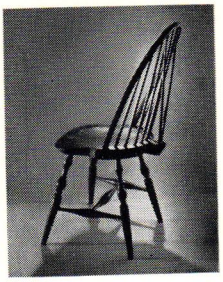
EVERYDAY ART QUARTERLY

A GUIDE TO WELL DESIGNED PRODUCTS

No. 15 / 25c

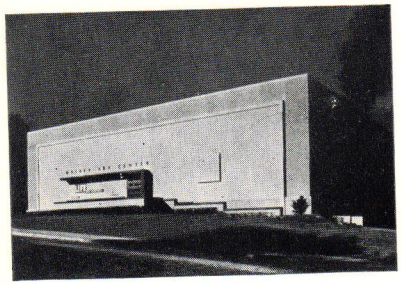
SUMMER 1950

WALKER ART CENTER • MINNEAPOLIS



on the cover

Many products have continued in use
over a long period of time.
Among these — shown on the cover and above —
is a Windsor chair made in Rhode Island
nearly two hundred years ago.
The problems it solved so well
still seem to us pivotal ones
in defining the requirements of a good chair.



THE WALKER ART CENTER

is a progressive
museum of the arts.

The objective of the Center is to give men, women and children an opportunity to know, enjoy and use the arts, to clarify the relationship of all art to contemporary life, to be useful by reporting, explaining, teaching the value of art to those who need or want this knowledge, to share with the schools and libraries in broadening the cultural opportunities in America.

EVERYDAY ART QUARTERLY

A GUIDE TO WELL DESIGNED PRODUCTS

CONTENTS FOR SUMMER 1950

in the Fall issue:

THE TRADITION IN GOOD DESIGN:
1940 to 1950

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to 1940:

the tradition in good design

The teapot shown above was designed by Josiah Wedgwood in 1765. It functions well, and its simplicity of form is compatible with today's esthetic. The Windsor chair on the front cover was in existence nearly three hundred years ago. Both of these products have been in continuous production and public demand since they were first designed, and are excellent examples of the good design in our past. The standards by which they were designed, whether they were consciously stated or not, were fundamentally the same as those which guide our twentieth century designers to their best results. Looking at them in perspective, we can see that they contribute to the forming of a tradition in good design, leading directly and continuously to our own times.

This is the first of two issues devoted to The Tradition in Good Design. Based on two related exhibitions in the Everyday Art Gallery, this issue covers the period to 1940; the next issue will cover the period from 1940 to 1950. Special emphasis on the past decade is not arbitrary; in the last ten years, there has appeared an abundance of products that are a synthesis of our vast technological advances and adhere to the principles of good design.

THE GOOD DESIGN which forms our tradition is not surface ornament. More than skin deep, it is broad in meaning, complex, penetrating. Problems of use, construction, and human requirements are uppermost. What task is an object designed to fulfill? With what materials and tools and processes can the object best be created? How can it be formed so as to please the eye and the sense of touch, as well as the mind? These questions — and the manner in which they have been answered in our past, together with some of the major implications — are outlined here, and developed in greater detail on the following pages.

1 ***there are basic design considerations and disciplines which remain constant.***

The use of an object determines its basic form.
The material and the technique of fabrication affect the form.
The visual quality of the form satisfies sensuous and psychological needs.

2 ***man has always solved the problem of design in terms of the foregoing basic considerations.***

Nevertheless — the needs, resources, and tastes unique to each culture tend to mark the objects created
as belonging to their particular time and place.

3 ***in the design process, there is a continuing interplay between the past and the present.***

When their function and method of manufacture remain essentially the same, objects produced today are similar to those of the past.
When there arise new esthetic, economic, and other social attitudes toward function, material, or process of manufacture —
then basically new designs may develop.

4 ***recognition of quality is the key problem of contemporary design.***

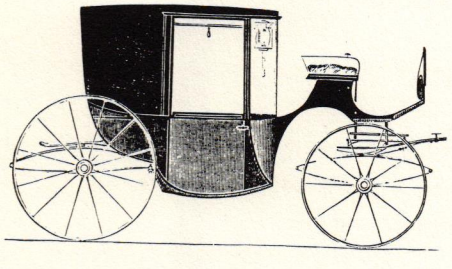
With few exceptions —
greater refinement in function, form, and craftsmanship are necessary in order to achieve maturity in the design development
of recent decades.

reproduction of sterling silver bowl
designed by Paul Revere in 1768
manufactured by Fisher Sterling

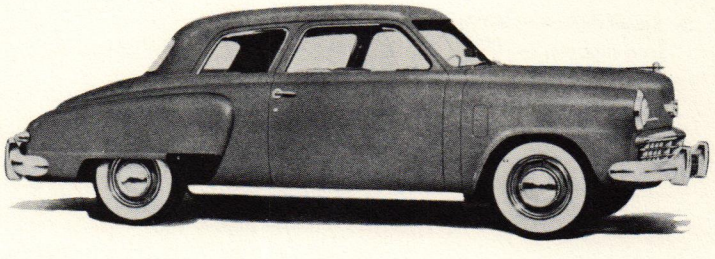
bentwood chair
designed by Michael Thonet in 1837
first manufactured in Germany

wood chair with jute webbing
designed by Bruno Matthson in the 1930 s
manufactured in Sweden

brougham designed by
a London coachmaker in 1839



automobile designed by
Raymond Loewy Associates in 1945
1949 model manufactured by Studebaker



lounge chair designed by
Eero Saarinen in 1949
manufactured by Knoll Associates

1 ***there are basic design considerations and disciplines which remain constant.***

The use of an object determines its basic form.
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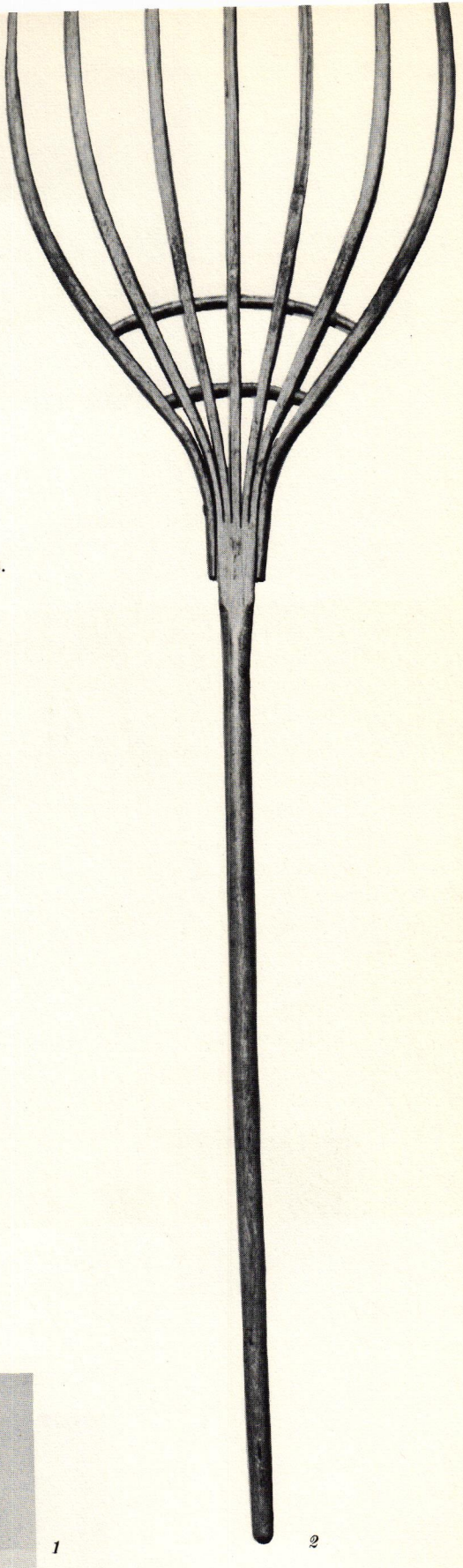


1 brass kettle, 1700 s
iron saucepan, ca. 1850

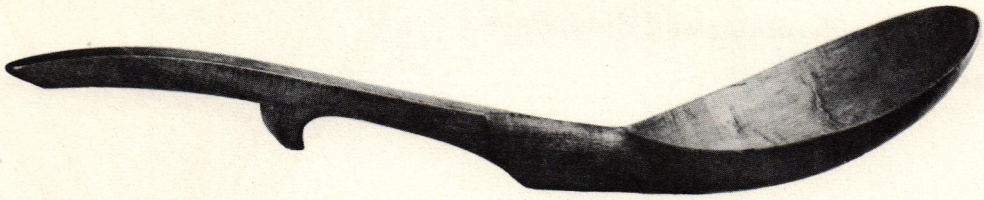
2 wood pitchfork, early 1800 s

3 wood soup spoon, early 1800 s

4 Norwegian wood butter bowl, 1846

5 Swedish iron scissors, 1788
iron pincers, ca. 1800
ax, ca. 1850
iron fork, 1870

1 *2*



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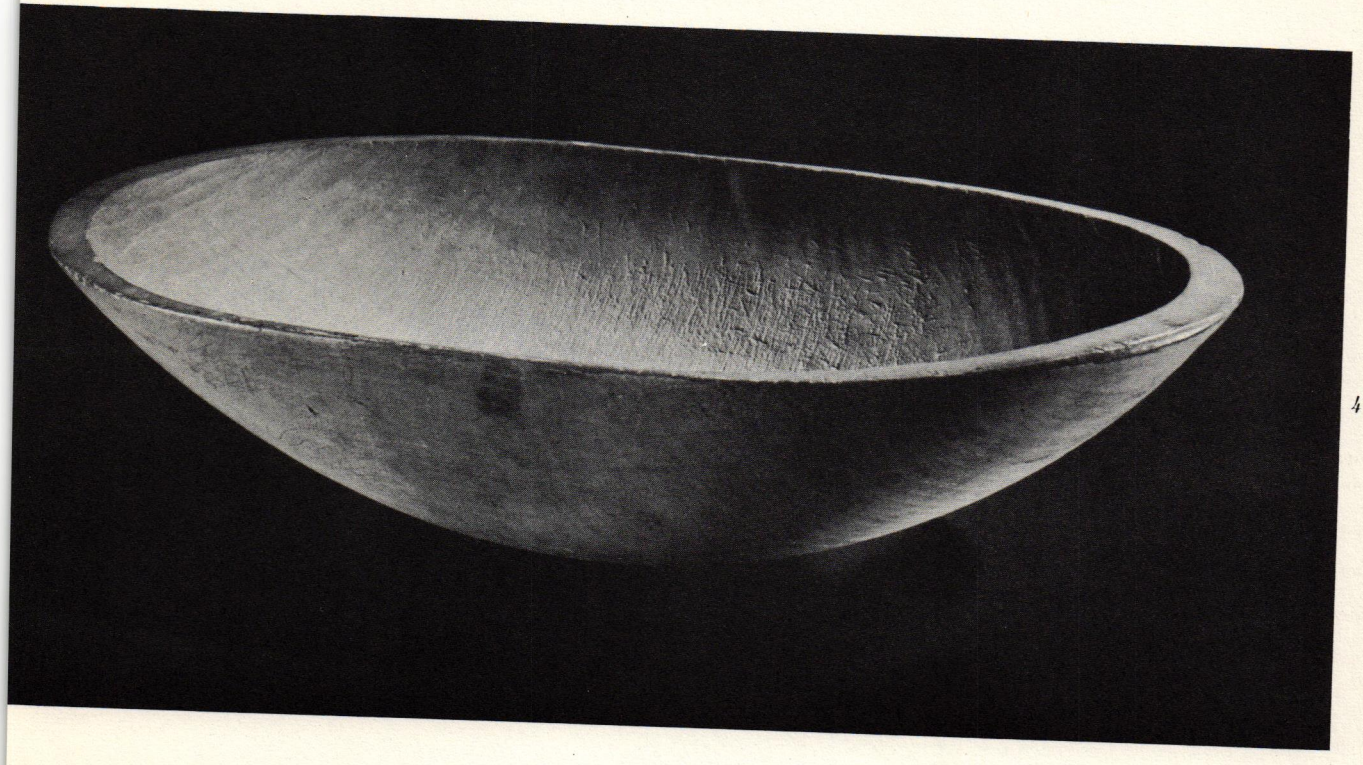

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5

1 ***there are basic design considerations and disciplines which remain constant.***

Queen's Ware designed in 1765 by Josiah Wedgwood

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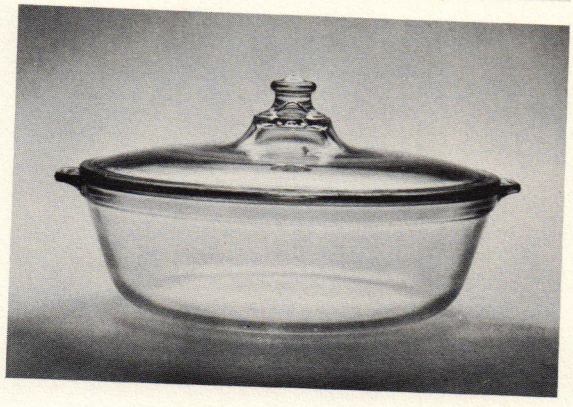

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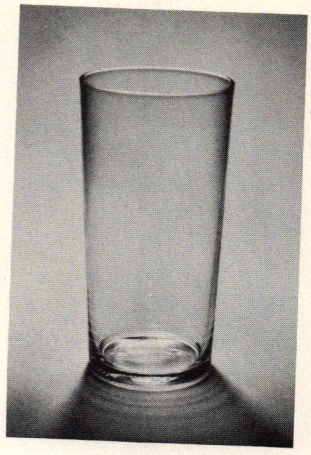
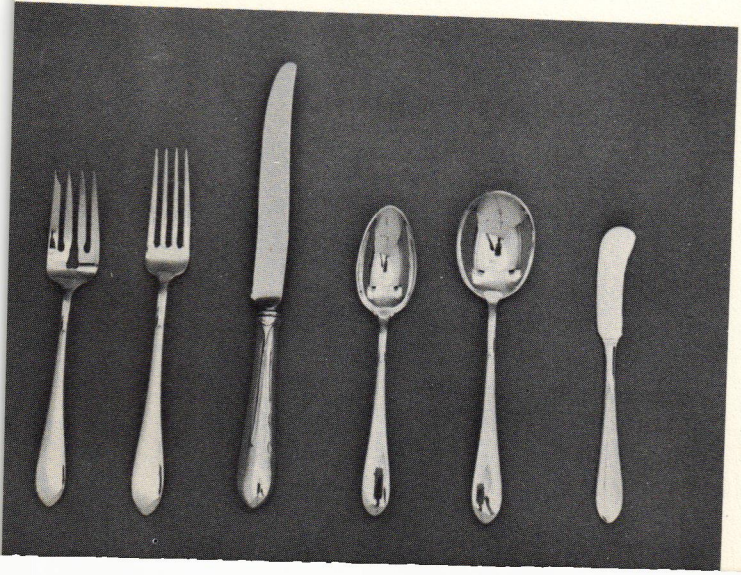




5

1 *reproduction of sterling silver bowl*
designed by Paul Revere in 1768
manufactured by Fisher Sterling

2 *stoneware beanpot*
first produced in the early 1800 s

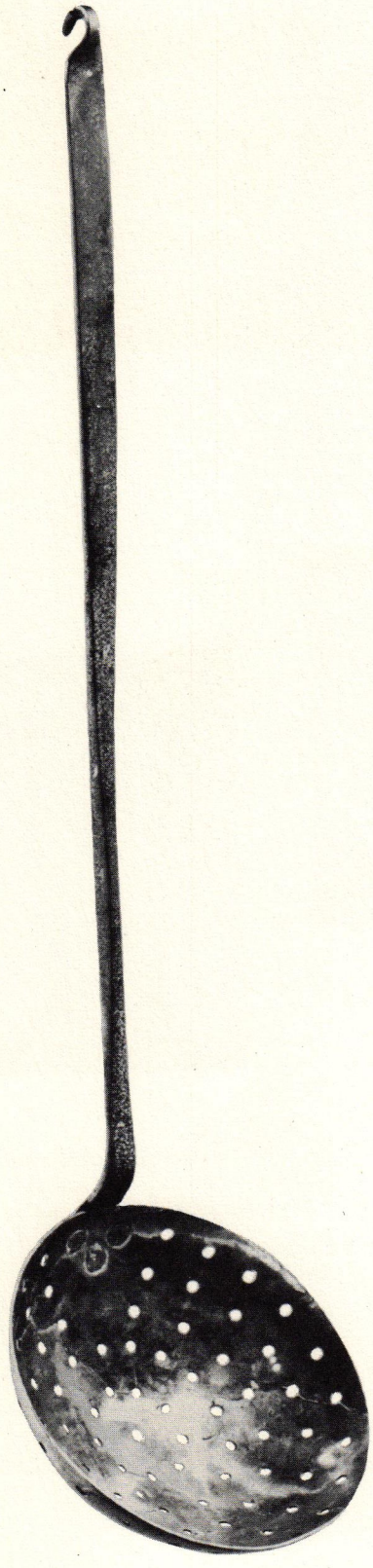
3 *pyrex casserole, first produced in the 1930 s*
by Corning Glass Works

4 *glass tumbler*
prototype in use for 1400 years

5 *sterling silver flatware, Gorham Antique*
first manufactured ca. 1875

2 ***man has always solved the problem of design in terms of the foregoing basic considerations.***

Nevertheless — the needs, resources, and tastes unique to each culture tend to mark the objects created as belonging to their particular time and place.



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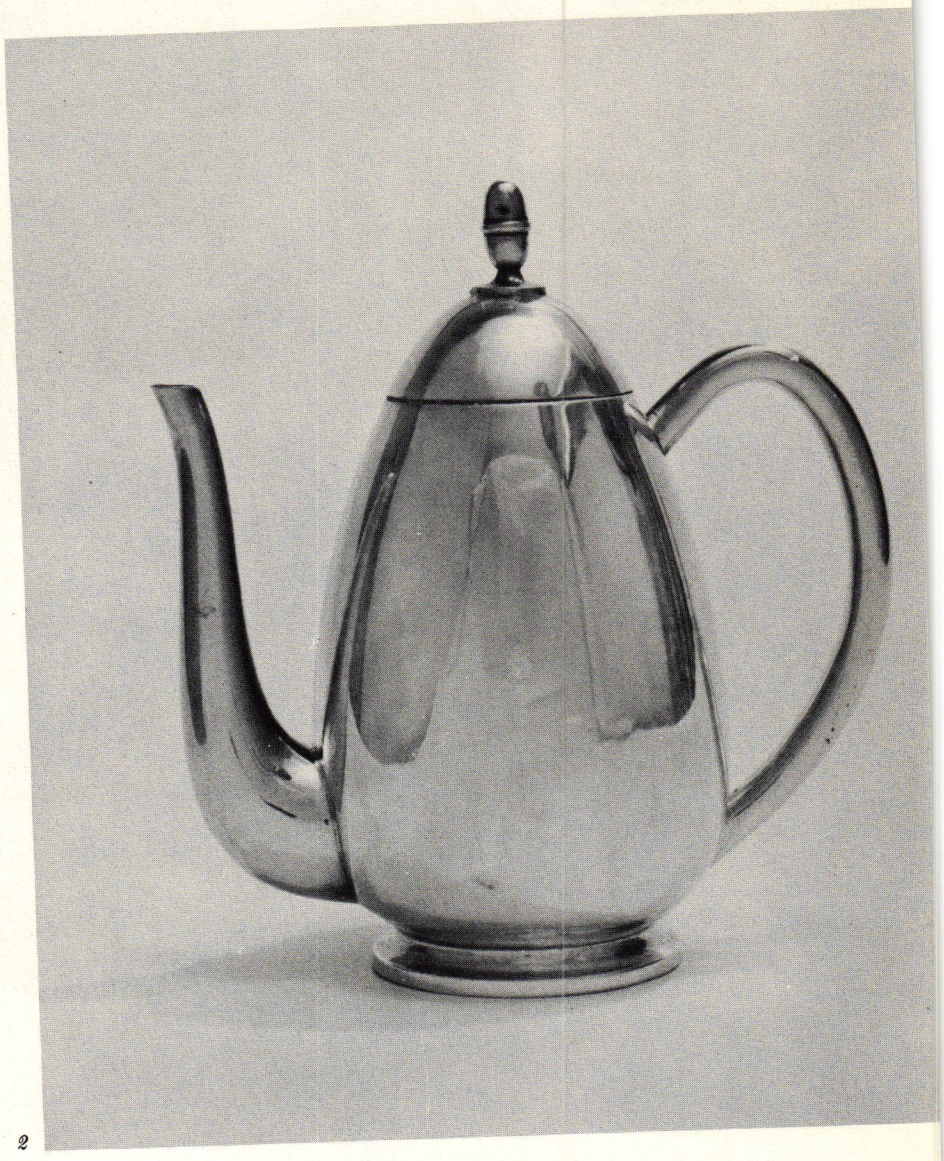

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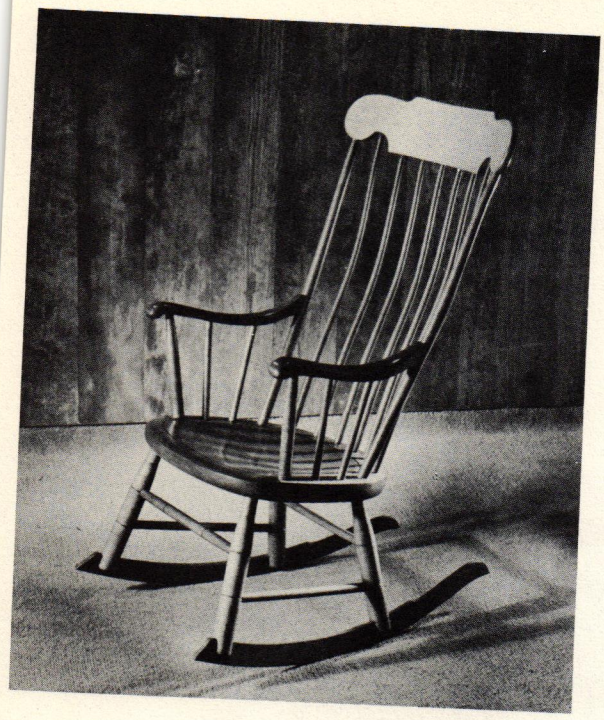

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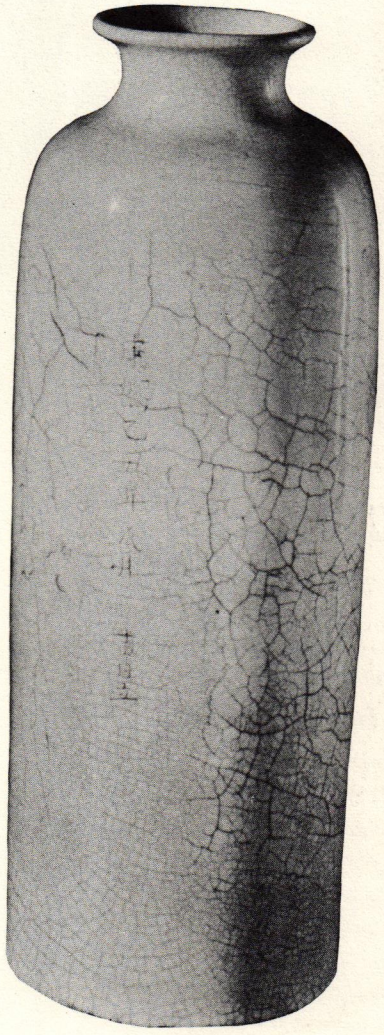

5

1 *brass skimmer, early 1800 s*

2 *silver plated Italian demi-tasse pot, ca. 1860*

3 *reproduction of the 18th century Boston rocker*
manufactured by Conant Ball

4 *upholstered armchair designed by Alvar Aalto*
first produced in the 1930 s
manufactured in Sweden

5 *Chinese vase, Ch'ing Dynasty*
reign of K'ang H'si, 1661-1722

3 *in the design process, there is a continuing interplay between the past and the present.*

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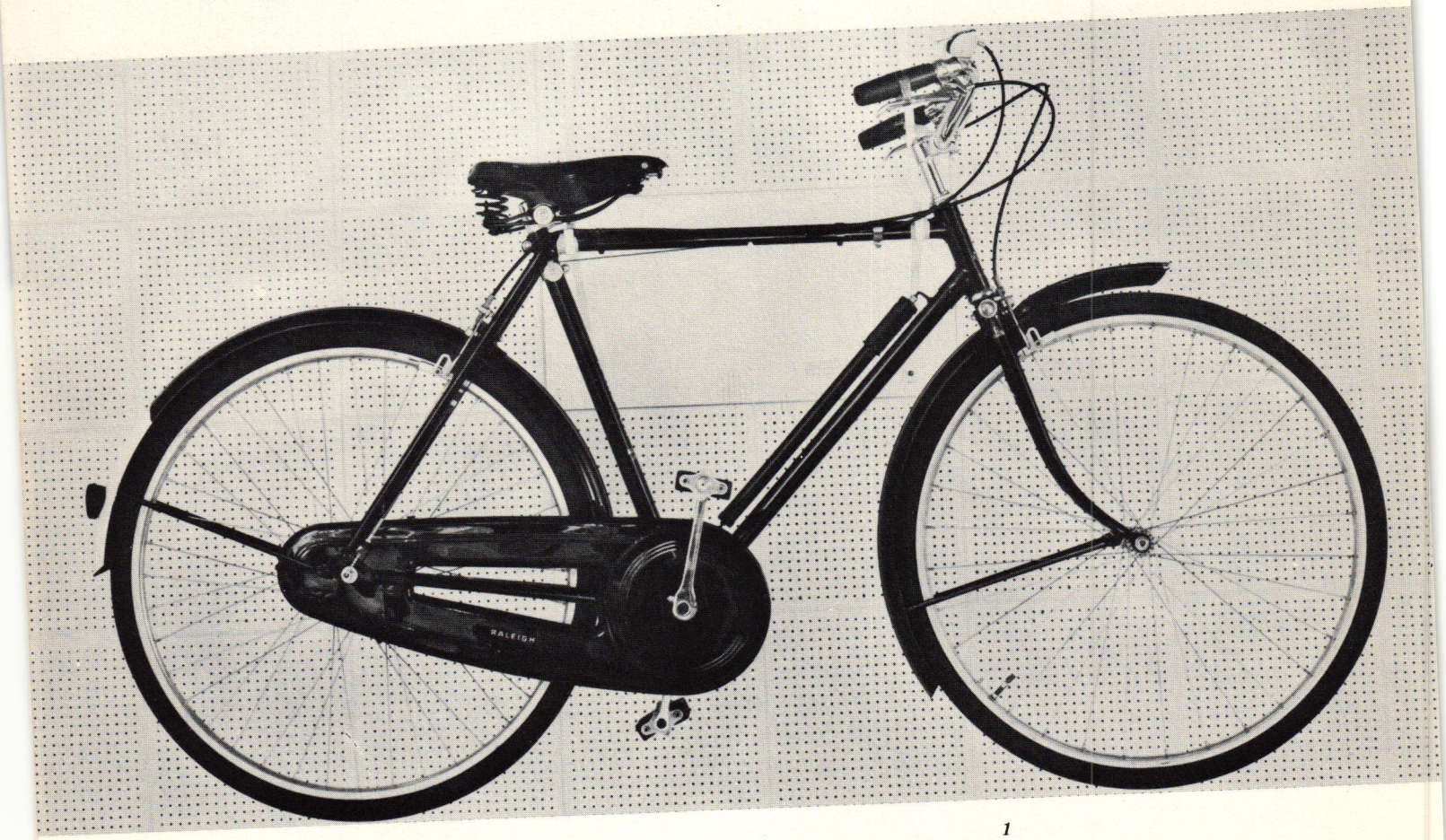


1

1 contemporary 3-speed English bicycle
manufactured by Raleigh

2 wood and iron bicycle, ca. 1860

3 floor lamp designed by Walter von Nessen
first produced in the early 1930 s
manufactured by Nessen Studio

4 kerosene lamp of tin and glass, ca. 1900

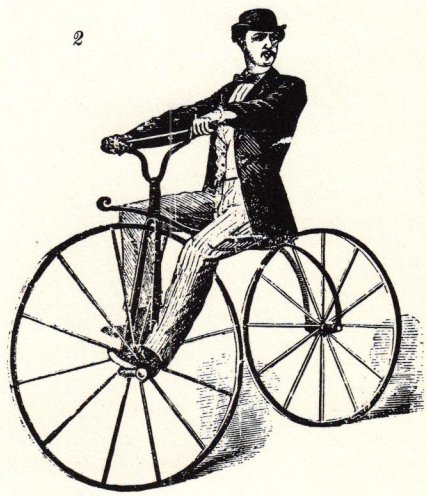
5 contemporary electric beater
manufactured by Sunbeam Mfg. Co.

6 rotary motion eggbeater, ca. 1885
manufactured by Keystone Mfg. Co.

7 contemporary electric ironer
manufactured by Hotpoint, Inc.

8 iron, early 1800 s
iron with wedge insert, ca. 1850
charcoal burning iron, early 1900 s
contemporary electric iron
manufactured by Proctor Electric Co.

2



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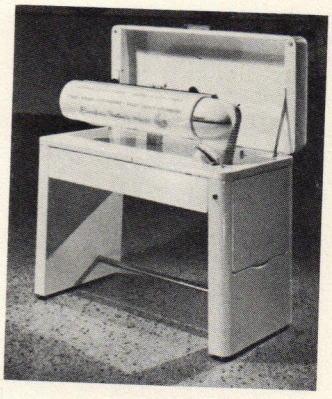

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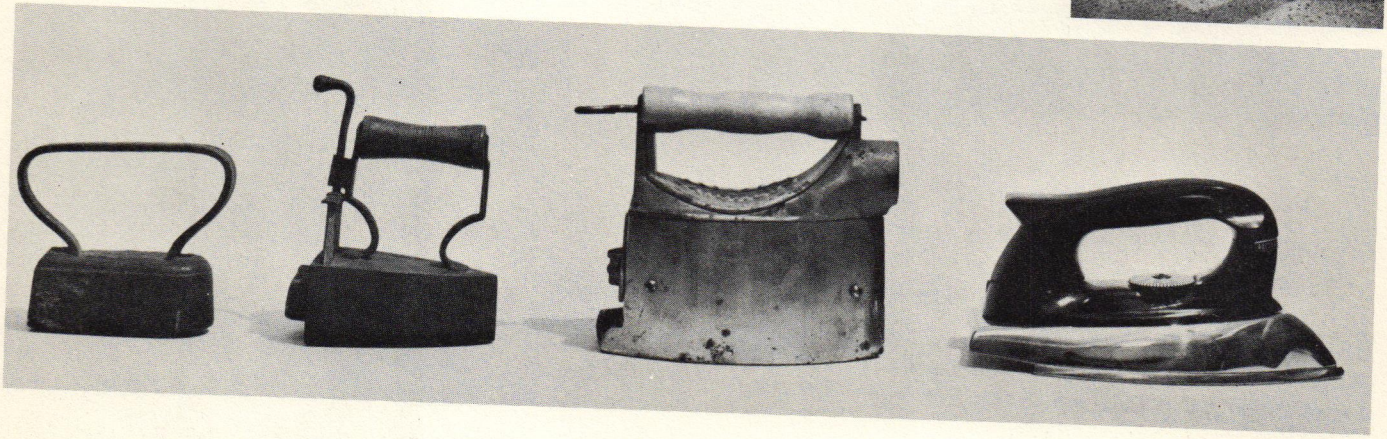

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4 *recognition of quality is the key problem of contemporary design.*

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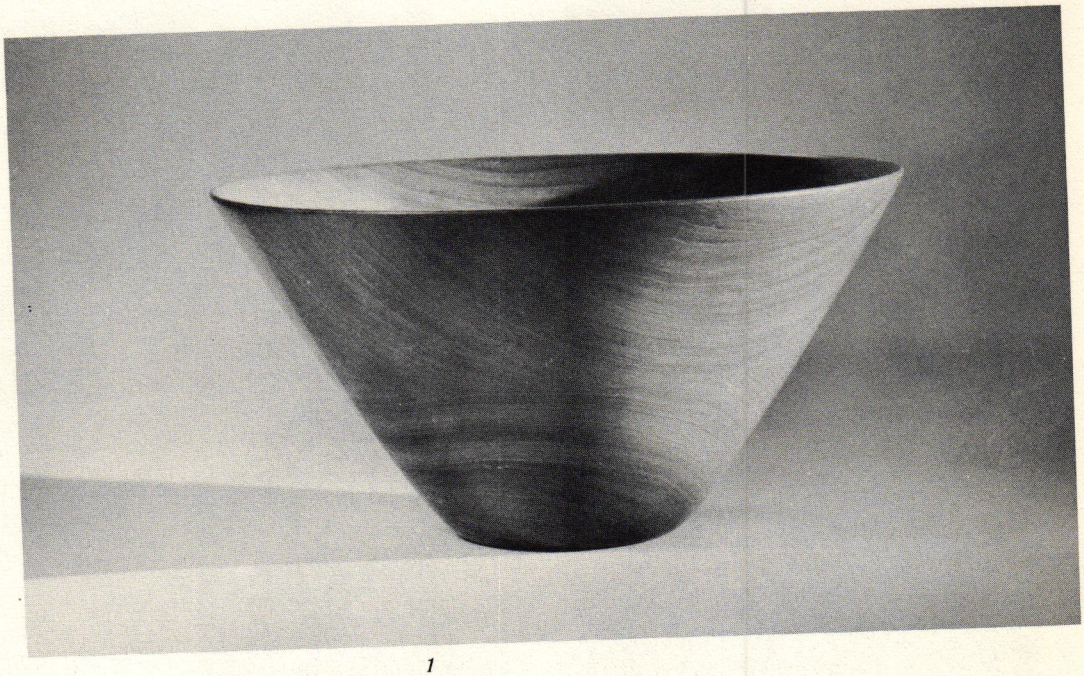

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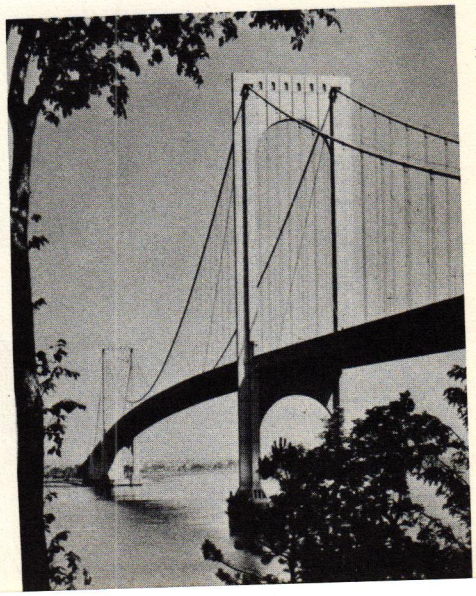


Rodney McCay Morgan

high quality design of the past decade:

1 wooden bowl designed and made by James Prestini

2 chair designed by Charles Eames
manufactured by Herman Miller Furniture Co.

3 Bronx-Whitestone Bridge, New York City, 1939
O. H. Ammann, chief engineer; Allston Dana,
engineer of design; Aymar Embury II, architect

the tradition in good design

a ceramic ware, which has been produced without change since 1765, impresses us today as being entirely compatible with our own standards. This, in spite of the fact that we are in the midst of one of the vital periods of design activity and exploration in history — and in spite of the fact that our world is flooded with new technological inventions.

Looking into the past, we find many more products of this type. Sometimes they have been appreciated all along, like the ceramic ware — or they may have been ignored or overlooked for a time, only to emerge now as harmonious with the spirit of today. All, however, reveal an approach to the problem of design which our own time has re-adopted as basic. In rejecting the frequently facade-minded criteria of our recent past, we have restated the fact that design is more than decorated surface, that it is concerned with the entire formulation of an object — concerned with the problems of use and construction and with relationships to all aspects of living. Design must be evaluated in the light of these basic considerations:

The use of an object must determine its basic form.

The material and the technique of fabrication must find honest expression in the form.

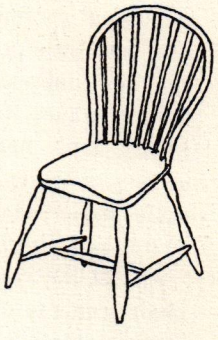
The visual quality of the form must satisfy sensuous and psychological needs.

The degree to which an object measures up to this set of requirements is the degree to which it is a *good design.**

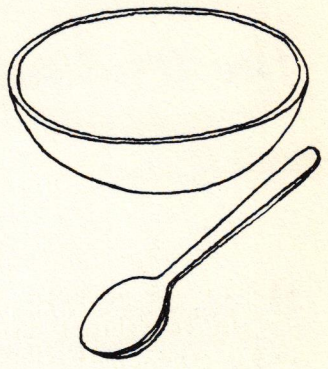
Moholy-Nagy in Vision in Motion, *says that design is "the organization of materials and processes in the most productive, economic way, in a harmonious balance of all elements necessary for a certain function. . . . It is the integration of technological, social and economic requirements, biological necessities and the psychological effects of materials, shape, color, volume, space, and thinking in relationships."*

Man has always solved the problem of design successfully in terms of these foregoing considerations. The Queen's Ware designed by Josiah Wedgwood in 1765 inaugurated the first mass production ceramic industry in history. When Josiah Wedgwood thought: how can I design this teapot so that the lid fits, the spout pours without dripping, the handle fits the hand, the base is safe from overturning . . . so that it is easy to clean and capable of being duplicated with precision on a vast scale, and, withal, elegant in form? — he designed a product which has retained its vitality for nearly two centuries.

There are other products which have continued in use over a period of many years. There is, for example, the Windsor chair. The first recorded chair of its kind was found in Windsor castle in the 1660 s. Although there have been many variations of this chair, it has never lost the characteristics which are essential to its vitality: the saddle seat which is adapted to the contours of the body; the delicately tapered spindles which are lightweight, strong and economical, comfortable to lean against, attractive. It has pleased many generations of people, crossed seas and continents, survived an industrial revolution, and is still in popular demand. It has retained its vitality because the problems which it solved so well still seem to us pivotal ones in defining the requirements of a good chair.



In addition to the qualities common to all good design, the needs, resources and ideals unique to each culture tend to mark the object as a product of its own time and place. If those needs or aspirations are too far removed from our own, the object created will probably not continue in common use, no matter how admirably it states its own message. The reserved, somewhat ascetic beauty of a Shaker chair, for example, expresses an attitude toward sitting which demands a solution well re-



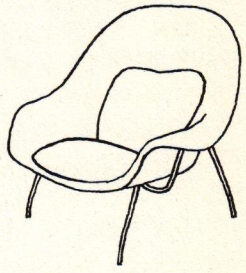
moved — visually as well as functionally — from the chair of a culture that prefers to sit comfortably and frequently. But if the product is useful and satisfying according to the standards of a particular time and place, it is well designed.

When their function and method of manufacture remain essentially the same, objects produced today are similar to those of the past. Many of the objects which have lived through the years are the simple — often handmade — household utensils and tools of daily use. A large number of them were developed out of natural functions, such as those performed by the hand. For example, bowls and spoons are basically containers similar to the cupped palm of the hand. Other familiar articles and tools extend the abilities of the hand to seize, grip, stir, squeeze, knead, et cetera. Formed directly in terms of their use, true to their materials, and honestly indicating the tools which were used, the beauty of these simple objects is a significant part of our tradition.

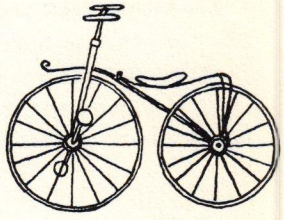
These simple products have been replaced or supplemented as new resources and needs have presented themselves. In addition to traditional ceramic ware, for example, we now have oven-proof ceramics, pyrex glass, and new unbreakable plastics. Although its appearance has changed with use, materials, and means of manufacture, the quality of the new object is judged by the same basic standards of honesty, sensitivity, and directness.

Of all the common objects of use, the chair seems to offer the greatest range for experimentation. Both sculptural and utilitarian, it provides great freedom for esthetic expression. Michael Thonet of Germany experimented in the 1830 s with steamed wood which he bent in molds. Since then, millions of his chairs have been distributed throughout Europe and the two Americas, and their manufacture has never been discontinued. They are inexpensive, lightweight and nearly indestructable. They were chosen by Le Corbusier because of their "nobility" of form, for his exhibition at the 1925 Exposition of Decorative Arts in Paris.

When it was discovered that thin wood veneers glued together form a new product of greater strength and resistance to warping, the era of the bent and molded plywood chair was begun. First used in railway stations and ferry boats back in the '70 s, chairs using the same principle appeared via Finland and Sweden in the 1930's, in the experiments of Aalto and Mathsson. Since the early 1940 s, Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen have designed molded plywood chairs that have been die-pressed to conform to the curves of the body. Shell-like and organic in form, light in character, and with a real concern for physical comfort, they are as contemporary as their inventive techniques of manufacture.



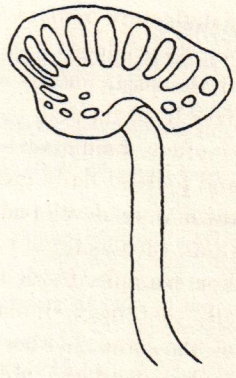
When new esthetic, economic, and other social attitudes toward function, material, or process of manufacture arise, then basically new designs may develop. A new concept will introduce a new product or variation, which in turn leads to infinite applications of the same principle. For example, the idea of continuous rotary motion being both faster and more efficient than a to-and-fro movement, was one of the conceptions to be applied to everything from bicycles to eggbeaters, ironers, locomotives, and conveyor belts. The direct statement of such new technical principles frequently created forms that were not dependent upon the appearance of traditional products. The beauty of the resulting industrial forms — the skeletal frame, the clean planar surface, the mass supported by the thin line, the geometric machine part — first defined the nature of a machine esthetic.



Changes in our basic social attitudes create the atmosphere for the development

of other new products. Reaction against the stiff formality of the nineteenth century — against the hard, high-backed chair, the whalebone corset, the floor length skirt, the rarely used parlor — influenced almost all objects of common use. The paramount problem in chair design, for example, became one of providing the human being with chairs which could adapt themselves to his needs for relaxation, reaching and stretching, and changing positions. Motion was first introduced by means of rockers, pivots and swivel devices, springs and movable units. The rocker, the "office" chair (first designed for the home), and the Morris chair were a few of these inventions. The most economical resilient seat was first used on a farm mowing machine; nearly a century later, Marcel Breuer used a similar cantilever principle in the tubular steel chair so common today. Contemporary solutions of a similar nature may be found in the tilting Barwa, the interchangeable sofa-bed, and the Pullman roomette.

In many minds, these fundamentally new products were long denied admittance to the realm of *art objects*, and only recently have we come to realize that something was left out of our concept of the arts if it could not be reflected in all of the objects of our civilization. It is clear that we must give up limited preconceptions, as has been necessary in science, in order to enlarge this concept of the work of art. As Herbert Read states so well, "The things we use in modern life are infinitely more numerous and more complex than ever before. When such things come into our life — typewriters, gasoline-pumps, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners — our first impulse is to put them in a category altogether distinct from objects such as dishes and candlesticks, which we have grown accustomed to regard as fit objects for aesthetic form. But once these objects too were intruders into a world of simpler utensils, or of no utensils at all, and just as they have been assimilated into the traditions of good form and design, so these new and complicated tools and utensils must equally be regarded as material for the applications of the principles of design. For these principles are ubiquitous. There is absolutely nothing we make and use which cannot submit to the discipline of form and its accompanying grace or harmony."



What are some of the immediate problems to consider in contemporary design? With few exceptions — greater refinement in function, form, and craftsmanship are necessary in order to achieve maturity in the design development of recent decades. There is a current disproportionate obsession with uniqueness, newness, and continuous change for its own sake. The designer must see himself not as a stylist or a decorator, one who changes the surface aspect of things only — but one who thinks of design in its fullest sense, and who sees, in its entirety, the product he designs. Much of the design of the present deteriorates because of the constant pressure for newer and even newer models.

Time and time again, the public has shown that it will continue indefinitely to buy a good thing. Such an opinion of public taste — empirically arrived at in the light of the tradition in good design — should strengthen the belief of manufacturers in the desirability of honest evolution and refinement, instead of built-in obsolescence. In this case, the stimulation of false values which have been placed on both the old and the new — the antique and the new model — could be replaced by genuine quality based on design essentials.

Then, once again, the achievement of good design could be effected — with the designer, manufacturer, and consumer in conscious accord and purposeful collaboration. ●

EVERYDAY ART in the magazines

A&A: ARTS & ARCHITECTURE, 3305 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, Cal.
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AH: AMERICAN HOME, 444 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y.
A&I: ART & INDUSTRY, 381 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.
AN: ART NEWS, 136 East 57th Street, New York, N. Y.
AR: ARCHITECTURAL RECORD, 119 West 40th Street, New York, N. Y.
ARev: ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW, 913 Queen Anne's Gate, Westminster, S. W. 1, England
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MP: MODERN PLASTICS, 122 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y.
PA: PROGRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE, 330 West 42nd Street, New York, N. Y.

HOUSES

Case Study House in Los Angeles, by Richard Neutra, is an attempt to solve the dwelling problem of an average sized, middle income family. *PA March*

Imaginative planting permits big picture windows in a house in Los Angeles, owned and designed by J. R. Davidson. *AF March*

Five Star Home No. 2004, geared for today's living at today's prices. *BH&G April*

Imagination, rather than money, makes a unique house built in large part from the sand, water, rock, and lumber of its site. Designed by Lloyd Ruocco. *HB April*

A desert house in Arizona, by Richard E. Drover, whose shadows have been put to work to make a cool belt between it and the heat of the afternoon sun. *HB April*

A small house on three levels uses its basement and roof to escape the "minimum" feeling. Designed by David B. Runnells. *AF April*

A little house in Florida, with a cut-in patio and a skeleton frame which permits full-height glass and 12-foot openings, seems big. Architects: Twitchell and Rudolph. *AF April*

Summer house in Maine for a family with several children. Existing cottages provide sleeping quarters for children and guests. By Harrison, Fouilhoux, and Abramovitz. *PA April*

House in Santa Barbara. Architect: Richard Neutra. *ARev May*

House by Richard Neutra has no railings to obstruct the view. *Int May*

Bird-Cage House, built inside a screened patio, is tailored to a tropical climate. Designed by Igor B. Polevitzky. *AF May*

Further discussion of the house by Igor Polevitzky for the Michael Hellers in Miami: Wrapped in a Plastic Screen. *H&G June*

Do Small Houses Afford a Satisfactory Practice? An article on the small house as a field of architectural practice: the architect, houses for individual clients, houses for sale, prefabricated houses. *AR May*

Project for a house, by Alvin Lustig. *A&A May*

Twin houses, for under $10,000 each, fill twin needs on the same lot. Planned by Henry Hill. *Liv June*

A house with a color scheme of bright pastels, planned by the owners, the Duke Russells. *Liv June*

EQUIPMENT

Recommendations on four TV receivers. *CR May*

Tests on washing machines. *CRep June*

More comfort in your kitchen. *BH&G June*

With the right equipment, washday need not be a chore. *Liv June*

INTERIORS, FURNISHINGS, ACCESSORIES

Light fittings from post-war Europe shown in an exhibition arranged by the Scottish Committee of the Council of Industrial Design. *Des March*

A new series of storage units by Charles Eames. *A&A April*

Suggestions for making your home look larger. *BH&G May*

Handwoven Swedish rugs designed by Sigvard Bernadotte. *CH Summer*

Photographs of a representative selection of contemporary furniture. *A&A May*

A change from chaos to comfort: very little money went into re-doing the living room and bedroom of the Garey apartment. *Liv June*

With well-planned lighting, fabrics, and good taste, you can brighten the corner where you live. *Liv June*

Air Minded: With cool furniture, you can give your living room the airiness of a terrace. *H&G June*

REMODELING

Style, rather than space makes much of a remodeled brownstone house in New York City. *Int April*

FOREIGN

Design Policy Begins at the Top is an article on the progressive Italian firm of Olivetti which stresses good design in the things used in their business, their products, and a design education policy for the general managers on down. *Des February*

Flats in Sao Paolo, for employees of an industrial insurance company, are raised on columns in order to free ground space for playgrounds, gardens, shops, and a garage. Architects: Marcelo, Milton and Mauricio Roberto. *ARev April*

MISCELLANEOUS

Jewelry by Milton Cavagnaro. *A&A February*

New toys emphasize variety in plastics, variety in conception and design. *MP March*

Good fences you can build. *BH&G May*

Jacques Lipchitz: a portfolio of photographs by Paul Weller. *Int May*

Picasso as Potter. Photographs and translated excerpts from Ceramiques de Picasso by Georges and Suzanne Ramie. *CH Summer*

Painting Outdoor Metal Furniture. *CR June*

ARTICLES

The Functional Tradition. A series of articles on the discipline of functionalism, landscape elements, trim, texture and color, and application in the functional tradition. *ARev January*

Article and photographs on the Exhibition of Home Furnishings selected by the Museum of Modern Art for the Merchandise Mart. *A&A March*

The Next Step by J. M. Richards. An article on the shortcomings of contemporary architecture and the dangers of functionalism. *ARev March*

The Shape of Things by Eliot Noyes: the Acorn Fireplace. *CRep March*

Outstanding Designs: furniture, fabrics, and accessories which received honors from the American Institute of Decorators. *H&G April*

33 ideas for your house, 30 building ideas, 23 kitchen ideas. *H&G April*

Frank Lloyd Wright and the Conquest of Space. An article by Bruno Zevi. *MA May*

Architecture and Learning: A Collegiate Quandary. An article on the architectural styles of university buildings. By Walter L. Creese. *MA May*

Chairs Eames and Chests: a discussion by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. of the work of Charles Eames, designer-craftsman uniting technology and artistry in a fresh concept of living. *AN May*

Five examples of building materials used in combination on the outside of houses. *BH&G June*

Ideas that do not take a lot of space for making your garden a place to relax. *BH&G June*

An airy utility room, with plenty of sunshine, that doubles as a workroom. Architects: Dighton Smith and Grant W. Voorhees. *BH&G June*

The Face of Time. An article by R. W. Symonds on traditional and modern clock dial design. *A&I June*

The Shape of Things by Eliot Noyes. Competent design versus irresponsible "styling." *CRep June*

ADDRESSES

designers, manufacturers, distributors, and lenders

of products in the exhibition
and in this issue of the Everyday Art Quarterly

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Chas. A. Anderson & Company, 1214 Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Bartolucci-Waldheim, 49 East Ontario, Chicago, Illinois
Conant-Ball Company, Gardner, Massachusetts
Corning Glass Works, Corning, New York
The Dayton Company, Nicollet Avenue at Seventh Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota
L. S. Donaldson Company, Nicollet Avenue at Seventh Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Charles Eames, 901 Washington Boulevard, Venice, California
Ira Enmark Company, 1100 Second Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Fisher Sterling, 346 Claremont Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey
Edwin Folstad, Island Park, Mound, Minnesota
The Gorham Company, Providence, Rhode Island
Hennepin County Historical Society, 1516 Harmon Place, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Holtzermann's, Cedar Avenue at Fifth Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota
The Hoover Company, Canton, Ohio
Hotpoint Incorporated, 5600 West Taylor Street, Chicago, Illinois
The International Silver Company, Meriden, Connecticut
S. Jacobs & Company, 811 Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Johnson-Gokey-Thiss, 525 Second Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Josiah Wedgwood and Sons, 24 East 54 Street, New York, New York
Anna B. Kerr, 1720 Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota
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Lenox Incorporated, Trenton, New Jersey
Raymond Loewy Associates, 580 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York
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Kurt Versen, 4 Slocum Avenue, Englewood, New Jersey
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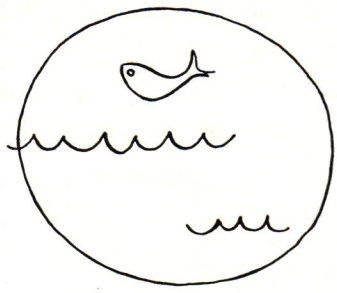
Russel Wright, 11 West 42 Street, New York, New York

on your vacation

trip this summer



all

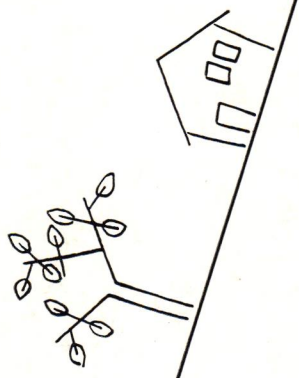
roads

lead

to

MINNEAPOLIS

city of lakes



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