic products, Philips mentions one of their many record players from the past and PodSpeaker is keen to show the MiniPod was originally designed by Simon Ghahary. All other audio companies I highlighted in the previous chapter reissued an iconic design or technology. Retro design, whether *transitional* or *synthetic*, is a way for companies to show off their history and heritage. By mentioning classic products from their past, they can remind customers how good those products were and how these new interpretations surely must be too. It is a way of differentiating from the competition.

This does not apply to companies who do not have a rich history to relate to and who make retro products for retro's sake. IFI wasn't around when 70s amplifiers were made and yet here is the Stereo 50. Crosley might have taken the name from an old American radio company, but they do not claim its history. Here, the perceived newness of a retro-styled product comes into play. While retro products are not technologically any different from their modernly designed counterparts, they do *look different*, they stand out.

I think this also why the inspiration of retro products almost always comes from the decades before 1980. Products made in the last decades still feel out-dated to us and have not (yet?) the rose-tinted connotation of a time where things were simpler and better. Many people still know these products, maybe having owned or used them in the past. Performance-wise, I think in the minds of many people those younger technologies and designs - CRT televisions, the first CD-players - still represent less advanced technology compared to what we have today. For even older technologies, like tube amplifiers, turntables and early radios, this is not the case. These technologies are still being used today and are still being praised for their inherent qualities. Marrying these 'retro' technologies with modern materials and capabilities makes sense, even from a performance point-of-view. Using a visual style from that period strengthens the positive connotations of that technology. This is why I think it is very unlikely we will see a reissue of the Sony CDP-101, the first CD-player ever (1982), any time soon. We will always remember the less-than-stellar performance of the first CD-players.

For some brands, the notion of retro, heritage or reinterpretation is not something they communicate explicitly. Samsung created the Samsung SERIF TV and to me, that is a retro-styled television. Its shape and materials instantly remind of early TV sets. Perceived newness plays a role here. This television looks radically different from other televisions by Samsung and other manufacturers. The PodSpeakers MiniPod is a design from 1994 and while it has had its updates, the original high-gloss version with its aluminium spikes, looks very 90s to me. PodSpeakers must have realised this too, because the new versions with a matte finish are much more modern. Retro notions exists in these products even though they were not specifically designed to be retro. Especially in the case of the SERIF, it shows that the retro design is seeping into our contemporary design language. It might be subtle, but it's there. Retro is a part of our design language. It's never been gone and now its imbued in all of our products. New designs that link to the past come out everyday and it is good to be aware of that. It would be unfair to downplay our current design climate as 'just retro' or 'we have seen that before.' We have to know where we come from before we can move onwards.

It appears there is a design language people associate with creating a *synthetic general* or *comprehensive* retro design. Most designs use 'honest' materials, like wood and aluminium. Natural unpainted wood was used frequently in midcentury modern furniture, as well as in hi-fi amplifiers and receivers with their characteristic wooden cases and brushed aluminium fronts. Fabric is another example, used on the back of the Samsung Serif. The faux leather finishes of the Crosley turntables are not only a way to keep manufacturing costs down, they are also historically correct, as we have seen on the original Dansette and Philips record players. In the case studies, plastics are only being used when the original historical inspirations were made from plastic as well. Obviously there are other products not mentioned in this research that use plastic to reach a lower price point.

Certain forms can be determined too. Slanted (wooden) feet originally used on midcentury furniture now appear as the spikes of the PodSpeakers MiniPod and as feet for the Crosley Dansette and the SERIF. And in general, we can see the prevalence of rounded corners in these case studies (the Bang & Olufsen BeoVision being the obvious exception). I think colours, like moss green or dark yellow, can be a part of this language too, but in these case studies there are no obvious stylistic preferences. Crosley products for instance, come in so many different colours that there is no argument for retro to be made for their choice of colours.

So retro design is not just inspired by the past, but inspired by specific forms of the past. Designers and companies do not just take random forms from the recent past and use them, they only pick the designs that serve their purpose. Either the design strengthens their history and heritage or it subtly uses a design language that can be found in other aspects of our world too, like the films and television series we watch, the music we listen to or the furniture we buy. Retro designs are picked to be in line with our modern tastes. No ostentatious buttons, lights and switches, but the clean sober approach of Luxman. No beige or brown coloured pickup players, but bright and happy ones. Our retro design is influenced by our modern tastes. We cherry pick retro designs to fit our contemporary design taste.

In the introduction I asked that if technology always advances, wouldn't we want its design to advance with it? While this question is not the research topic, I think this is a question I need to reflect upon. I do not think retro design is a bad thing. Many retro designs highlight a company's history in a way modern designs are not able to do. And when everyone makes products that perform excellently, this company history is what can set a product apart from the competition. Retro products also look very different from the competition. Whether people like it is a matter of taste, but at least the retro design lets the product stand out, makes it memorable. I also think the softer nostalgic language of retro designs can help people with accepting modern technology. Clean and abstract lines tell a story of cold performance, while the gentle warmth of retro can invite people in. Nostalgia surely plays a role too, but this is not the only good thing about retro. Put simply, I think retro can be a good thing, as long it doesn't slip into useless kitsch. Having said that, I still believe design should evolve towards the future, in both its capabilities and its aesthetics. Older designs, *retro* designs can help us, however. Help us make technology more human.

Discussion

In this research I analysed retro designs in consumer electronics, specifically in audio equipment like turntables, amplifiers, speakers and televisions. There are many more industries in which retro design can be found and I only highlighted a few of those. What to think of the car industry of the computer industry? Furthermore, within audio and video products there is a wealth of other retro designs to study. I took six case studies and while I feel they are good examples of the retro trend, there were many more candidates. Researching more products will be very fruitful. Further research could also be done on companies and their design briefs themselves. Why do they reissue designs? Why do they use retro designs for their new products? The analyses above are all reasons why retro designs exist. There is one other, but proving it requires more research from a marketing perspective: retro sells. Companies like Crosley are very popular and their products sell all over the world. It would be naive to deny that other companies would not be interested in retro because of the profits that can be made. It does not apply to every company I have analysed here. I think Bang & Olufsen certainly uses its history to its advantage, but it did not blatantly design a retro TV. Reissuing famous designs and copying successful retro brands, like Crosley does, must be very effective ways to sell. That leaves the question of why so many people are fond of retro products. It is a question that I keep coming back to. This research has only given possible explanations and they are discussed above. I am sure however that further research can improve on these.

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