Steve Jobs: The Next Insanely Great Thing

Steve Jobs interview by Gary Wolf

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Steve Jobs has been right twice. The first time we got Apple. The second time we got NeXT. The Macintosh ruled. NeXT tanked. Still, Jobs was right both times. Although NeXT failed to sell its elegant and infamously buggy black box, Jobs's fundamental insight that personal computers were destined to be connected to each other and live on networks was just as accurate as his earlier prophecy that computers were destined to become personal appliances.
Now Jobs is making a third guess about the future. His passion these days is for objects. Objects are software modules that can be combined into new applications (see "Get Ready for Web Objects"), much as pieces of Lego are built into toy houses. Jobs argues that objects are the key to keeping up with the exponential growth of the World Wide Web. And it's commerce, he says, that will fuel the next phase of the Web explosion.

On a foggy morning last year, I drove down to the headquarters of NeXT Computer Inc. in Redwood City, California, to meet with Jobs. The building was quiet and immaculate, with that atmosphere of low-slung corporate luxury typical of successful Silicon Valley companies heading into their second decade. Ironically, NeXT is not a success. After burning through hundreds of millions of dollars from investors, the company abandoned the production of computers, focusing instead on the sale and development of its Nextstep operating system and on extensions into object-oriented technology.

Here at NeXT, Jobs was not interested in talking about Pixar Animation Studios, the maker of the world's first fully computer-generated feature movie, Toy Story (see "The Toy Story Story," Wired 3.12, page 146). Jobs founded Pixar in 1986 when he bought out a computer division of Lucasfilm Ltd. for US$60 million, and with Pixar's upcoming public stock offering, he was poised to become a billionaire in a single day. To Jobs, Pixar was a done deal, Toy Story was in the can, and he was prepared to let his IPO do the talking.

A different type of executive might have talked only about Pixar. But even when given the chance to crow, Jobs kept talking about Web objects and his ambitions for NeXT. He was fixed on the next big thing. And that was fine. After all, people often become more interesting when they've failed at something, and with his fall from Apple, the struggle at

NeXT, and the triumph of Pixar, Jobs is now moving into his second circuit around the wheel of fortune. What has he learned?

As we began our interview, Jobs was testy. He told me that he didn't care anymore about revolutionizing society, and that he didn't believe changes in technology could solve the most important problems we face. The future of the Web was in the hands of big corporations, he said. This was where the money was going to be made. This was where NeXT was pitching its products.

I couldn't help but wonder how this incarnation of Steve Jobs jibed with the old revolutionary of Apple and the early years of NeXT. As the conversation deepened, some of the connections slowly grew clear. Jobs's testiness faded, and he allowed himself to speculate on the democratizing effects of the Web and his hope for defending it against the threat of Microsoft. Jobs's obsession with his old rival took the form of an unusual proposal for all parties to voluntarily keep the Web simple and avoid increasingly popular client-side enhancements like HotJava.

In the old days, Jobs was an evangelist for American education and worked hard to get computers in schools. The partnership between Apple and educators was key in establishing a market for the Macintosh, while the NeXT machine was originally designed to serve primarily as a tool for students and teachers. Now, Jobs flatly concludes, technology can't help fix the problems with our education system. His new solutions are decidedly low-tech.

The new Steve Jobs scoffs at the naïve idealism of Web partisans who believe the new medium will turn every person into a publisher. The heart of the Web, he said, will be commerce, and the heart of commerce will be corporate America serving custom products to individual consumers. The implicit message of the Macintosh, as unforgettably expressed in the great "1984" commercial, was Power to the People. Jobs's vision of Web objects serves a different mandate: Give the People What They Want.

Wired : The Macintosh computer set the tone for 10 years. Do you think the Web may be setting the tone today?

Jobs : The desktop computer industry is dead. Innovation has virtually ceased. Microsoft dominates with very little innovation. That's over. Apple lost. The desktop market has entered the dark ages, and it's going to be in the dark ages for the next 10 years, or certainly for the rest of this decade.
It's like when IBM drove a lot of innovation out of the computer industry before the microprocessor came along.
Eventually, Microsoft will crumble because of complacency, and maybe some new things will grow. But until that happens, until there's some fundamental technology shift, it's just over.
The most exciting things happening today are objects and the Web. The Web is exciting for two reasons. One, it's ubiquitous. There will be Web dial tone everywhere. And anything that's ubiquitous gets interesting. Two, I don't think Microsoft will figure out a way to own it. There's going to be a lot more innovation, and that will create a place where there isn't this dark cloud of dominance.

Why do you think the Web has sprouted so fast?

One of the major reasons for the Web's proliferation so far is its simplicity. A lot of people want to make the Web more complicated. They want to put processing on the clients, they want to do this and that. I hope not too much of that happens too quickly.
It's much like the old mainframe computing environment, where a Web browser is like a dumb terminal and the Web server is like the mainframe where all the processing's done. This simple model has had a profound impact by starting to become ubiquitous.

And objects?

When I went to Xerox PARC in 1979, I saw a very rudimentary graphical user interface. It wasn't complete. It wasn't quite right. But within 10 minutes, it was obvious that every computer in the world would work this way someday. And you could argue about the number of years it would take, and you could argue about who would be the winners and the losers, but I don't think you could argue that every computer in the world wouldn't eventually work this way.

Objects are the same way. Once you understand objects, it's clear that all software will eventually be written using objects. Again, you can argue about how many years it will take, and who the winners and losers will be during this transition, but you can't argue about the inevitability of this transition.

Objects are just going to be the way all software is going to be written in five years or pick a time. It's so compelling. It's so obvious. It's so much better that it's just going to happen.

How will objects affect the Web?

Think of all the people now bringing goods and services directly to customers through the Web. Every company that wants to vend its goods and services on the Web is going to have a great deal of custom application software to write. You're not just going to be able to buy something off the shelf. You're going to have to hook the Web into your order-management systems, your collection systems. It's going to be an incredible amount of work.

The number of applications that need to be written is growing exponentially. Unless we can find a way to write them in a tenth of the time, we're toast.

The end result of objects this repackaging of software is that we can develop applications with only about 10 to 20 percent of the software development required any other way.

We see how people won the battle of the desktop by owning the operating system. How does one win on the Web?

There are three parts to the Web. One is the client, the second is the pipes, and the third is the servers.

On the client side, there's the browser software. In the sense of making money, it doesn't look like anybody is going to win on the browser software side, because it's going to be free. And then there's the typical hardware. It's possible that some people could come out with some very interesting Web terminals and sell some hardware.

On the pipe side, the RBOCs are going to win. In the coming months, you're going to see a lot of them offering a service for under $25 a month. You get ISDN strung into your den, you get a little box to hook it into your PC, and you get an Internet account, which is going to be very popular. The RBOCs are going to be the companies that get you on the Web. They have a vested interest in doing that. They'd like to screw the cable companies; they'd like to preserve the customers. This is all happening right now. You don't see it. It's under the ground like the roots of a tree, but it's going to spring up and you're going to see this big tree within a few years.

As for the server market, companies like Sun are doing a nice business selling servers. But with Web server software, no one company has more than a single-digit market share yet. Netscape sells hardly any, because you can get free public-domain software and it's very good. Some people say that it's even better than what you can buy.

Our company decided that people are going to layer stuff above this very simple Web server to help others build Web applications, which is where the bottleneck is right now. There's some real opportunity there for making major contributions and a lot of money. That's what WebObjects is all about.

What other opportunities are out there?

Who do you think will be the main beneficiary of the Web? Who wins the most?

People who have something -

To sell!

To share.

To sell!

You mean publishing?

It's more than publishing. It's commerce. People are going to stop going to a lot of stores. And they're going to buy stuff over the Web!

What about the Web as the great democratizer?

If you look at things I've done in my life, they have an element of democratizing. The Web is an incredible democratizer. A small company can look as large as a big company and be as accessible as a big company on the Web. Big companies spend hundreds of millions of dollars building their distribution channels. And the Web is going to completely neutralize that advantage.

What will the economic landscape look like after that democratic process has gone through another cycle?

The Web is not going to change the world, certainly not in the next 10 years. It's going to augment the world. And once you're in this Web-augmented space, you're going to see that democratization takes place.
The Web's not going to capture everybody. If the Web got up to 10 percent of the goods and services in this country, it would be phenomenal. I think it'll go much higher than that. Eventually, it will become a huge part of the economy.

What's the biggest surprise this technology will deliver?

The problem is I'm older now, I'm 40 years old, and this stuff doesn't change the world. It really doesn't.

That's going to break people's hearts.

I'm sorry, it's true. Having children really changes your view on these things. We're born, we live for a brief instant, and we die. It's been happening for a long time. Technology is not changing it much if at all.
These technologies can make life easier, can let us touch people we might not otherwise. You may have a child with a birth defect and be able to get in touch with other parents and support groups, get medical information, the latest experimental drugs. These things can profoundly influence life. I'm not downplaying that. But it's a disservice to constantly put things in this radical new light that it's going to change everything. Things don't have to change the world to be important.
The Web is going to be very important. Is it going to be a life-changing event for millions of people? No. I mean, maybe. But it's not an assured Yes at this point. And it'll probably creep up on people.
It's certainly not going to be like the first time somebody saw a television. It's certainly not going to be as profound as when someone in Nebraska first heard a radio broadcast. It's not going to be that profound.

Then how will the Web impact our society?

We live in an information economy, but I don't believe we live in an information society. People are thinking less than they used to. It's primarily because of television. People are reading less and they're certainly thinking less. So, I don't see most people using the Web to get more information. We're already in information overload. No matter how much information the Web can dish out, most people get far more information than they can assimilate anyway.

The problem is television?

When you're young, you look at television and think, There's a conspiracy. The networks have conspired to dumb us down. But when you get a little older, you realize that's not true. The networks are in business to give people exactly what they want. That's a far more depressing thought. Conspiracy is optimistic! You can shoot the bastards! We can have a revolution! But the networks are really in business to give people what they want. It's the truth.

So Steve Jobs is telling us things are going to continue to get worse.

They are getting worse! Everybody knows that they're getting worse! Don't you think they're getting worse?

I do, but I was hoping I could come here and find out how they were going to get better. Do you really believe that the world is getting worse? Or do you have a feeling that the things you're involved with are making the world better?

No. The world's getting worse. It has gotten worse for the last 15 years or so. Definitely. For two reasons. On a global scale, the population is increasing dramatically and all our structures, from ecological to economic to political, just cannot deal with it. And in this country, we seem to have fewer smart people in government, and people don't seem to be paying as much attention to the important decisions we have to make.

But you seem very optimistic about the potential for change.

I'm an optimist in the sense that I believe humans are noble and honorable, and some of them are really smart. I have a very optimistic view of individuals. As individuals, people are inherently good. I have a somewhat more pessimistic view of people in groups. And I remain extremely concerned when I see what's happening in our country, which is in many ways the luckiest place in the world. We don't seem to be excited about making our country a better place for our kids. The people who built Silicon Valley were engineers. They learned business, they learned a lot of different things, but they had a real belief that humans, if they worked hard with other creative, smart people, could solve most of humankind's problems. I believe that very much.
I believe that people with an engineering point of view as a basic foundation are in a pretty good position to jump in and solve some of these problems. But in society, it's not working. Those people are not attracted to the political process. And why would somebody be?

Could technology help by improving education?

I used to think that technology could help education. I've probably spearheaded giving away more computer equipment to schools than anybody else on the planet. But I've had to come to the inevitable conclusion that the problem is not one that technology can hope to solve. What's wrong with education cannot be fixed with technology. No amount of technology will make a dent.
It's a political problem. The problems are sociopolitical. The problems are unions. You plot the growth of the NEA [National Education Association] and the dropping of SAT scores, and they're inversely proportional. The problems are unions in the schools. The problem is bureaucracy. I'm one of these people who believes the best thing we could ever do is go to the full voucher system.
I have a 17-year-old daughter who went to a private school for a few years before high school. This private school is the best school I've seen in my life. It was judged one of the 100 best schools in America. It was phenomenal. The tuition was $5,500 a year, which is a lot of money for most parents. But the teachers were paid less than public school teachers so it's not about money at the teacher level. I asked the state treasurer that year what California pays on average to send kids to school, and I believe it was $4,400. While there are not many parents who could come up with $5,500 a year, there are many who could come up with $1,000 a year.

If we gave vouchers to parents for $4,400 a year, schools would be starting right and left. People would get out of college and say, "Let's start a school." You could have a track at Stanford within the MBA program on how to be the businessperson of a school. And that MBA would get together with somebody else, and they'd start schools. And you'd have these young, idealistic people starting schools, working for pennies.

They'd do it because they'd be able to set the curriculum. When you have kids you think, What exactly do I want them to learn? Most of the stuff they study in school is completely useless. But some incredibly valuable things you don't learn until you're older yet you could learn them when you're younger. And you start to think, What would I do if I set a curriculum for a school?

God, how exciting that could be! But you can't do it today. You'd be crazy to work in a school today. You don't get to do what you want. You don't get to pick your books, your curriculum. You get to teach one narrow specialization. Who would ever want to do that?

These are the solutions to our problems in education. Unfortunately, technology isn't it. You're not going to solve the problems by putting all knowledge onto CD-ROMs. We can put a Web site in every school none of this is bad. It's bad only if it lulls us into thinking we're doing something to solve the problem with education.

Lincoln did not have a Web site at the log cabin where his parents home-schooled him, and he turned out pretty interesting. Historical precedent shows that we can turn out amazing human beings without technology. Precedent also shows that we can turn out very uninteresting human beings with technology.

It's not as simple as you think when you're in your 20s that technology's going to change the world. In some ways it will, in some ways it won't.

If you go back five years, the Web was hardly on anybody's horizon. Maybe even three years ago, it wasn't really being taken seriously by many people. Why is the sudden rise of the Web so surprising?

Isn't it great? That's exactly what's not happening in the desktop market.

Why was everyone, including NeXT, surprised, though?

It's a little like the telephone. When you have two telephones, it's not very interesting. And three is not very interesting. And four. And, well, a hundred telephones perhaps becomes slightly interesting. A thousand, a little more. It's probably not until you get to around ten thousand telephones that it really gets interesting.

Many people didn't foresee, couldn't imagine, what it would be like to have a million, or a few tens of thousands of Web sites. And when there were only a hundred, or two hundred, or when they were all university ones, it just wasn't very interesting. Eventually, it went beyond this critical mass and got very interesting very fast. You could see it. And people said, "Wow! This is incredible."

The Web reminds me of the early days of the PC industry. No one really knows anything. There are no experts. All the experts have been wrong. There's a tremendous open possibility to the whole thing. And it hasn't been confined, or defined, in too many ways. That's wonderful.

There's a phrase in Buddhism, "Beginner's mind." It's wonderful to have a beginner's mind.

Earlier, you seemed to say there's a natural affinity between the Web and objects. That these two things are going to come together and make something very new, right?

Let's try this another way. What might you want to do on a Web server? We can think of four things:

One is simple publishing. That's what 99 percent of the people do today. If that's all you want to do, you can get one of a hundred free Web-server software packages off the Net and just use it. No problem. It works fine. Security's not a giant issue because you're not doing credit card transactions over the Web.

The next thing you can do is complex publishing. People are starting to do complex publishing on the Web very simple forms of it. This will absolutely explode in the next 12 to 18 months. It's the next big phase of the Web. Have you seen

the Federal Express Web site where you can track a package? It took Federal Express about four months to write that program and it's extremely simple. Four months. It would be nice to do that in four days, or two days, or one day.

The third thing is commerce, which is even harder than complex publishing because you have to tie the Web into your order-management system, your collection system, things like that. I think we're still two years away. But that's also going to be huge.

Last is internal Web sites. Rather than the Internet, it's intranet. Rather than write several different versions of an application for internal consumption one for Mac, one for PC, one for Unix people can write a single version and have a cross-platform product. Everybody uses the Web. We're going to see companies have dozens if not hundreds of Web servers internally as a means to communicate with themselves.

Three of those four functions of the Web require custom applications. And that's what we do really well with objects. Our new product, WebObjects, allows you to write Web applications 10 times faster.

How does the Web affect the economy?

We live in an information economy. The problem is that information's usually impossible to get, at least in the right place, at the right time.

The reason Federal Express won over its competitors was its package-tracking system. For the company to bring that package-tracking system onto the Web is phenomenal. I use it all the time to track my packages. It's incredibly great. Incredibly reassuring. And getting that information out of most companies is usually impossible.

But it's also incredibly difficult to give information. Take auto dealerships. So much money is spent on inventory billions and billions of dollars. Inventory is not a good thing. Inventory ties up a ton of cash, it's open to vandalism, it becomes obsolete. It takes a tremendous amount of time to manage. And, usually, the car you want, in the color you want, isn't there anyway, so they've got to horse-trade around. Wouldn't it be nice to get rid of all that inventory? Just have one white car to drive and maybe a laserdisc so you can look at the other colors. Then you order your car and you get it in a week.

Today a dealer says, "We can't get your car in a week. It takes three months." And you say, "Now wait a minute, I want to order a pink Cadillac with purple leather seats. Why can't I get that in a week?" And he says, "We gotta make it." And you say, "Are you making Cadillacs today? Why can't you paint a pink one today?" And he says, "We didn't know you wanted a pink one." And you say, "OK. I'm going to tell you I want a pink one now." And he says, "We don't have any pink paint. Our paint supplier needs some lead time on that paint." And you say, "Is your paint supplier making paint today?" And he says, "Yeah, but by the time we tell him, it takes two weeks." And you say, "What about leather seats?" And he says, "God, purple leather. It'll take three months to get that."

You follow this back, and you find that it's not how long it takes to make stuff; it's how long it takes the information to flow through the system. And yet electronics move at the speed of light or very close to it.

So pushing information into the system is sometimes immensely frustrating, and the Web is going to be just as much of a breakthrough in terms of pushing information in as getting information out.

Your view about the Web is an alternative to the commonly held one that it's going to be the renaissance of personal publishing. The person who can't get published through the broadcast media will get a chance to say something.

There's nothing wrong with that. The Web is great because that person can't foist anything on you you have to go get it. They can make themselves available, but if nobody wants to look at their site, that's fine. To be honest, most people who have something to say get published now.

But when we ask how a person's life is changed by these technologies, pushing information to customize products makes marginal differences. You go to the store and there's a lot of different kinds of toilet paper some have tulips embossed on them and some don't. You're standing there making a choice, and you want the one with the embossed tulips.

I like the ones without the tulips.

I do, too and unscented. But that customization is relevant to you for that second but in no other way. For the average person, the possibility to participate as a publisher or a producer has a higher value for them.

I don't necessarily agree. The best way to think of the Web is as a direct-to-customer distribution channel, whether it's for information or commerce. It bypasses all middlemen. And, it turns out, there are a lot of middlepersons in this society. And they generally tend to slow things down, muck things up, and make things more expensive. The elimination of them is going to be profound.

Do you think large institutions are going to be the center of the economy, basically driving it as they are now? Some people say the big company is going to fragment.

I don't see that. There's nothing wrong with big companies. A lot of people think big business in America is a bad thing. I think it's a really good thing. Most people in business are ethical, hard-working, good people. And it's a meritocracy. There are very visible examples in business of where it breaks down but it's probably a lot less than in most other areas of society.

You don't think that structural economic changes will tend to shrink the size of these large companies?

Large companies not paying attention to change will get hurt. The Web will be one more area of significant change and those who don't pay attention will get hurt, while those who see it early enough will get rewarded.
The Web is just going to be one more of those major change factors that businesses face every decade. This decade, in the next 10 years, it's going to be the Web. It's going to be one of them.

But doesn't the Web foster more freedom for individuals?

It is a leveling of hierarchy. An individual can put up a Web site that, if they put enough work into it, looks just as impressive as the largest company in the world.
I love things that level hierarchy, that bring the individual up to the same level as an organization, or a small group up to the same level as a large group with much greater resources. And the Web and the Internet do that. It's a very profound thing, and a very good thing.

Yet the majority of your customers for WebObjects seem to be corporations.

That's correct. And big ones.

Does that cause you any kind of conflict?

Sure. And that's why we're going to be giving our WebObjects software away to individuals and educational institutions for noncommercial use. We've made the decision to give it away.

Shooting the Web in the foot

What do you think about HotJava and the like?

It's going to take a long time for that stuff to become a standard on the Web. And that may shoot the Web in the foot. If the Web becomes too complicated, too fraught with security concerns, then its proliferation may stop or slow down. The most important thing for the Web is to stay ahead of Microsoft. Not to become more complicated.

That's very interesting. Java pushes the technology toward the client side. Do you find that wrong?

In my opinion? In the next two years? It's dead wrong. Because it may slow down getting to ubiquity. And anything that slows down the Web reaching ubiquity allows Microsoft to catch up. If Microsoft catches up, it's far worse than the fact the Web can't do word processing. Those things can be fixed later.

There's a window now that will close. If you don't cross the finish line in the next two years, Microsoft will own the Web. And that will be the end of it.

Let's assume for a second that many people share an interest in a standard Web that provides a strong alternative to Microsoft. However, when it comes to every individual Web company or Web publisher, they have an interest in making sure that their Web site stays on the edge. I know we do at HotWired. And so we have to get people into HotJava we have to stay out there which doesn't bode well for retaining simplicity. We're going to be part of that force pushing people toward a more complicated Web, because we have no choice.

The way you make it more complex is not by throwing stuff on the client side but by providing value, like Federal Express does, by becoming more complex on the server side.

I'm just very concerned that if the clients become smart, the first thing this will do is fracture the Web. There won't be just one standard. There'll be several; they're all going to fight; each one has its problems. So it's going to be very easy to say why just one shouldn't be the standard. And a fractured Web community will play right into Microsoft's hands.

The client-server relationship should be frozen for the next two years, and we shouldn't take it much further. We should just let it be.

By collective agreement?

Yeah. By collective agreement. Sure. Go for ubiquity. If Windows can become ubiquitous, so can the existing Web.

How did Windows become ubiquitous?

A force of self-interest throughout the industry made Windows ubiquitous. Compaq and all these different vendors made Windows ubiquitous. They didn't know how to spell software, but they wanted to put something on their machines. That made Windows ubiquitous.

So it just kind of happened.

No, it was sort of an algorithm that got set in motion when everyone's self-interest aligned toward making this happen. And I claim that the same sort of self-interest algorithm is present on the Web. Everyone has a self-interest in making this Web ubiquitous and not having anyone own it especially not Microsoft.

Is the desktop metaphor going to continue to dominate how we relate to computers, or is there some other metaphor you like better?

To have a new metaphor, you really need new issues. The desktop metaphor was invented because one, you were a stand-alone device, and two, you had to manage your own storage. That's a very big thing in a desktop world. And that may go away. You may not have to manage your own storage. You may not store much before too long.

I don't store anything anymore, really. I use a lot of e-mail and the Web, and with both of those I don't have to ever manage storage. As a matter of fact, my favorite way of reminding myself to do something is to send myself e-mail. That's my storage.

The minute that I don't have to manage my own storage, and the minute I live primarily in a connected versus a stand-alone world, there are new options for metaphors.

You have a reputation for making well-designed products. Why aren't more products made with the aesthetics of great design?

Design is a funny word. Some people think design means how it looks. But of course, if you dig deeper, it's really how it works. The design of the Mac wasn't what it looked like, although that was part of it. Primarily, it was how it worked. To design something really well, you have to get it. You have to really grok what it's all about. It takes a passionate commitment to really thoroughly understand something, chew it up, not just quickly swallow it. Most people don't take the time to do that.

Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things. And the reason they were able to do that was that they've had more experiences or they have thought more about their experiences than other people. Unfortunately, that's too rare a commodity. A lot of people in our industry haven't had very diverse experiences. So they don't have enough dots to connect, and they end up with very linear solutions without a broad perspective on the problem. The broader one's understanding of the human experience, the better design we will have.

Is there anything well designed today that inspires you?

Design is not limited to fancy new gadgets. Our family just bought a new washing machine and dryer. We didn't have a very good one so we spent a little time looking at them. It turns out that the Americans make washers and dryers all wrong. The Europeans make them much better but they take twice as long to do clothes! It turns out that they wash them with about a quarter as much water and your clothes end up with a lot less detergent on them. Most important, they don't trash your clothes. They use a lot less soap, a lot less water, but they come out much cleaner, much softer, and they last a lot longer.

We spent some time in our family talking about what's the trade-off we want to make. We ended up talking a lot about design, but also about the values of our family. Did we care most about getting our wash done in an hour versus an hour and a half? Or did we care most about our clothes feeling really soft and lasting longer? Did we care about using a quarter of the water? We spent about two weeks talking about this every night at the dinner table. We'd get around to that old washer-dryer discussion. And the talk was about design.

We ended up opting for these Miele appliances, made in Germany. They're too expensive, but that's just because nobody buys them in this country. They are really wonderfully made and one of the few products we've bought over the last few years that we're all really happy about. These guys really thought the process through. They did such a great job designing these washers and dryers. I got more thrill out of them than I have out of any piece of high tech in years.

Source: http://www.wired.com/wired/archive//4.02/jobs.html