



Consumer trends Robyn Waters

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Kirsten Sharett, WGSN 17.06.04

US-based trend expert Robyn Waters outlines the strongest global trends affecting consumer choices and the products that impress her.

Consumer trends

- **Spirituality:** People are in search of meaning through their personal indulgences. Robyn Waters says: "They are saying, 'I have worked so hard that I have earned that massage.' They even want their dishwashing soap to be indulgent."

That idea translates into food, clothing, shoes, almost anything. The premise, "I need to take care of myself," is part of the new gold standard, which is **peace of mind**.

What does this mean for designers and markers? "If you are selling something or making something, somehow that product has to deliver peace of mind, or a beautiful view that makes you feel, 'I deserve this'. Marketers have to become healers. You can't sell. You have to heal," says Waters.

The **bathroom** – the "ahhh room" – is one of the best examples of this, says Waters. "People don't want to be pelted by water. The big trend is big shower heads and sky lights so you feel like you're outdoors. They heal and bring you into nature. It's not blasting you with jets. [Products need to be] presented as indulgent, healing, nurturing and reflective and not at a pace to get jazzed to start the day."

Waters' inspiration for this came from her interest in eastern philosophy, spirituality, and fascination with soul development. That has since sparked trips to Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand. A recent trip to Dubai that left her impressed with the beauty, contrasts and visual stimulation of the Middle East (see WGSN's comment on Dubai)

- **Choosers, looking for Yoda:** With so many brands to choose from, how do you know what is best? "People will begin to choose choosers. Oprah is a Yoda. Dr. Atkins is a Yoda. This is not the same as a celebrity endorsement. These are trusted people whose values you identify with and somehow guide you for best choices. Celebrity endorsements will mean less and less. Why? Because it is less about emulation and more about value alignment."
- **Mass customisation:** "I want it my way and I want it personalised. That translates for iPods, food, almost anything. The tension between opposites is one of the biggest trends out there. We all want to stand out, but we all want to fit in. It is the ying/yang and how they coexist."
- **Simplicity movement:** "Realness – making it and keeping it simple is another huge trend. To sum it up, people are looking for some kind of

Robyn Waters's top consumer trends.

- Spirituality: people are in search of meaning through their personal indulgences.
- Choosers, looking for Yoda: people will begin to choose choosers.
- Mass customisation: I want it my way and I want it personalised.
- Simplicity movement: realness – making it and keeping it simple.

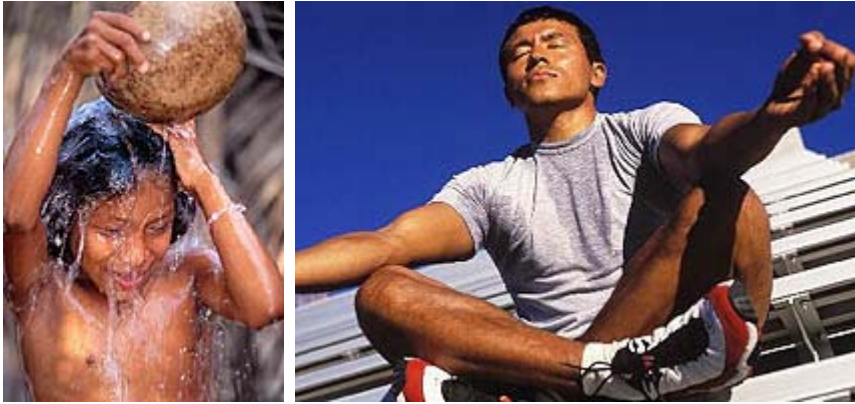
Background on Robyn Waters

- 28 years in the retailing industry.
- Former vice-president of design and product development for Target Stores.
- Waters has just launched her own company **RW Trends**.
- Her life and work motto is **edit, focus and maximize**.

Waters's favourite products.

- Caldrea. Amatherapy all-natural dishwashing liquids www.caldrea.com
- Method. Another all-natural cleaning product seen at www.methodhome.com.
- Starbucks. The company that has turned coffee into an affordable luxury.
- The car designers out of Palo Alto School of Design.
- Coach. The American version of Burberry.
- Rice to Riches in NoLLta. The store design, the

depth and purpose."



Photos courtesy of Alamy.com

Background

After 28 years in the retailing industry, the former vice-president of design and product development for Target Stores, Robyn Waters called it quits. This baby boomer set off to take a year's sabbatical to reflect on life. Instead, what she got was an enduring stream of requests to espouse her knowledge and insight of global trends affecting consumer choices. With so much business coming her way, **Waters launched her own company, RW Trends.**

In an interview with WGSN, this "generalist of life", as Waters refers to herself, knows a lot about the "soft stuff."

"I offer an environmental scan of the soft stuff and answer the questions: how do people feel, how does it affect their lives, how might that affect their purchases or decisions?" she says. In a new book, to be published in 2005, titled *The Trend Masters Guide: From A to Z* she espouses her motto of edit, focus and maximise.

"There is **too much information** and it's toxic," she added. "There isn't one next big thing. There are many new interesting things, but you have to connect the dots with people's needs."

Several running themes and recurring buzzwords – such as "**paradox of choice**," and "**claustrophobia of abundance**" – are dancing around to describe the endless stream of merchandise cluttering the market, confusing and frustrating consumers and leaving many people feeling paralysed to make decisions, or anxious to make too many.

Her advice to her clients is to **interpret trends, never taken them literally, and work to translate them appropriately for your customer.** "A trend is a signpost or indicator - it is not the end-all be-all. It points you in a direction."



choices, the specials all create an experience."

Recommended books

- Charles Handy's *Age of Paradox*
- Melinda Davis's *The New Culture of Desire*
- Michael Silverstein's *Trading Up: The New American Luxury*
- Robyn Waters's own book *The Trend Masters Guide: From A to Z* will be published in 2005.
- See Pursuit of Pleasure in ThinkTank/Consumer Attitudes for further reading.

Waters's favourite products

- "One of my favourites is **Caldrea** aromatherapy all-natural dishwashing liquids. It has revolutionised the market because of its inherent luxury using all natural plant essences. This has done to dishwashing soap what Aveda has done for hair."

Cleaning can become an indulgent, healing experience. Waters adds: "This isn't an endorsement. I love this product. I use lavender and it transports me to Provence. I don't use my dishwasher soap anymore."

The product is \$10 a bottle and sells at upscale boutiques or high-end furniture or gift stores and at the website www.caldrea.com

- Another all-natural cleaning agent is made by **Method**, seen at www.methodhome.com. This product was launched two years ago with a bottle designed by product artist Karim Rashid. "Women love this product. It's an icon."
- **Starbucks**: the company that has turned coffee into an affordable luxury and a small indulgence. There are reportedly over 19,000 ways to order a Starbucks coffee and they have just signed a deal with Jim Bean to offer liquor coffee. "I think they will be the place to go for a luxury product elegant dessert coffee liquor alternative," believes Waters.
- The **auto industry** is getting it right too. "Many of the car designers came out of Palo Alto School of Design. It's a regular think-tank."

She notes the new Volvo concept car for women was designed entirely by women. "Only women were allowed to make decisions about this car. Now that's how you get in touch with the customer."

- **Coach**: "My personal point of view about the fashion industry is that it is over the top in many cases and trying way too hard, but Coach is one of my favourite examples right now. I'm blown away. They get it right. They make it special and get it right. It's an American version of Burberry and it's brilliant."
- In terms of visual merchandising and offering an experience when you walk into a store, **Rice to Riches in NoLiTa** is amazing, says Waters. "The store design, the choices, the specials, you have an experience."

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