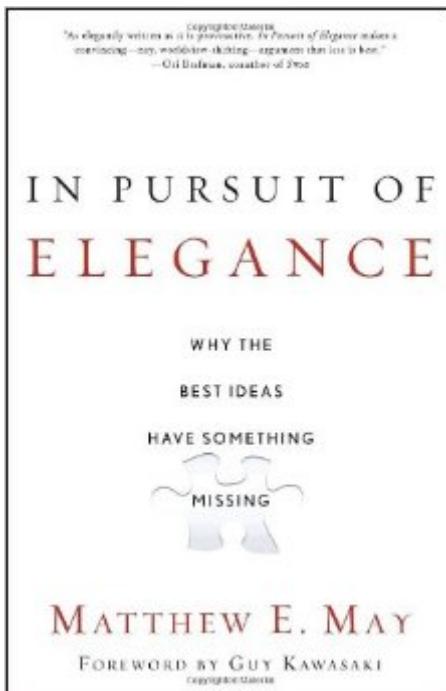


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In Pursuit Of Elegance: Why The Best Ideas Have Something Missing



Synopsis

What made the *Sopranos* finale one of the most-talked-about events in television history? Why is *sudoku* so addictive and the *iPhone* so darn irresistible? What do Jackson Pollock and Lance Armstrong have in common with theoretical physicists and Buddhist monks? Elegance. In this thought-provoking exploration of why certain events, products, and people capture our attention and imaginations, Matthew E. May examines the elusive element behind so many innovative breakthroughs in fields ranging from physics and marketing to design and popular culture. Combining unusual simplicity and surprising power, elegance is characterized by four key elements—“seduction, subtraction, symmetry, and sustainability. In a compelling, story-driven narrative that sheds light on the need for elegance in design, engineering, art, urban planning, sports, and work, May offers surprising evidence that what’s “not there” often trumps what is. In the bestselling tradition of *The Tipping Point*, *Made to Stick*, and *The Black Swan*, *In Pursuit of Elegance* will change the way you think about the world.

Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Crown Business; Reissue edition (September 7, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385526504

ISBN-13: 978-0385526500

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.5 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (38 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #462,540 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #334 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Aesthetics #423 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Psychology & Counseling > Creativity & Genius #1191 in Books > Business & Money > Skills > Decision Making

Customer Reviews

I fail to see what is so great about this book. The idea of elegant solutions is nothing new. The author's definition of elegance is anything but elegant. Consider this definition of elegant instead - "simple, intuitive and powerful." The book did a lot of rambling. It could be cut by at least a third without loss. I found many of the examples to be contrived, like the California fast food joint with the small menu and an additional secret menu. Does this strike you as elegant? The one thing that I

have praise for is the presentation of the concept of symmetry. The author showed how mathematicians came up with a definition for a term that many may initially feel is undefinable. The mathematical definition of symmetry is a good example of elegance. I disagree, however, with the insistence that elegant solutions must always be symmetric.

First of all, I have well over 2000 biz books in my library and this is one of my favorite books. It takes a very difficult subject, elegance, and does a credible job explaining what it is and what it isn't. This is not a step by step book to creating elegant solutions or products. Rather, it presents a compelling argument on why subtraction can lead to elegance. Why doing nothing is so difficult for humans and organizations but is many times the right thing "to do". Why in-action or restraining your brain from wanting to add can lead to breakthroughs in elegant design. The author works hard to give examples from a wide range of disciplines. Because of this broad stroke of the brush, the only complaint would be that he does not delve deep enough into some of these examples. But by leaving some space, it made me want to dig deeper into some of the examples. Engaging a reader's curiosity to seek more is exactly what elegance is all about. And I think the author balanced this perfectly. Do yourself a favor...ignore the negative reviews on here. Under no circumstance does this book deserve less than 4 stars. It is easy to read and engages your brain in a provocative way...what more can you ask from a book?

I have an interest in urban design. The discussion of the Monderman intersection and why it works so well in handling traffic and preventing accidents is worth the price of the book all by itself. (This is a roundabout-style intersection paved with a textured surface, lacking a traffic light.) Since I read this book, I can hardly pass an intersection without thinking how much better it would work as a Monderman intersection, and how easy and cheap the conversion would be. Maybe you're not interested in traffic flow, but May puts in enough off-the-wall examples to get nearly anyone thinking. Recommended.

If you want an elegant review of this book, just read my review title. If you need to hear more, the book is inelegant because the author talks about many interesting things, but his discussion is rambling and often the connection to the concept of elegance feels forced. The experience is like reading a collection of magazine articles thrown together to give (only) the appearance of a coherent book. Clearly, this is not the work of a serious researcher working at the true frontiers of understanding, but rather a quasi-journalist trying to impress the business crowd by making

mountains out of molehills. You can save yourself some time by skipping the book and realizing that elegance simply means 'achieving something with high efficiency to an extent that is surprising and possibly also beautiful'. That's not a revelation - all capable designers and problem solvers already knew that. I'm tempted to give one star, but will instead give two because at least there's some interesting stuff in the book. But again, walk away if your goal is to learn something profound about elegance.

To say that his book is about lean would be a disservice. It's much more than that. The stories and analyses record Matt's search for creative ideas and innovative solutions to problems in a surprisingly wide range of fields, from Jackson Pollack to the Sopranos, from traffic circles in Europe to video rental stores, from sudoku to corporate HR policies. I don't buy into all of his examples, but the overall force of his argument is compelling and very, very thought-provoking. Certainly, I won't look at a product boasting a "New & Improved!" sticker in the same way again. Matt proposes that truly "elegant" solutions have a wonderful -- and elusive -- combination of simplicity and power. We don't have to lard up a product with new features to solve customer problems any more than we need a 175-page employee manual to tell workers what we expect them to do. What I love about the book -- and what I'm still thinking about two weeks after reading it -- is the challenge of creating elegant solutions to the ongoing information management problems I see everyday.

The reviews of this book seem to be bipolar. You either love it or not. I'm with the latter. I had to force myself to keep reading it. I kept stumbling over historical examples that were then force-fit into the author's categories and I found it nearly impossible to take away anything from each chapter. For me, the best reading was the chapter on Laws of Subtraction and even that left me feeling empty. I have to agree with others that the author rambles and doesn't even follow his own principals in attempting to write the book in an elegant manner. The best example is the chapter on Seeking Symmetry. He attempts to conclude the chapter with "There are a few valuable points to take away..." and then goes on to ramble for another 6-7 pages with more trivia. The book drove me nuts. If you're looking for a book with practical takeaways, this is not it.

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