Buckminster Fuller

Inventor (1895 – 1983)

Fuller was born in Milton, Massachusetts, and attended Milton Academy. After graduating he studied at Harvard where he was expelled twice. By his own appraisal, he was a non-conforming misfit. Between his sessions at Harvard, Fuller worked as a mechanic in a textile mill, and later in the meat-packing industry. He also served in the U.S. Navy in World War I. In 1917, he married Anne Hewlett. In the early 1920s, he and his father-in-law developed the Stockade Building System for producing lightweight, weatherproof, and fireproof housing. It proved to be a commercial failure.

In 1927, he began to evolve his unorthodox "comprehensive design" theory. His first luxury house, designed but never built, was spacious and comfortable, and supported by a single support housing the heating and plumbing. In 1933, his Dymaxion car could travel at 90 miles per hour, cross rough country with ease, turn in its own length, and get 30-40 miles per gallon using a Ford V-8 engine..

Fuller taught at the progressive Black Mountain College in North Carolina during the summers of 1948 and 1949. There, with the support of a group of professors and students, he began reinventing a concept that would make him famous: the geodesic dome. In 1949, he erected his first geodesic dome building that could sustain its own weight with no practical limits. It was 14 feet in diameter and constructed of aluminum aircraft tubing and a vinyl-plastic skin, in the form of a tetrahedron. To prove his design Fuller hung from the structure's framework with several students who had helped him build it. A Fuller dome housed the American exhibit in Moscow in 1959.

Fuller wrote more than 30 books, coining and popularizing terms such as "Spaceship Earth" and "synergetics." One of his most impressive efforts was his diary, known as Dymaxion Chronofile, a chronicle of his life from 1915 to 1983. It included daily activities, newspaper clipping, receipts, and correspondence and added up to roughly 270 linear feet of paper.

He also worked in the development of numerous inventions, chiefly in the fields of design and architecture but also revolutionized cartography with his Air/Ocean map. Carbon molecules known as fullerenes or buckyballs were named for their resemblance to geodesic spheres.

Fuller died on July 1, 1983, a guru of the design, architecture, and alternative communities. In the period leading up to his death, his wife had been lying comatose in a Los Angeles hospital, dying of cancer. While visiting her there he exclaimed, "She is squeezing my hand!" He then stood up, suffered a heart attack, and died an hour later. His wife died 36 hours after he did.



The stamp design is taken from a magazine cover illustration by Boris Artzybasheff.

