Phillip Joe - Head of Interaction Design, IDEO Product Development:
I think that many people think about styling as good design. They think about the box that’s on the outside but quite often good design or considered design goes much deeper and you could take a product like this for example. This here happens to be a battery pack for a little device which sits by your heart and actually before you have a heart transplant it has a little pacemaker in here which this battery keeps pulsing through and so the user interface for this, for example, needs to be very, very clear. I need to understand when the battery needs to be replaced, I need to understand how I replace the battery and of course, during the process of changing the battery, it needs to be pretty reassuring. I don’t want to take this battery out and think, oh does my heart stop for a little while? So I think it is things like that which really demonstrate that good design has to be well thought through.

As products become more and more complex and we try and build more and more functionality into them, then the information that the user requires to understand and use it increases. I guess there are a couple of ways of dealing with this information. There’s probably two extreme examples here: this product here is a labeller which gives you all the functionality on the surface of the product but you can see here that actually it seems quite complex when you first come up to it. Another extreme on this continuum might be that you have four modal buttons such as this here and what it uses is a large LCD display – this is actually a product that I can wear on the mountain and it is a stopwatch and it is an altimeter. What I can do here is I can press these buttons and as you can see, it is actually quite hard to press through them and you can imagine that when I am actually on a ski slope and I’m looking at this with foggy goggles and I’m wearing gloves, it might actually be quite difficult to use.

Another important principle is to give the user feedback. Essentially what you are doing is telling the user that you’ve done something or letting the user know that the machine has acknowledged your input. One example is a gas cooker, turning the knob you can see the flames come up and you can see the water boil. That feedback’s automatic but sometimes you have to design it in. For example, the click of a button so that you know when you’ve pressed it. So it takes many forms: it can be auditory, it can be tactile, it can be other senses as well like smell.