



Noel Mayo

President, Noel Mayo Associates

Industrial designer Noel Mayo is the owner and president of Noel Mayo Associates, Inc., the first African-American industrial design firm in the United States, with clients including NASA, IBM, the Department of Commerce and Agriculture, Black and Decker, the Museum of American Jewish History, and the Philadelphia International Airport.

Mayo received a BS degree in industrial design from the Philadelphia College of Art (now the University of the Arts) in 1960. He later became chairperson of that department, making him the first African American chairperson of an industrial design program in the United States. During his 11 years in that post, the department grew from the ninth to the third largest department in the college.

Mayo, now retired, taught product and graphic design at The Ohio State University (OSU). Along the way, he was responsible for recruiting and funding the largest number of African-American graduate students in the department's history.

In 1989, Mayo was named the Ohio Eminent Scholar in Art and Design Technology. The Eminent Scholar program is designed to attract nationally and internationally known scholars to further strengthen outstanding academic programs that deal with compelling statewide issues.

He taught OSU's Professional Practices course for 20 years.

Briefly share your pioneering efforts in design or design/innovation management.

After becoming the first African-American and industrial designer to graduate from the University of the Arts in 1960, I learned the hard way that I had to exceed all expectations.

During the summer of my junior year, the head of the department, Joseph Carreiro, hired me to work for his firm, Carreiro/Sklaroff Design Associates. Before I started, Carreiro and his partner, William Sklaroff, decided they were going to Europe for the summer. They left me to run the office. I worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week, for the entire summer. I hired several classmates to help with the design projects. I also got the bills paid on time with the checks they'd left me.

Somehow, nothing ever frightened me again after that summer.

Several years later, after graduation, I bought the firm and changed the name to Noel Mayo Associates, Incorporated.

What kinds of changes have occurred in design and design management during your years in this field?

The major changes that I have observed over the years revolve around computer technology and shorter delivery times of design concepts and implementation. Also, I have noticed that most secretarial positions have disappeared.

While working at the firm, I began to learn from the other graphic designers and interior designers, and I began to integrate interior design and graphic design into all my design thinking.

How long have you been working on this? What kind of effort has it taken?

Over the last 40 years or so, I have added design color theory and psychology to my design principles.

What are you most proud of? What gives you the most joy?

I'm proud of the undergraduate and graduate students I've worked with and mentored over the years. I'm proud of my clients who say they appreciate how much I've taught them about design principles. I'm proud that my work is in the major museum collections in the United States.

I am also proud of my 40-plus-year relationship with an outstanding firm, Lutron Electronics Company, Inc. where I am named on more than 250 design patents and 27 utility patents.

How are you contributing or giving back to the design community (for example, time, mentoring, teaching, financial)?

I have been working with the Columbus Board of Education to develop an online design program that would be available to fourth-grade students and higher.

I've been working with African and African-American designers (Five ID Studio) to develop improvements to their new product, the Titan Mixer Bottle, which was given birth on Kickstarter. I have been helping those designers financially, as well as emotionally, for more than a year.

I also serve on the board of trustees at the University of the Arts, which involves serving on and chairing various committees, as well as raising and giving funds to the university. ■

Q&A

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They left me to run the office.... Somehow, nothing ever frightened me again after that summer.

Lorraine Justice, PhD College of Imaging Arts and Sciences Professor,
Rochester Institute of Technology

*It was the year 1982, and I actually heard the words:
“Here, Lorraine, go make this pretty.”*

Meshella Eddye Woods, Assoc. NOMA Interior Architectural Designer

*As the architects of our environment and as agents of change,
we have a responsibility to make a positive impact upon social and
economic injustices within the local, national, and global society.*

Kwame Nyanning Vice President of Experience Design, McKinsey & Co

*To be able to do your best work, in what are often not design-friendly
environments, you have to stay focused and remain open and
collaborative with folks who, while not designers, often have input,
insight, or expertise relevant to the design process, all while moving
at light-speed.*

Charles Harrison Industrial Designer and Educator

*From the time I decided to become a designer, I found myself
in a pioneer role.*