



HISTORY

< How the 1972 Polaroid SX-70 revolutionized consumer photography

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ROB SCHMITZ, HOST:

Point a camera, press a button and wait. It takes three minutes to see your photo. For our series *America in Pursuit*, exploring culture, history and objects in American life, NPR culture correspondent Anastasia Tsioulcas takes us back to a time before selfies.

ANASTASIA TSILOULCAS, BYLINE: In 1972, the Polaroid SX-70, made in collaboration with a famous industrial designer named Henry Dreyfuss, was a revelation.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

UNIDENTIFIED NARRATOR: Hold your left hand out. Place the camera across the palm.

TSIOULCAS: Polaroid recruited another famous industrial design firm, the Eames office, to make a film explaining it to Polaroid stockholders. Somehow, the film manages hilariously to make this easy-to-understand item very complicated.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

UNIDENTIFIED NARRATOR: Grasp the rear of the viewfinder cap. Pull the camera into its erect position. To load, press, and the door opens. Take the 10-picture film pack and push it all the way in.

TSIOULCAS: The color scheme is very 1970s. You can imagine it in a groovy office or in the interior of a station wagon. This model is wrapped in black and cognac leather with metal fittings with one exception, says Emily Orr, a curator at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Museum of Design in New York City.

EMILY ORR: And one other important moment of color on it is the trigger button, which is right there - brilliant red - at the front, making it easy for the user to locate.

TSIOULCAS: Intuitive design at its best.

ORR: This was at the core of Henry Dreyfuss' practice. He believed in simplicity. He thought that objects should be easy to use, easy to manufacture and easy to maintain.

TSIOULCAS: And the public loved it. Everyday people used it to snap pictures of their vacations and holidays.

ORR: By 1974, it had sold over 700,000 units and was quickly a cult favorite used by the likes of Andy Warhol and Ansel Adams.

TSIOULCAS: As well as Richard Avedon, Walker Evans and David Hockney, among other famous artists and photojournalists. That ability to whip out a camera and take a picture wherever, whenever was a preview of our current obsessions.

Anastasia Tsioulcas, NPR News, New York.

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