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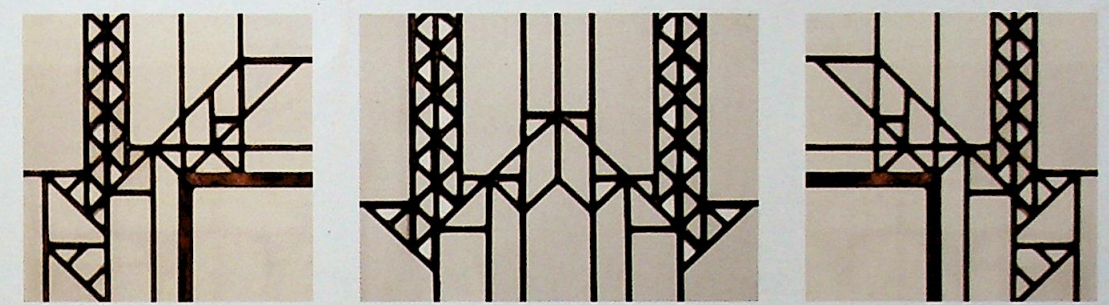


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FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT



Set of Six Windows from the Francis Little House, Wayzata, Minnesota, 1912-14

• BERNARD GOLDBERG FINE ARTS, LLC •



Clear, opaque and flashed glass with copper-coated zinc caming. Four center panels: $37\frac{7}{8} \times 18\frac{1}{2}$ in.; two exterior panels: $37\frac{7}{8} \times 15\frac{3}{8}$ in.; overall: 12 ft. $5\frac{3}{8}$ in. \times $43\frac{7}{8}$ in.

THIS SET of six windows was originally designed for and installed in the Francis W. Little House in Wayzata, Minnesota between 1912 and 1914. With its emphasis on horizontality and spatial continuity, and its fusion of interior and exterior spaces, the house was a sublime refinement of the Prairie School style. Although the house was razed in 1973, the living room and most of its furnishings survived intact, and have been installed in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art since 1982.

The Little House windows are both a culmination of Wright's light screen designs and a significant departure from those that came before. Whereas he had previously derived his inspiration for patterning from the natural surrounding environment, the Wayzata windows, created after Wright's extended stay in Europe from 1909–1910, embrace the machine age through a recurring geometric motif reminiscent of steel girders. The design represents his first use of an industrial vocabulary in the light screens, and the first use of triangles as a design motif. Previous windows had been based on a rectilinear template, but here, after extensive consultation with his patrons, Wright moved from the square to the triangular, resulting in a patterning both more complex and more dynamic than previous light screens. To temper this dynamism, Wright eschewed color in his use of glass, alternating clear and translucent white in the vertical accumulations of triangles, and subtly diffusing color solely through the copper electroplating of the zinc caming.

The relative spareness of the caming in the light screens' center panels points to Wright's desire to diminish the boundaries between interior and exterior space. A horizontal "window within the windows" travels between the center panels, opening up the view outdoors. This horizontal rectangle is truncated in the side panels; it becomes vertically oriented and allows the pattern of girders, made up of an accumulation of rectangles, to take precedence and create vertical balance.

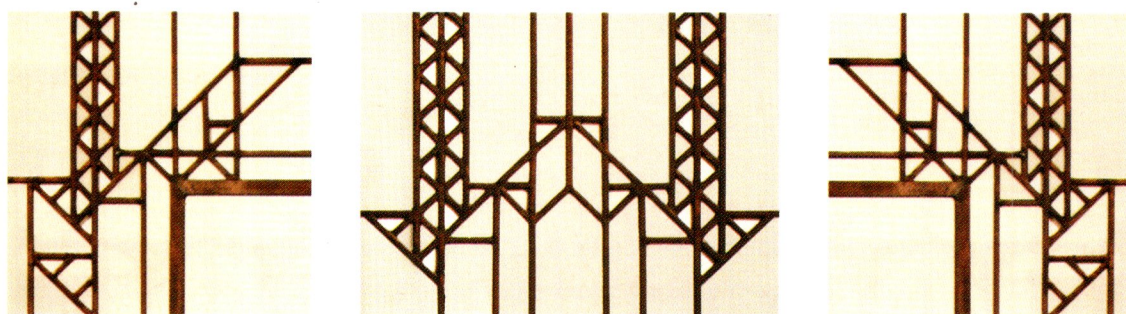
Although the architect would abandon the use of light screens by 1925, the Little House triangles were an important late addition to his vocabulary, and one that would be used again in such seminal Wright designs as the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo and the Hollyhock House in Los Angeles.

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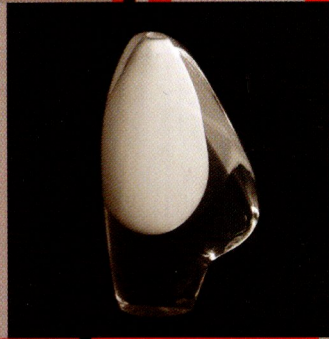
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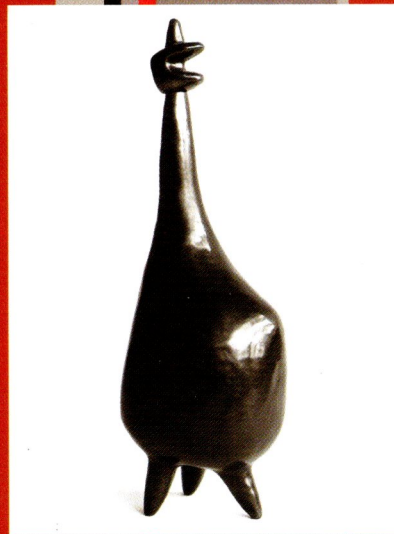


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Contents

Why MODERN?

Some fifteen years ago, bright, uncluttered interiors furnished with sleek, stylish, yet strangely familiar pieces began to appear on the pages of glossy shelter magazines. These decors included bent-plywood chairs by Charles and Ray Eames, tables by Eero Saarinen with enameled cast-aluminum bases and marble tops, and a host of other pieces produced in the 1940s and 1950s by manufacturers such as Knoll, Herman Miller, Dunbar, and Widdicombe. The look might have become a passing decorating fad—gone the way of “shabby chic” and wenge wood. Instead, the rediscovery of vintage modernist design took on a life of its own.

Today, the decorative arts of recent decades have assumed a place of distinction, attracting the interest of not only serious and cerebral aficionados of design—and top auction houses and dealers—but also that of scholars, museums, and foundations. The work of imaginative, yet all but forgotten, designers steadily reappears in galleries, and hardly a month goes by without the publication of a new monograph on their work. The current generation of designers, energized by the forward-looking spirit of their predecessors, now annually unveils scores of fresh, technically innovative—and responsibly produced—objects for the home.

MODERN intends to be a lively and spirited forum for this relatively young and still developing field of interest. Our aim is to approach vintage and contemporary decorative arts from a variety of vantage points: historical, aesthetic, theoretical, and market-oriented. We will host a parliament of voices—those of collectors, curators, dealers, and auction-house specialists—and intend to speak to both those who are well versed in design and those who are newcomers to it. As our knowledge of modern design expands and evolves, so too will MODERN.

Please take a seat.



Gregory Cerio
Editor



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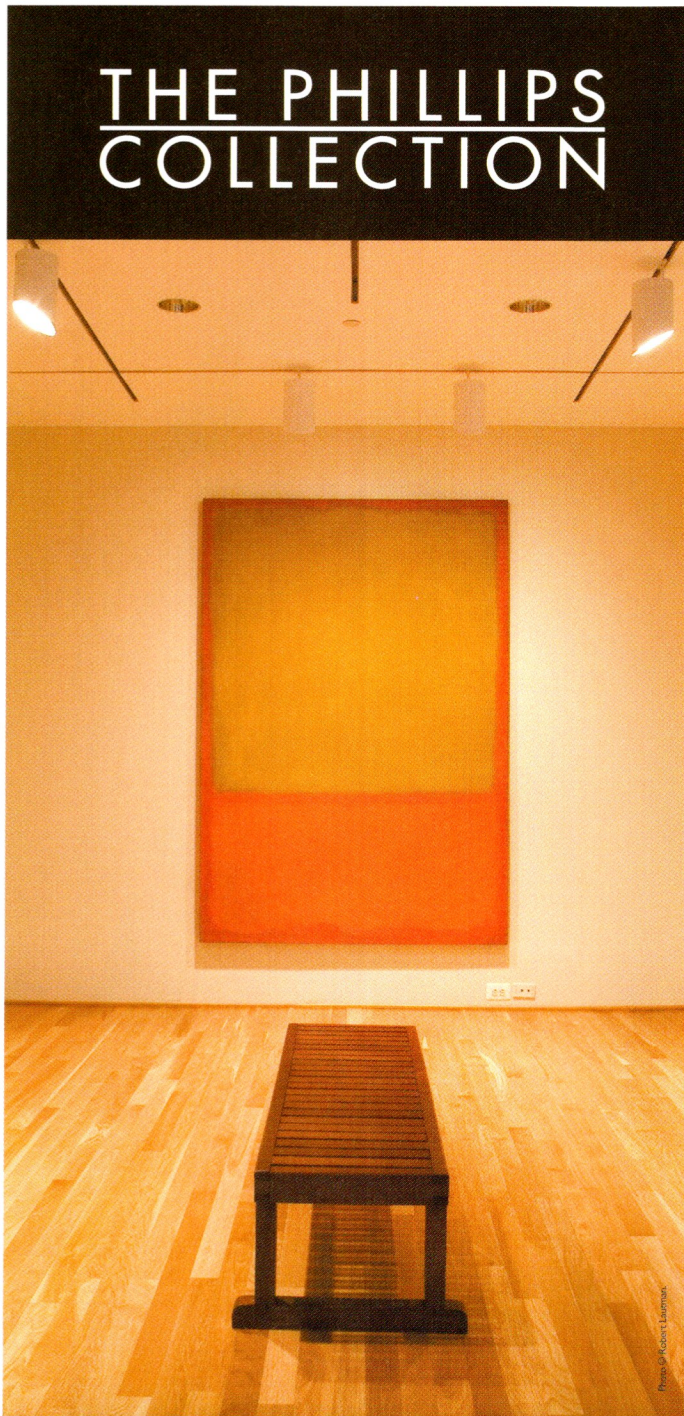
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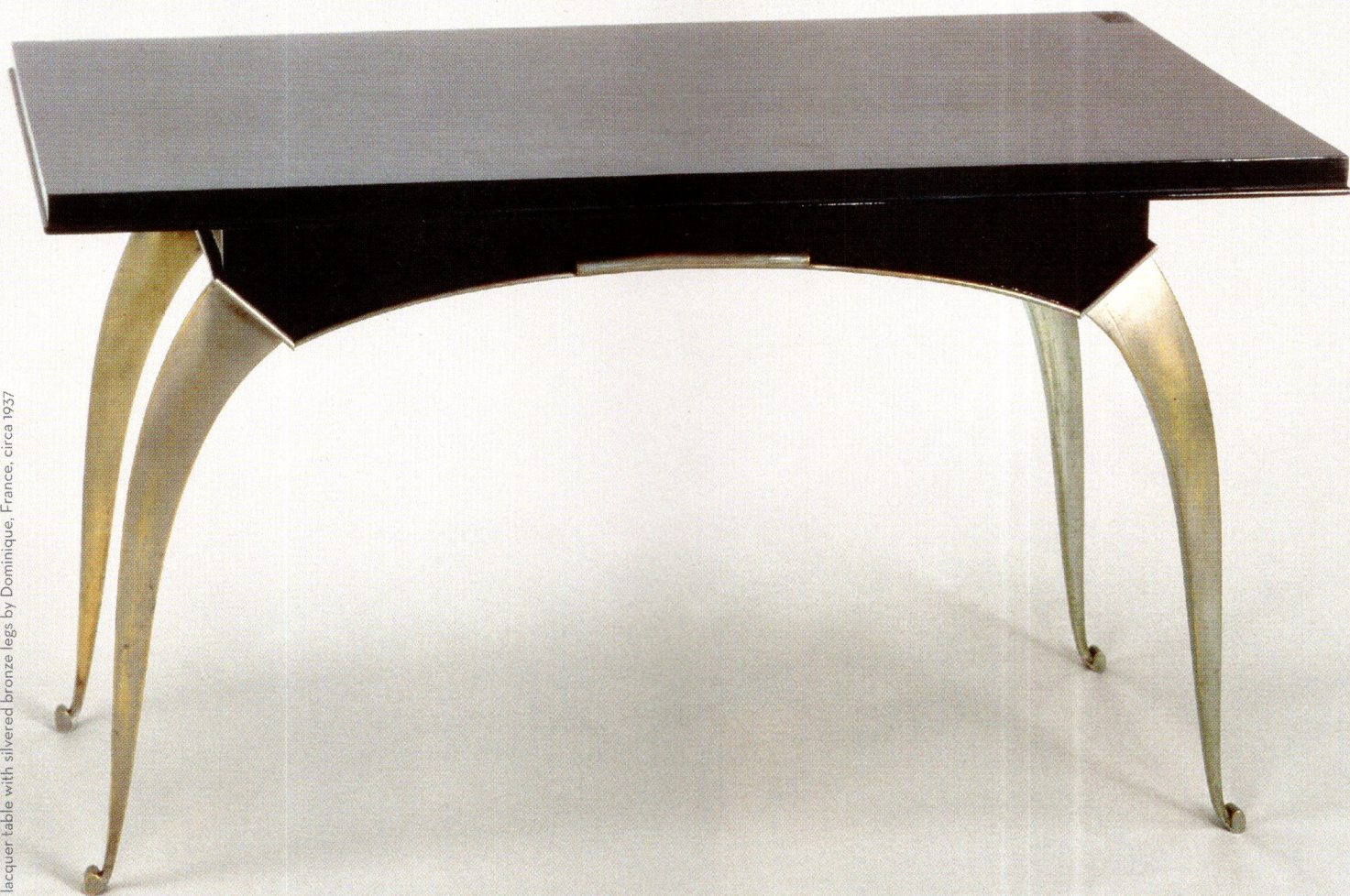
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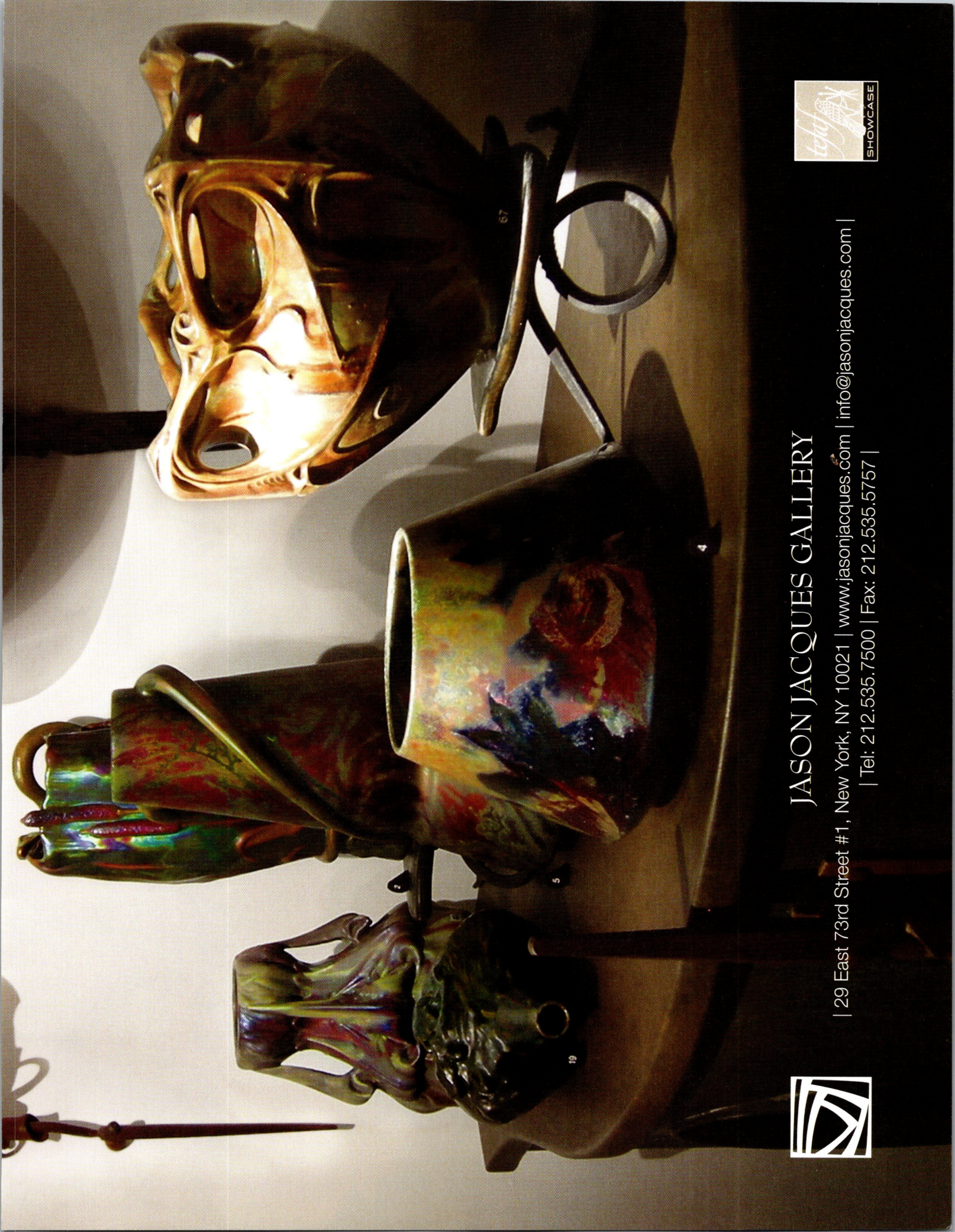
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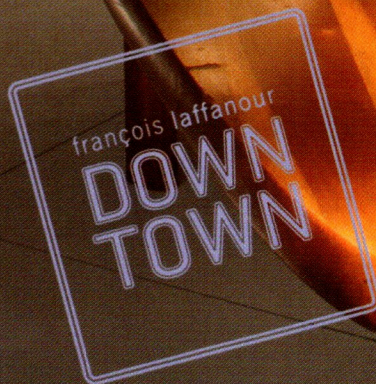


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Behind the Numbers

What Sold, for How Much, and Why?

LOT 318, WRIGHT AUCTIONS, CHICAGO, DECEMBER 9, 2008: A tea table designed by Maria Pergay in 1957. Custom-made of silver, silver-plated steel, and mirror-polished stainless steel, it sold for \$112,800 off an estimate of \$60,000 to \$80,000—the top lot in the sale. Some reasons for the high price:

Rarity

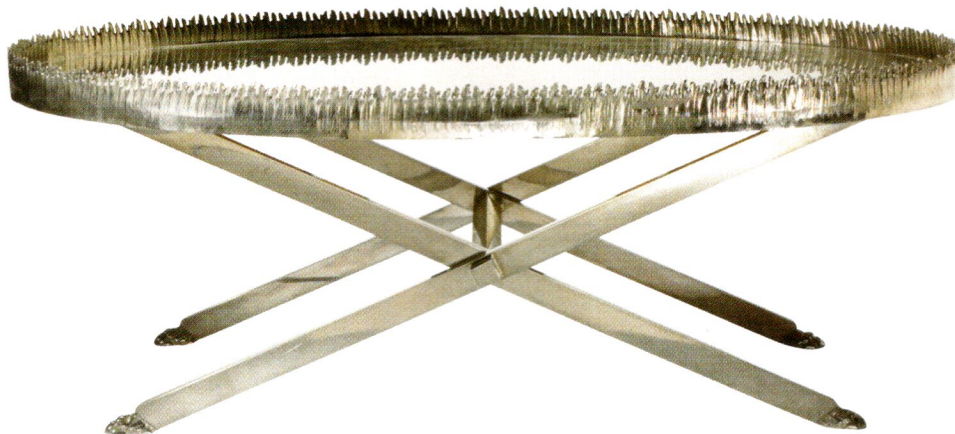
Throughout her career, Pergay, now 78 years old, has never designed objects for mass production. She created perhaps three other variants on this tea table, but for all intents and purposes, it is a unique piece. “It’s an early and unusual Pergay design,” says auctioneer Richard Wright. “It strikes a nice balance—neither severe nor a confection.”

Materials

Furniture fabricated from silver has an old and regal pedigree—Louis XIV furnished several rooms at Versailles with pieces made of solid silver—but silver leaf is seen only in modern designs (and then not often). “The table has a spectacular materiality,” Wright says. “The soft sheen of silver gives it a special quality.”

Current cachet

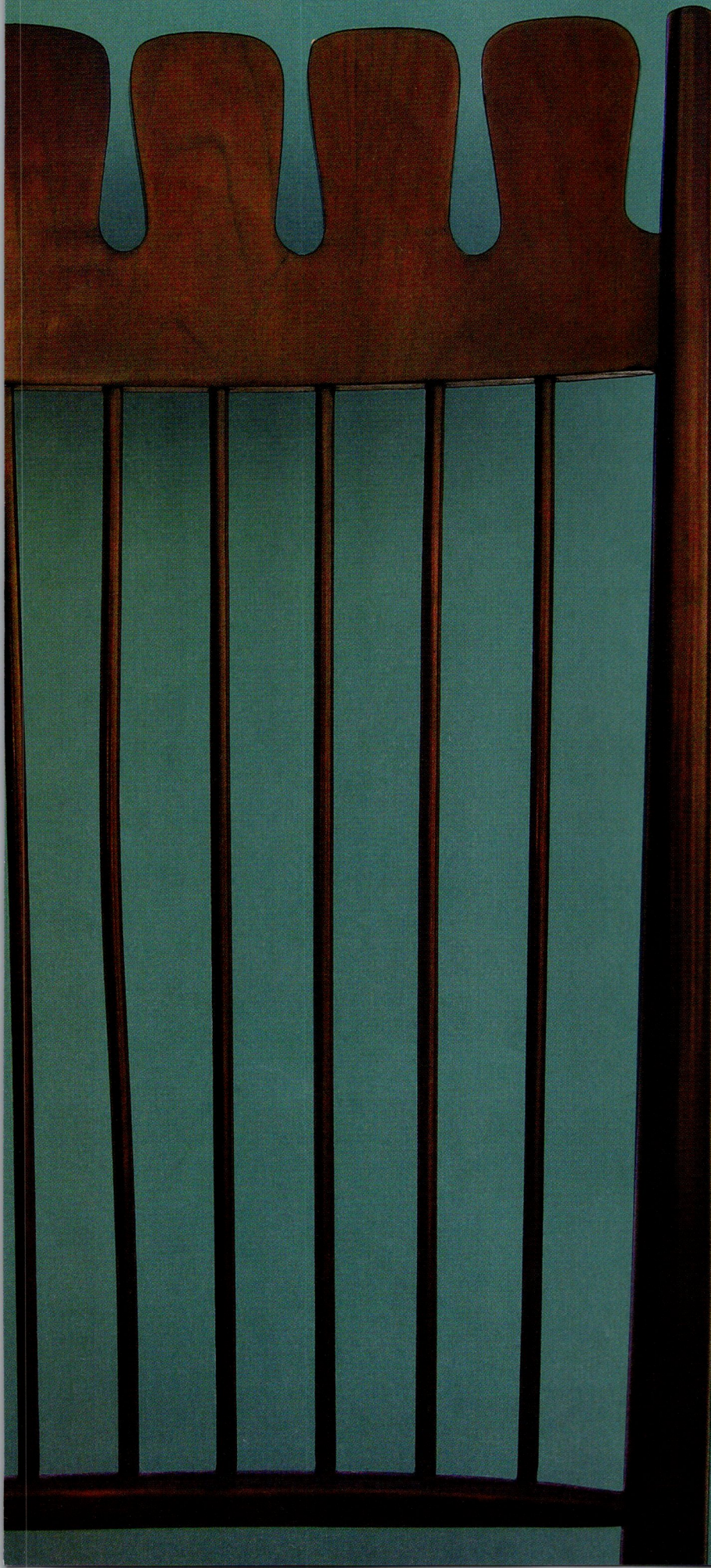
Over the past few seasons, New York dealer Suzanne Demisch has carefully built a market for Pergay’s work and co-authored a monograph on her career, *Maria Pergay: Between Ideas and Design*. “You can say we were fundamental in raising her profile among collectors,” says Demisch. “Maria is now a known quantity. And when a piece [like the tea table] comes along that has never been seen before, there’s an automatic spike in price.”

**Form**

As Wright points out, “there is a timelessness to the X-based table, but Pergay treats it in such a modern way.” The scalloped tongue-of-flame edging makes the piece, giving it a verve that is wholly unexpected in an object made in 1957. The detailing seems to foreshadow a style nearly 40 years in the future: the neo-baroque designs of the 1990s by the now dissolved team of Elizabeth Garouste and Mattia Bonnetti. According to Demisch, “Maria has always been several steps in front of other people.”

Provenance

The history of the Pergay table is known: it was commissioned by Madame Aboucaya, the wife of Algeria’s envoy to France. While not a particularly distinguished provenance, “it was nice to have that information,” says Wright.



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New Sensations

Dealers Offer Market Insights and Recent Discoveries



Classically Inspired

"I've become interested in the designer **John Vesey**, who worked in the 1960s and 1970s. Vesey's pieces drew on historical models—like classical campaign furniture, X-based tables, and drum forms—but he never reproduced them exactly. Instead, he reinvented these classic models by using new materials such as steel, glass, and brass."

Liz O'Brien, New York City



Honest Forms

"We've begun to showcase the work of **Axel Einar Hjorth**, who was an influential Swedish designer from the 1920s through the 1940s. I love the simplicity of his pieces—his raw use of materials in designs that express strict modernist ideas while remaining functional. This chair was from a line of furniture made for the relaxation of the mind, eyes, and spirit. Hjorth is starting to command bigger prices. One piece of his recently sold for \$57,000 at Christie's."

Kim Hostler, Antik, New York City



Floating Stones

"We are the first gallery to bring **Jean Brand's** work to New York City. Brand started **Atelier Janus** in the early 1960s in Paris, where he experimented with resin, plastic, and fiberglass. Brand was a master craftsman, and his production numbers are low. We found three of his early 1970s resin tables on a recent trip to Europe. They are made of monochromatic stones that are encased in clear resin. The tables have a real wow factor—we'd never seen anything like them. As you stare at them you begin to see the handmade qualities such as the irregularities in the shape and the ripples in the surface. The stones look like they're floating in water."

Sean Robins, Galerie Van den Akker, New York City

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A Mexican Maestro

“We have been collecting and promoting the work of several Mexican designers who were active from the 1940s to the 1970s. We’ve had great success with pieces by **Arturo Pani**, who spent his youth in Europe and was trained in Paris before returning to Mexico City in the late 1930s. He was the most important interior designer in Mexico until his death in 1981. He worked in iron and gilt, and with stone, mirrors, and glass. Everything he did was custom-made.”

Robert Willson, Downtown, Los Angeles



Lesser-known Nordics

“We focus on handmade, well-crafted Scandinavian design. Because pieces by the bigger names have been snapped up, this is a bit of a boom time for the minor—or not as major—Scandinavian designers. Take, for instance, **Severin Hansen**, almost all his pieces are in Brazilian rosewood. This upholstered bench is simple but sculptural. There is always beautiful detailing in his work.”

Abby Malowancyk, Collage 20th Century Classics, Dallas

Chrome Confusion

“It’s a good time to buy things from the 1960’s and 1970’s. The designs are high quality and they are a good value. I’m interested in chrome pieces by the likes of **Milo Baughman** and **Gabriela Crespi** [pictured: a Crespi chair], although there’s some confusion. People think that anything with flat bar chrome is Baughman, but eighty percent of the chrome stuff you see on-line listed as Baughman isn’t his work at all.”

Gary Calderwood, of Calderwood 2 Gallery and Calderwood2 Gallery, Philadelphia



by Damaris Colhoun



Newer Studio Pieces

“We’re best known for dealing in the work of **George Nakashima**, but lately I’ve been looking at the second generation of the **studio craft** furniture movement—artist/artisans like **David Ebner** [pictured: an Ebner cabinet] and **Michael Coffey**, who began to work in the late 1960s and in the 1970s. They have the same reverence for wood as Nakashima, but the forms they make are somehow more sensual. Each of their pieces is beautiful and unique, which gives them staying power. I think their market has huge growth potential.”

Robert Aibel, Moderne Gallery, Philadelphia

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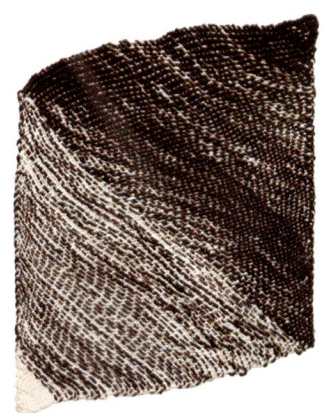
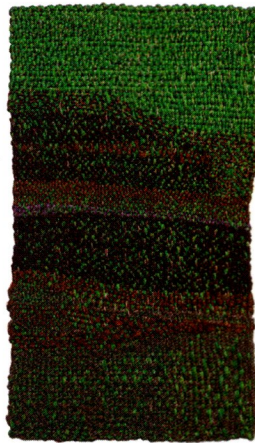
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Voices

Passionate Dispassion

A talk with collector John C. Waddell

Among students of modern design, John Waddell, a retired business executive, is revered, both as a generous donor and as a model collector: astute, rigorously studious, a person who gathers objects with a historian's sense of purpose. Here he talks about his interests, instincts, and methods.

You assembled a major collection of early twentieth-century photography, much of which you donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1987. What prompted you to change collecting fields?

My collection of early modernist photographs was formed during the 1980s, with surprisingly little competition from other collectors. It was a valuable lesson in the benefits of good timing. Soon after, the field became crowded, prices soared, and I was happy to be out of the market. That collection couldn't have been formed five years later.

Why American modern design?

It represented another opportunity to explore modernism's early stages in a medium that was relatively uncollected.

How would you define your collection?

I define it very succinctly: objects that reflect the advent of modernism in America.

What intrigues you about that subject?

It's about America turning a corner—shaking off historicist styles and beginning to relate to the movement that came to define twentieth-century applied arts.

When did modern design come into its own in the United States?

Although there had been the occasional modern interior based on progressive Central European designs, modernism was a tough sell here. It wasn't until the mid-twenties that the movement began to gain some traction. The ensuing fifteen years was a period of incredible creativity.

What spawned it?

During the teens and through the mid-twenties, a talented group of young designers, schooled in modern styles, immigrated to America, primarily from Germany and Austria. Kem Weber, Oscar Bach, Elsa Tennhardt, Walter von Nessen, and Peter Müller-Munk were among those

who came from Germany. The Austrians included Paul Frankl, Joseph Urban, Rudolph Schindler, and Frederick Kiesler; there was also Ilonka Karasz from Hungary. I would say that Frankl, based in New York, and Weber, in Los Angeles, became the most influential.



So the widespread perception that modernist styles came to America only in the wake of the 1925 Paris design exposition—the showcase from which the term “art deco” derives—is wrong.

Yes, immigrant designers from Central Europe planted the seeds of modern design in America well before the French fair.

You reject applying the term “art deco” to the material you collect.

I prefer to save the descriptor “art deco” for the French moderne style of the 1920s and 1930s. It's not helpful to apply that term to the clearly different American style of the same period, which, thankfully, is increasingly known as American modern.

When did “industrial design” arise?

In general terms, most American modern objects from the twenties were handmade in small numbers. Many have been lost. Those that survive often have condition problems. With the thirties came broader

demand that supported factory—or machine age—volume production and gave rise to American-born industrial designers, such as Gilbert Rohde, Donald Deskey, Norman Bel Geddes, Henry Dreyfuss, Walter Dorwin Teague, and Russel Wright.

Does rarity affect your choices? Or are you indifferent to it?

I work on both sides of that divide. I'm interested in the very rare, early pieces from the twenties as well as the mass-produced, frequently iconic articles from the thirties. I should add that I don't admire all I collect; any object that supports the narrative is of interest.

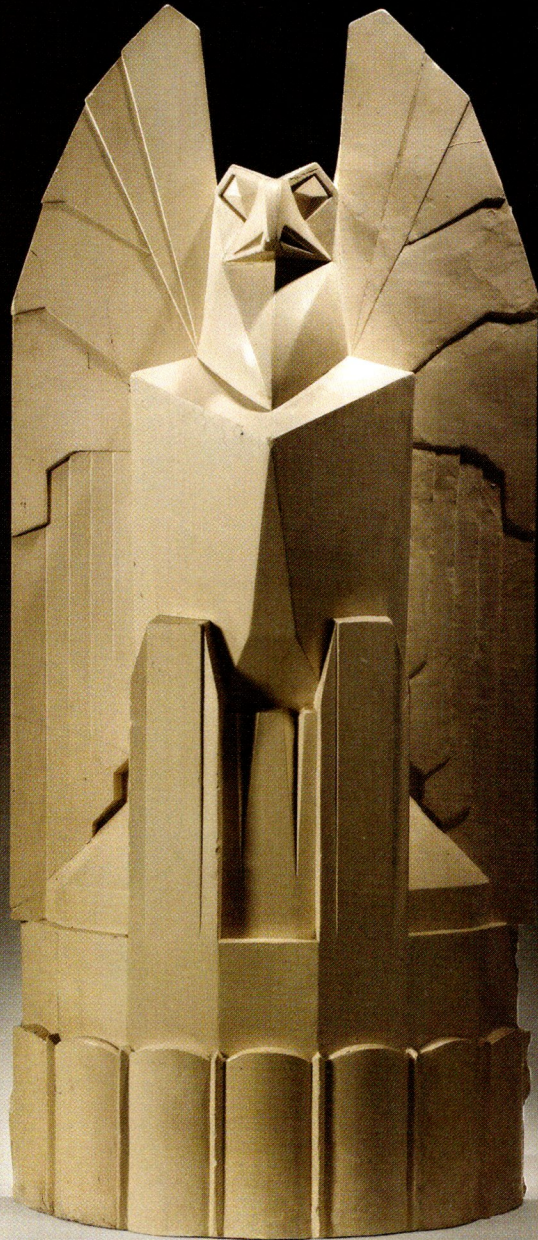
Which do you appreciate more in a design: technical or material innovation, or aesthetic innovation?

My first interest is originality, which is why I'm preoccupied with dating. An aesthetically improved version of an idea that was pursued by a pioneer designer at an earlier date is of less interest. I prefer the groundbreakers.

Where, in terms of purchases, would you advise a newcomer to American modern design to start?

Consider still available classic designs by America's great industrial designers, such as a thermos carafe and tray by Henry Dreyfuss [American Thermos Bottle Company, 1935], an electric clock by Gilbert Rohde [Herman Miller Clock Company, c. 1933], or a soda syphon bottle by Norman Bel Geddes [Walter Kidde Sales Company, c. 1935]. Beware of undisclosed restoration, and settle for nothing less than excellent condition.

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Designer Spotlight

The Three Faces of Paul Evans

Paul Evans is the wild card of midcentury American design: a craftsman, artist, and entrepreneur whose creations resist categorization. The Pennsylvania native's primary medium was metal. Working with steel, bronze, chrome, and aluminum, he explored all the potential of his materials in form and texture, producing furniture lines that were by turns burly, phantasmagorical, and suave.

Evans's designs tend to provoke reactions that are at once visceral and ambivalent. Todd Merrill, a New York dealer who showcases Evans prominently in his inventory, recalls his reaction to one monumental wall-mounted console in sculpted bronze: "First, I thought it was the ugliest thing I had ever seen. A couple of days later, I loved it." (Rock star Lenny Kravitz bought that piece. In Evans's lifetime—he died in 1987, at age 55—his clients included members of Saudi royalty, the mordant playwright Paddy Chayefsky, and the sweet-souled puppeteer Shari Lewis, of "Lamb Chop" fame.)

For all the contrasts in Evans's body of work, his designs can be grouped into three signal styles:

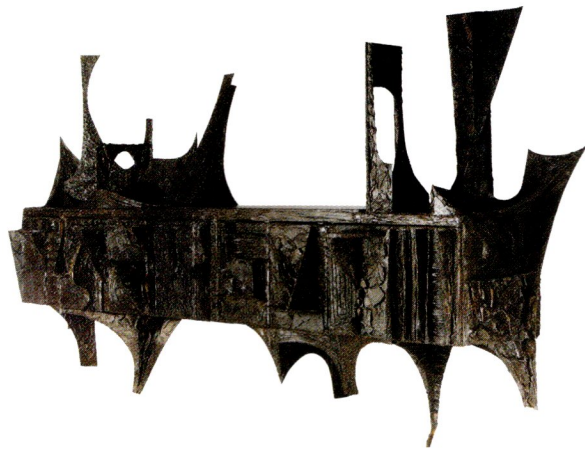
The "Cityscape" line

By the 1970s, Evans had a team of more than eighty workers. Because he insisted on hand-construction, he struggled to fill orders. Reading concedes that Evans devised the Cityscape line in part because it was relatively easy to produce. The line's tables, desks, and lamps are finished with an irregular mosaic of square and rectangular plaques of chrome and bronze (either patinated or burnished). Their aesthetic is perfectly in keeping with the "high-tech" look of the day: slick, sleek, and cosmopolitan. Merrill notes that the Cityscape and sculpted-bronze pieces are most popular with European collectors, while Americans gravitate to the sculpted-steel designs. The auction record for an Evans piece—an early steel-front cabinet—is \$157,000, but other examples of his work have sold privately for double that figure.



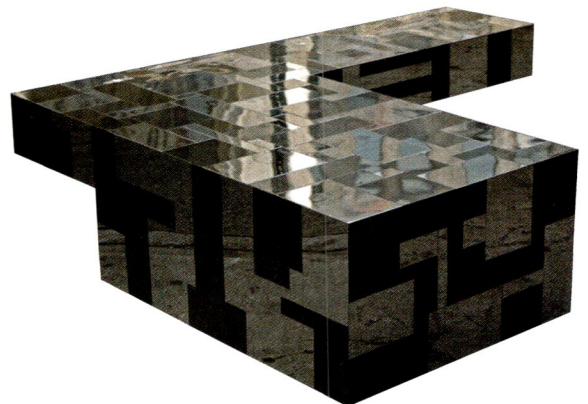
Sculpted steel-fronted cabinets

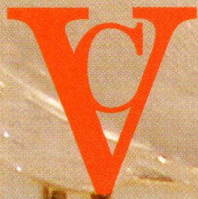
Evans trained as a silversmith, and was making table-top objects—teapots, menorahs—when he began a professional relationship with studio furniture maker Phillip Lloyd Powell in the late 1950s. Powell, who had a studio in New Hope, Pennsylvania, convinced Evans to create large-scale work. Among the first forms he conceived were wooden cabinets faced with rectangular patinated steel mounts divided into a grid of pockets, which Evans filled with an array of glyphs and runic forms. "At the time, there was a huge interest in American folk art, and I can't help but feel there's an affinity for folk art in Evans's early work," Merrill says. The steel compositions can be read as a kind of brawny album quilt. Jeffrey Head, a Los Angeles writer working on an Evans monograph, points out that Evans studied textile design for a time after high school, and says, "You can see how the idea of a tapestry, of a mixing of forms, could have had an influence on him."



Sculpted-bronze forms

In the early 1960s, Evans formed a business relationship with Directional Inc. furniture company, an avant-garde-minded New York showroom which was eager to have him create new furniture lines. By this time, Evans had expanded his New Hope studio and hired several assistants, chief among them a local craftsman named Dorsey Reading. Reading told Merrill that Evans wanted to work in bronze—but not in traditional cast bronze. Reading introduced him to a technique used in shipbuilding for spraying bronze on surfaces. In 1964 they developed a method in which epoxy was slathered and shaped on a wooden matrix, then coated in bronze. The forms Evans made are strange and primordial. He drew the epoxy down to make stalactite-like chair legs, or he built it up into stalagmites that serve as bases for glass-topped tables. Love them or hate them, the pieces are mesmerizing and wholly original.





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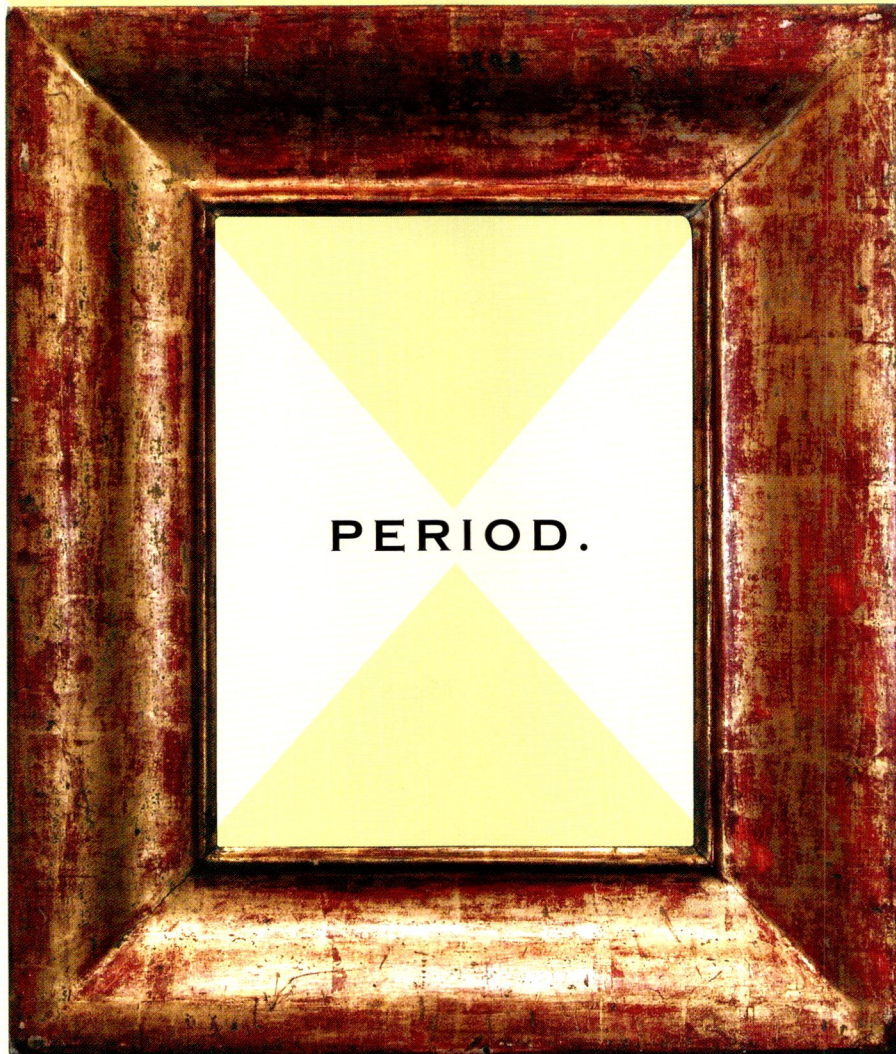
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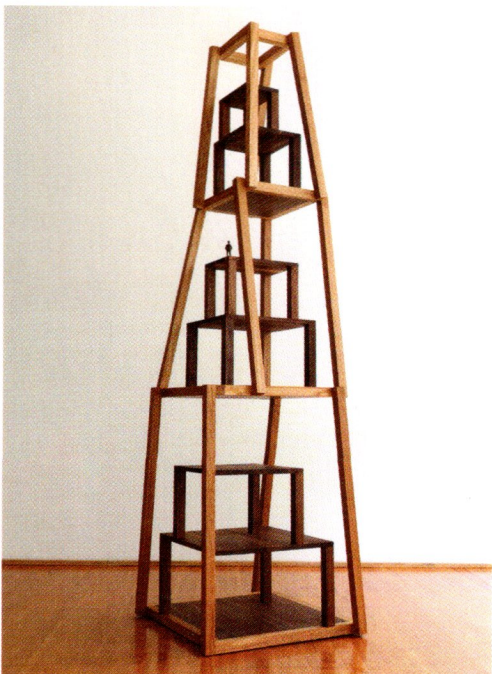
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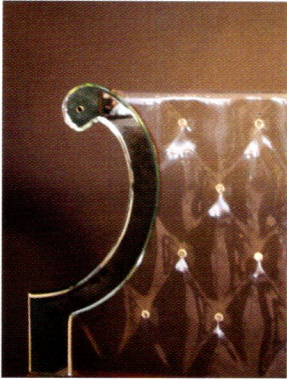
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Vicke Lindstrand

Sommerso Vase, 1950
L 19.5 cm / 8.2 inches
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In Perspective

Curator's Eye

We asked custodians of leading twentieth-century decorative-arts collections to discuss one object they feel is particularly noteworthy. Here is a gallery of their choices.



Gerald Summers
Plywood Armchair
DESIGNED 1933–34

“In the current situation of economic crisis, it seems appropriate to remember a wonderful demonstration that the design process can be both economical and beautiful. The dream of a piece of furniture made from a single piece of material originated with Michael Thonet of Austria in the nineteenth century, but it was not realized until Summers created this chair. Technically, it is a modest work: it requires two cuts in a sheet of plywood fitted to a mold, saving on material, labor, and costs. Structurally, it is a weak chair—the back legs tend to break off—but it is an elegant design, with a simplicity that seems to fit our times.”

Alexander von Vegesack

Director, Vitra Design Museum, Weil-am-Rhein, Germany



Diego Giacometti

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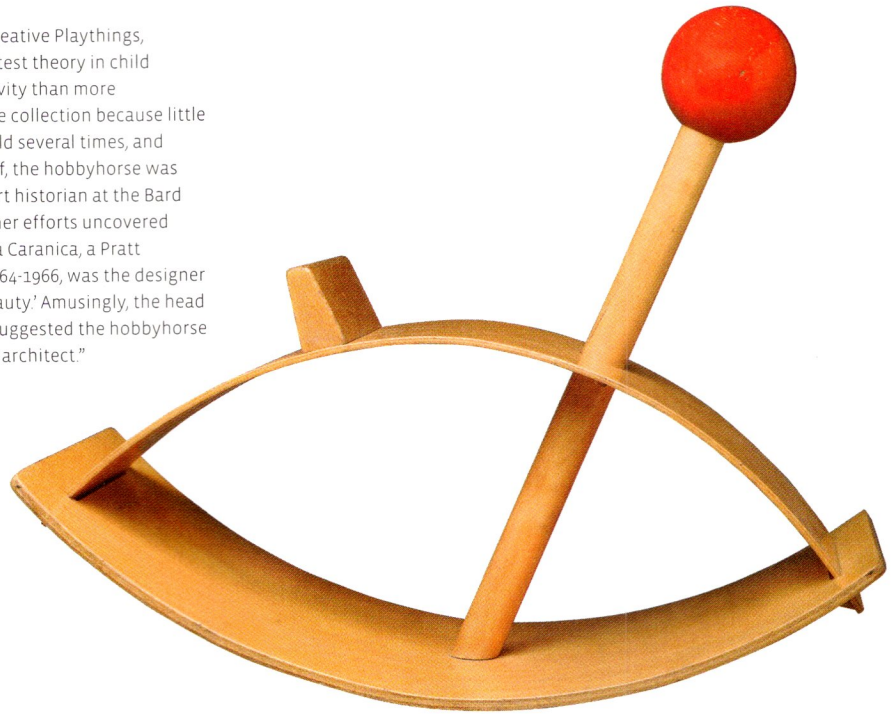
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Gloria Caranica
Hobbyhorse
 DESIGNED, C. 1965

"This amazingly reductivist child's hobbyhorse was made by Creative Playthings, of Princeton, New Jersey—a firm founded in 1950, when the latest theory in child development was that abstract toys stimulated greater creativity than more conventional narrative ones. I hesitated to acquire one for the collection because little was known about the design. Creative Playthings had been sold several times, and no business papers from the past were retained. With no proof, the hobbyhorse was often credited to Philip Johnson. Fortunately, Amy Ogata, an art historian at the Bard Graduate Center, has been researching progressive toys, and her efforts uncovered many facts about Creative Playthings. It turned out that Gloria Caranica, a Pratt Institute graduate who worked at Creative Playthings from 1964-1966, was the designer of the abstract hobbyhorse, which was called the 'Rocking Beauty.' Amusingly, the head of design at Creative Playthings, who hired Ms. Caranica and suggested the hobbyhorse project, was named Philip Johnson—only he wasn't the noted architect."

Barry R. Harwood
Curator of Decorative Arts, Brooklyn Museum



Lorin Jackson
Table, retailed by Grosfeld House
 DESIGNED C. 1940

"This is not a 'high modernist' design, but it uses a then-new material—Plexiglas—in an innovative way, and reflects a concurrent interest in surrealism and classical motifs that were in the air for furniture designers when this table was conceived. The way the plastic supports, in the neoclassical form of ribbon-tied staves, seem to bend under the weight of the glass tabletop suggests a surrealist influence that is interesting. The piece has a wonderful provenance: Marjorie Merriweather Post's daughter Nedenia—better known as the actress Dina Merrill—chose this table for her room at Mar-a-Lago, the family's Palm Beach mansion. She was always in stride with what was fashionable."

Patricia Kane
Friends of American Arts Curator of American Decorative Arts, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven

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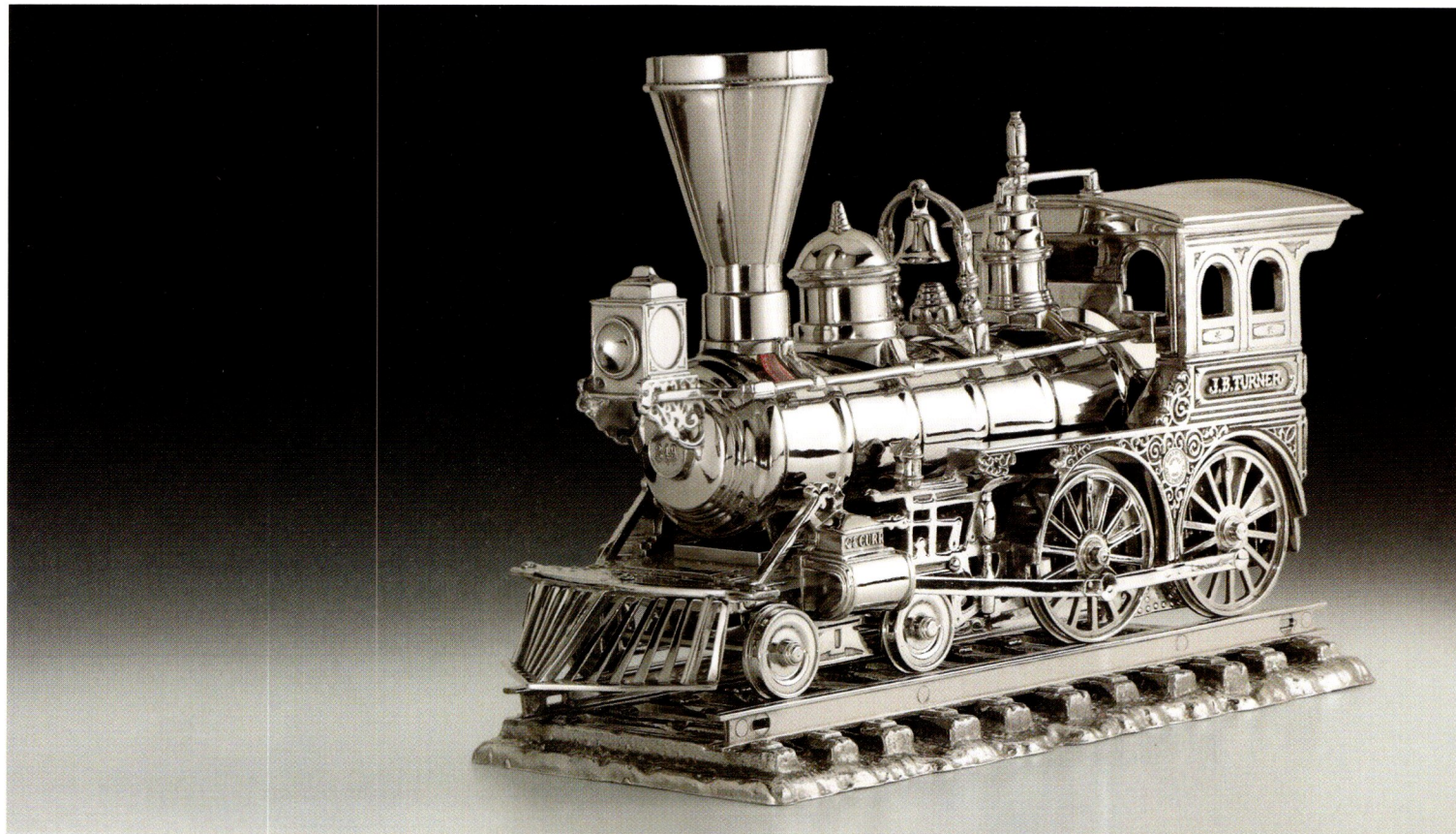
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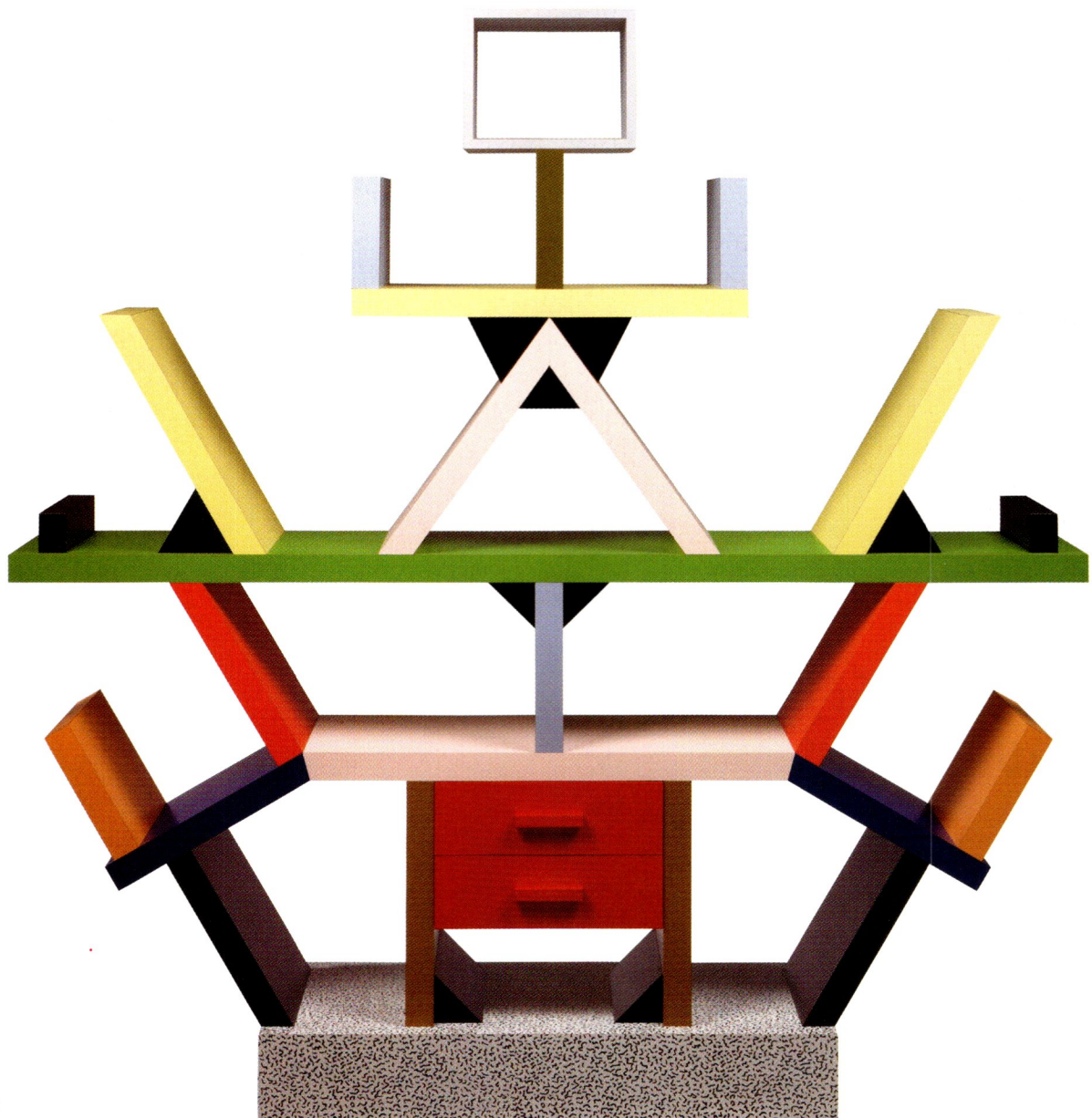
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DESIGNED 1981

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Jane Adlin

*Associate curator, Nineteenth-Century, Modern, and Contemporary Art,
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*Associate director, Curatorial Affairs & Education,
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Desk

DESIGNED C.1952

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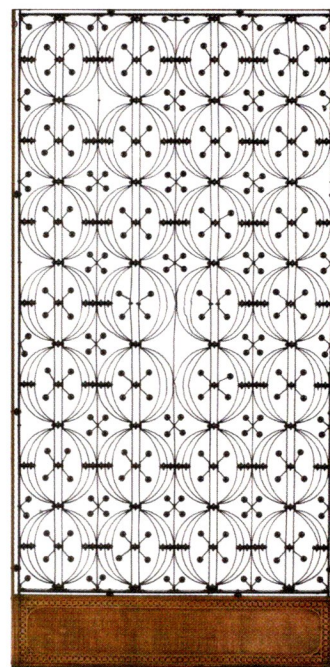
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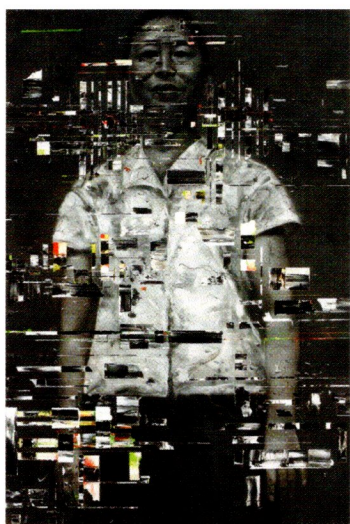
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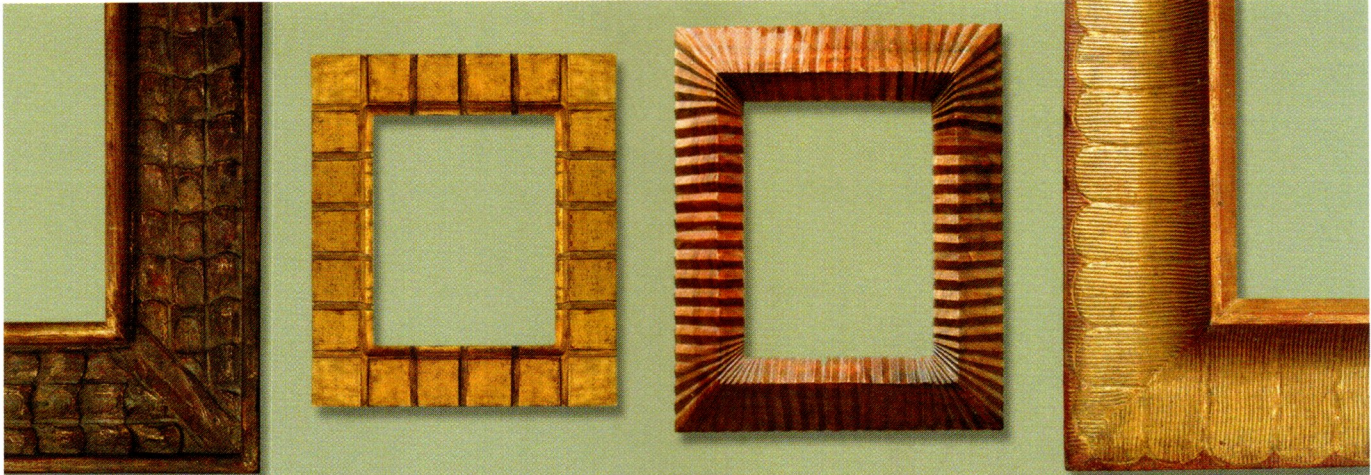
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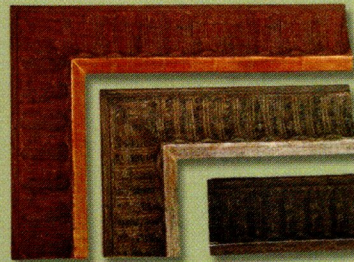


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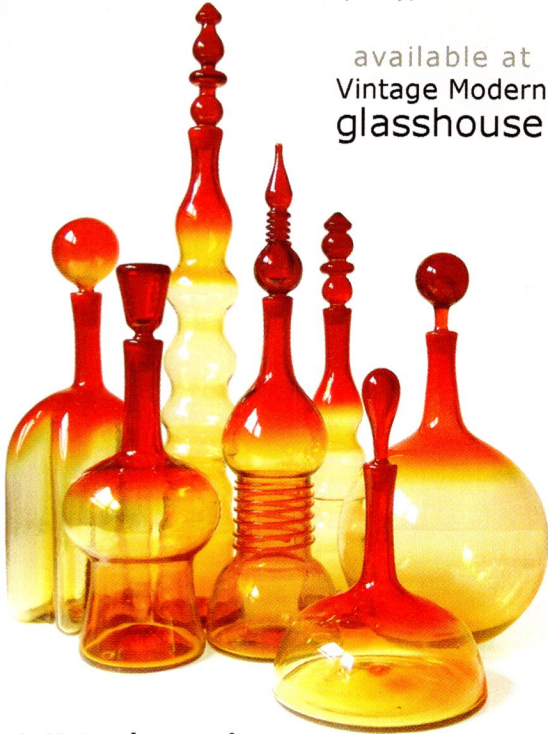
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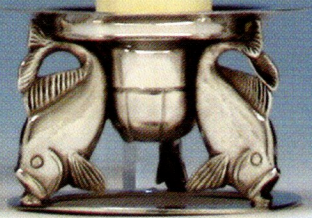
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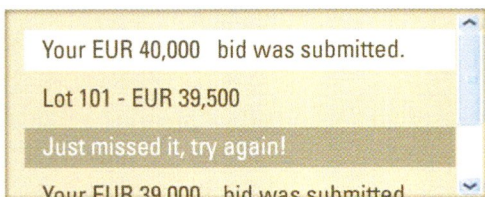
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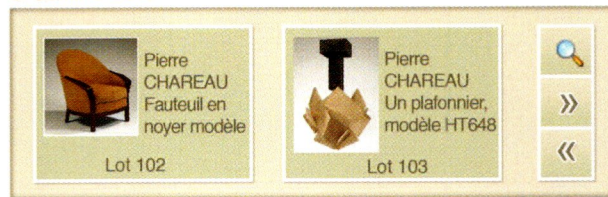
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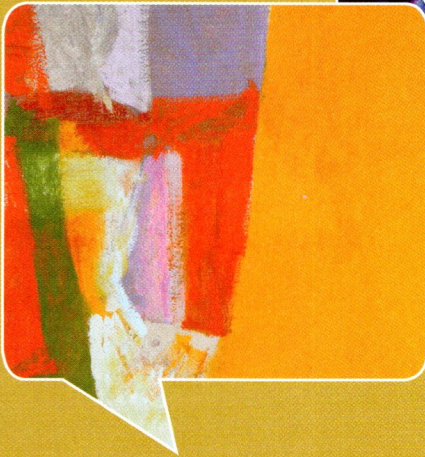
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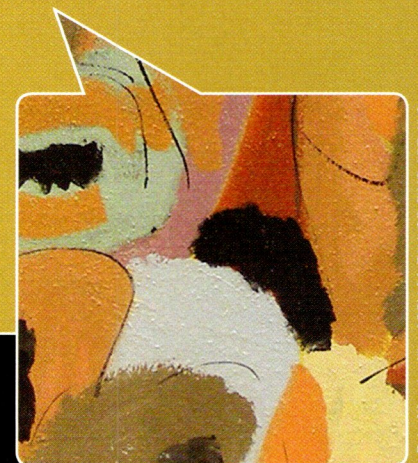
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Bidding under way on the Eileen Gray Dragons chair at the Christie's sale of the collection of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé, held in February at the Grand Palais in Paris

Staying Power

Prewar or postwar, art deco or avant garde, twentieth-century French furniture reasserts its primacy

BY PAUL O'DONNELL



LOT 276

CHRISTIE'S

For more than a quarter-century, art deco and postwar furniture from France led the market in vintage twentieth-century furniture. Rare, intricately designed, and languorously beautiful, the designs that came out of Parisian workshops between the wars satisfied collectors' deep faith in traditional French cabinetmaking, but with such verve and with so many well-placed swooping lines that these pieces also brought life to the well-decorated room. If the postwar architect-designers like Jean Prouvé and Le Corbusier acolyte Charlotte Perriand invested their furniture with more philosophical rigor than voluptuous glamour, their sheer inventiveness and sleek forms also gave dealers and collectors plenty to talk about on their way to one impressive sale after another through the early 2000s.

But of late, the momentum seemed to have moved on—the record for a twentieth-century work belonged to a table by Italian designer Carlo Mollino, which sold in 2005 for nearly \$4 million. In 2007, a set of Gio Ponti chairs topped an auction chock-full of postwar French designs, and pieces from the 1960s by the American Paul Evans were easily doubling or trebling their estimates. Meanwhile, celebrity buyers were making headlines with heady purchases of one-off or limited-edition chairs and sofas by living artists like Marc Newson and Ron Arad.

Then this February the Dragons chair, designed during the First World War by Eileen Gray, the Irish-born Parisian transplant, sold at Christie's auction of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé's collection for \$28 million, exceeding its estimate by a factor of ten.



ANDRÉ GROULT



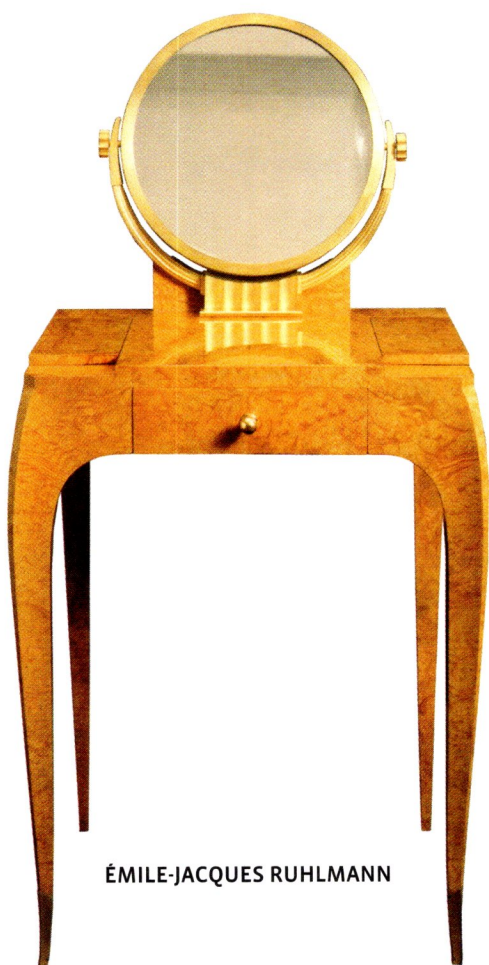
MAISON LELEU

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

A rare pair of early art deco-era side chairs by André Groult; a c. 1950 hand-carved oak cabinet by Alexandre Noll; a burled elm vanity table designed in 1913 by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann; a mahogany cabinet decorated with mother-of-pearl inlays from Maison Leleu, featuring gilt-bronze hardware and detailing



ALEXANDRE NOLL



ÉMILE-JACQUES RUHLMANN

The Gray sale was hardly the only *succès fou*. At the same auction, an exotically stylized 1965 bar by François-Xavier Lalanne also brought nearly ten times its estimate, at \$3.5 million, and a circular green marble table by the deco-era great Armand-Albert Rateau went for \$1.4 million. “Everything you need to know comes out of this sale,” says Cristina Grajales, owner of the Cristina Grajales gallery in New York City. “You have extraordinary craftsmanship, attention to detail, beautiful form. When you stand in front of the pieces, they feel as fresh as when they were made.”

The prices, coming in the middle of the global economic downturn, testified to more than the beauty of the pieces. They reasserted French design as the blue-chip standard for collectible twentieth-century furniture. “People would like some assurance about where their money is going,” says April Magen, of New York’s Magen H Gallery. “They want to know that the item is going to have some appreciation in the future.”

The avant-garde furniture of postwar French designers had claimed the status of art from the very beginning. In 1953, Paris dealer Steph Simon invited the French architects Prouvé and Perriand to exhibit their sleek and dynamic new metal and wood furnishings in his shop, along with work by the ceramist Georges Jouve and lighting designer Serge Mouille. When these designers began to age and pass on toward the end of the last century, a second wave of Parisian gallerists like Patrick Seguin and Philippe Jousse started championing their work as functional works of art. “They raised its prestige by taking a gallery approach,” says Zesty Meyers, a dealer in Brazilian furniture who has modeled his Tribeca gallery, R 20th Century, after Seguin and Jousse’s pioneering exhibitions of French 1950s design.

Art it may be, but the postwar sensibility was not for the faint of heart. Gone were the fanciful details and ultraluxe finishes of the prewar era. “After the war, people took life much more seriously,” says Susan Weber, the director of the Bard Graduate Center. “Their furniture was a response to the horrors they had lived through.”

At the same time, designers’ imaginations, and those of their clients, were captured by the airplane and the prospect of space flight. There were new plastics and other materials to be understood and incorporated. “People began to experiment with a lot of different materials—plywood and metal—because they had to,” says Ray Raymakers, of Galerie Van den Akker in New York. “After the war, the traditional materials were scarce.” (The French artist and artisan Alexandre Noll, for example, resorted to using old railroad ties for his sculptures.) The result, says Weber, was a “brutal functionalism” that collectors admired more than they bought. Not until 1991, when Steph Simon’s collection was part of a milestone sale of modern furnishings, did postwar furniture truly arrive.

Meanwhile, traditional antiques dealers had entered the twentieth-century. Retreating from skyrocketing prices for eighteenth-century furniture, collectors and decorators rallied around furniture of the arts and crafts movement, art nouveau, and eventually art deco. If Prouvé was stark, and Perriand too much of a minimalist, the furniture of the prewar era by masters such as Rateau, Jules Leleu, Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, and Jean-Michel Frank had a sumptuous beauty that bore the traditional French hallmarks of craft and obsessive attention to detail.

Parisian antiques shops began selling art deco in the late 1960s, but even in the 1970s, says one dealer, “at the flea-market stalls, you’d get puzzled looks when you asked for art deco. They didn’t

understand the interest in it.” In New York, Gerard Widdershoven built the initial inventory for his gallery, Maison Gerard, with pieces that importers of eighteenth-century French furniture tossed in to fill up containers. “They often used the furniture from the Thirties and Forties as packing material,” says Widdershoven. But a series of sales and exhibitions—beginning with auction of French couturier Jacques Doucet’s collection in 1972 (from which Saint Laurent bought his Dragons chair) and ending in a retrospective at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1976—cemented the market for deco and moderne furniture.

As Ruhlmann and Rateau were enjoying a new audience, a revolution in interior design had begun. Empowered by the Internet, collectors—led by celebrity shoppers like Brad Pitt, who has been a Prouvé fan since the late 1990s—were buying furniture for themselves. Abandoning a unified Louis XVI or English country-house look, they assembled their decor according to a personal aesthetic, with an emphasis on discovering new genres and new names. Auction houses, once the exclusive haunt of dealers and seasoned collectors, began catering to the retail trade and its hunt for the new. In 1990 it was still possible to stumble on a 1920s Ruhlmann cabinet in a Paris flea market. At last month’s Saint Laurent sale, a 19-inch-high Ruhlmann vase fetched \$202,000.

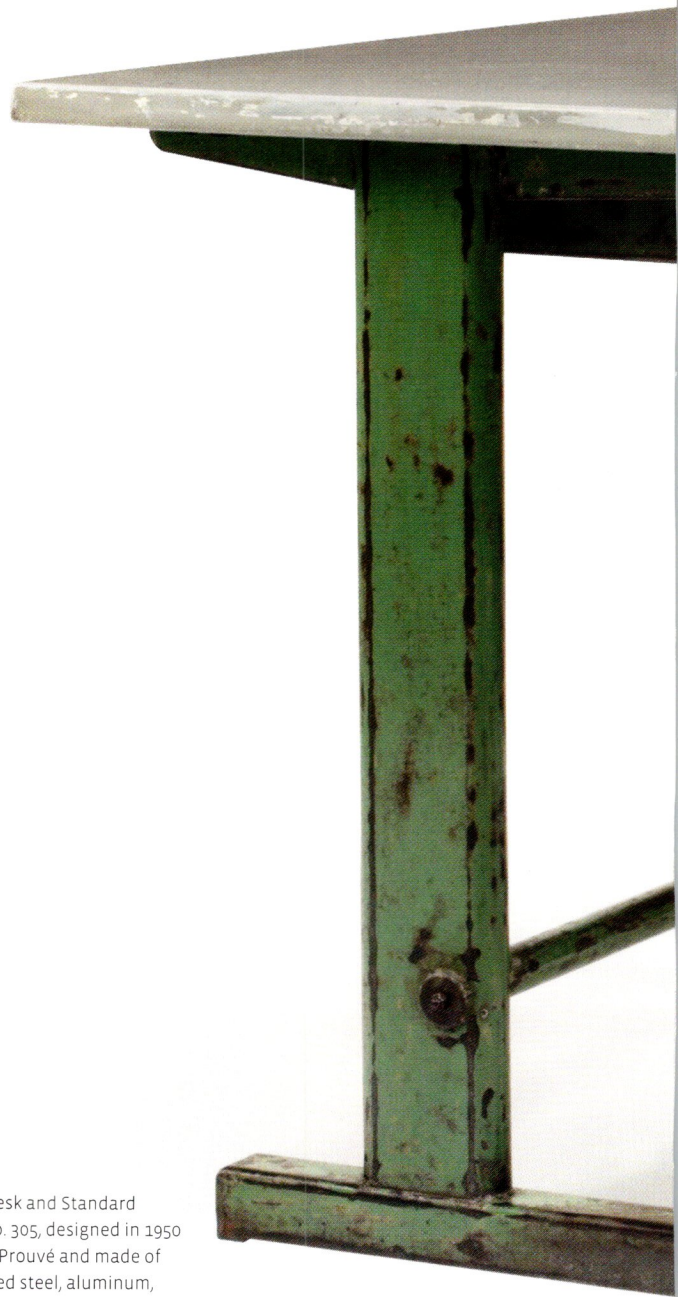
As the boom expanded, the search for new names enriched the understanding of the entire era. Unknown or unheralded French designers have come to light, including Perriand’s talented assistant Pierre Chapo and the minimalist Michel Boyer. The costliness of French furniture encouraged the growth of the market for Scandinavian designers such as Arne Jacobsen, Poul Kjaerholm, and Finn Juhl. Brazil, where French designers had a direct influence and the forests provided new, highly figured woods, has also become a deep resource for elegant designs.

Most dealers believe that the enthusiasm for French furniture, and twenty-five years of rising prices, has now rooted out all the significant pockets of top-level furniture. “We know where all the big holdings are,” says one dealer. “It’s a matter of waiting for their owners to sell or to die.”

And the fact is, there simply wasn’t much inventory to begin with. “Remember that twentieth-century design movements lasted relatively short periods,” says Raymakers. “Art deco, postwar modernism—these were brief expressions that produced furniture that few people were able to afford. This eliminates supply.” (The exception is the United States, where people like Charles and Ray Eames, Eero Saarinen, George Nelson, and others were pointedly trying to provide good design to the masses: the supply of their democratically produced pieces is so great that prices are soft.)

Left with few pieces, fewer competitors, and few surprises, says Deborah Colman, of Pavilion Antiques in Chicago, “the unique, unseen pieces in private collections will now realize the highest prices.” And as the Saint Laurent sale perhaps proved, the limit of those prices has yet to be glimpsed. Even at the stratospheric levels of the Yves Saint Laurent/Pierre Bergé sale, Zesty Meyers figures, “a lot of French is still a great buy. If it’s \$100,000 now, what is it going to be worth ten years from now?”

Paul O’Donnell writes regularly on the decorative arts

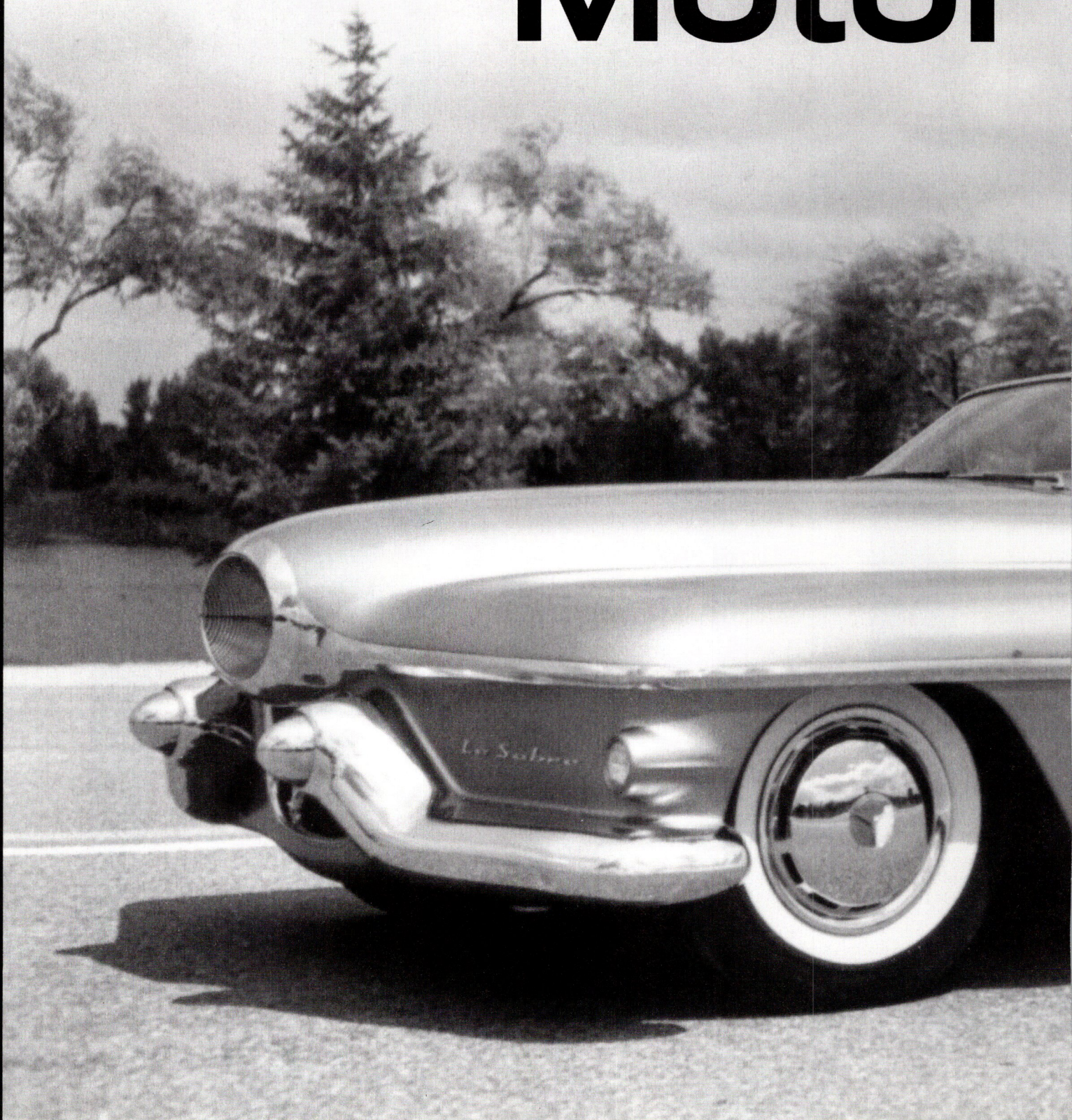


A Cité desk and Standard Chair no. 305, designed in 1950 by Jean Prouvé and made of enameled steel, aluminum, and beech plywood

In French design, a collector finds “extraordinary craftsmanship, attention to detail, beautiful form. When you stand in front of the pieces, they feel as fresh as when they were made.”

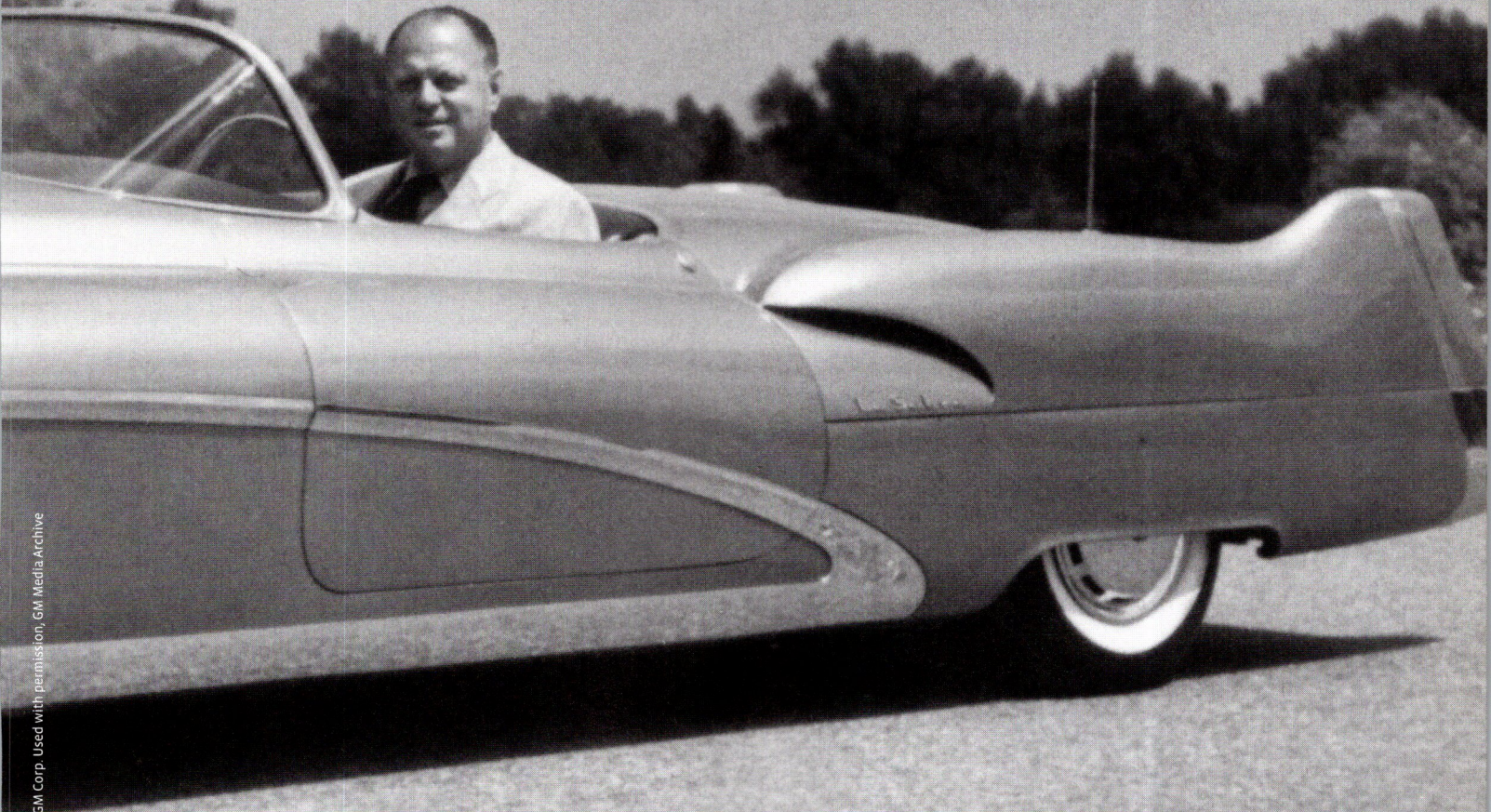


Modernism Motor



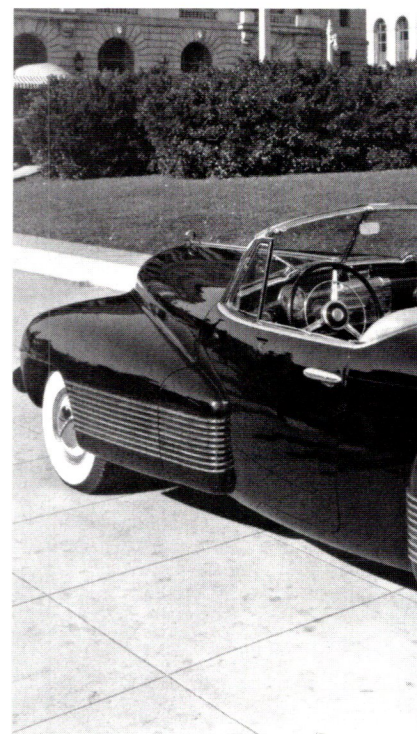
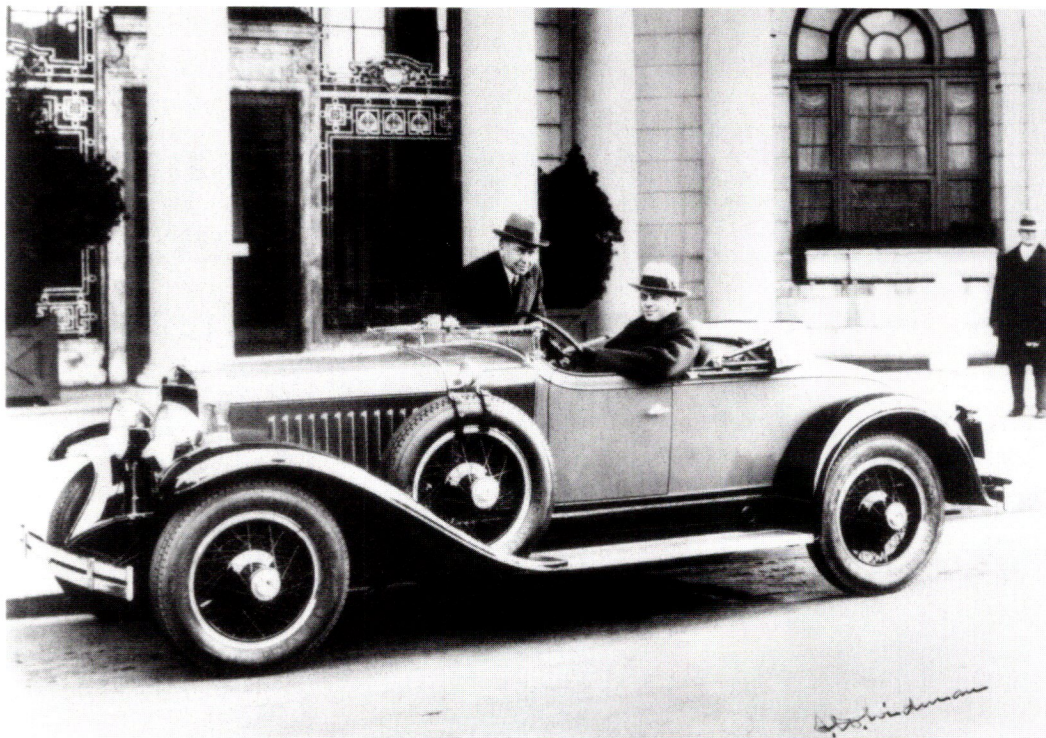
and the **City**

If modern design was not welcome in every American home, it did reside in every garage—and GM's design director was the man who put it there **BY RUSSELL FLINCHUM**



GM design director Harley Earl at the wheel of a 1951 Buick LaSabre show car.

Modernism and the Motor City



Harley Earl

Maker of American Dream Machines

There are many ways to look at cars, but it is difficult to get people to really *look* at them as an amalgam of design decisions and stylistic tools that deal with what is an essentially awkward form. While he might have considered analysis by amateurs annoying and best left to professionals like himself, Harley Earl (1893–1969) certainly made people look. Beginning in the 1930s, Earl established a system for designing automobiles at General Motors that was akin to Thomas Edison’s “invention of a process of invention.” Before Earl, mass-produced automobiles were created in a haphazard process that varied widely from manufacturer to manufacturer, their aesthetics, such as they were, largely determined by engineers. By 1946, most American manufacturers (at least those that survived) had created design departments along the lines that Earl had initiated more than a decade before. It is entirely appropriate to speak of automotive design as “B.E.” and “A.E.” (Before and After Earl). He was the transitional figure between the world of nineteenth-century coach building (the creation of custom bodies) and twentieth-century design for mass production, and probably the most influential designer of the last century.

In the mid-1950s, when General Motors’ products captured nearly 50 percent of the American market, Earl’s designs were ubiquitous; he determined the final appearance of 50 million cars. Despite this,

he was never accepted by the “Good Design” community centered around the Museum of Modern Art in New York. “Good Design” eschewed the decorative and the flamboyant, especially in product design. Their suspicion of Earl was grounded in his popular appeal and his gift for playing upon the public’s fascination with speed and its visual analogue, streamlining. Nowhere was Earl’s gift for tapping into the postwar American zeitgeist more apparent than in those showcases of swank—the Motorama displays of the 1950s. Clear plastic bubble canopies, gold-plated details, and experimental gas turbine engines were a few representative elements of Earl’s “Dream Cars” displayed next to GM’s production models. If Augustus found Rome made of brick and left it of marble, Earl found the American automobile made of wood and lacquer and left it of brightly painted steel and chrome. His influence on Americans’ acceptance of modern design was commensurate with his six-foot-four former athlete’s frame—outsized, impressive, and a bit intimidating.

In 1927, Earl forever changed the aesthetics of the American automobile with his design for GM’s LaSalle, the first mass-produced automobile to be purposely (and successfully) styled. By then Henry Ford’s dominance of the domestic market was over. General Motors was moving ahead with chief executive Alfred P. Sloan’s strategy of creating “a car for every purse and purpose.” Earl and his growing stable of designers became absolutely essential to the GM system of broadly related product lines (Cadillac, Buick, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, and so forth), which were designed to appeal to people at different income levels. The goal was to encourage consumers to reach for the next level—to move up from a Chevrolet to a Buick, and then on to the pinnacle, a Cadillac. Appropriate and innovative styling by Earl



LEFT: Harley Earl seated in the 1927 LaSalle with Larry Fisher of Fisher Body. **CENTER:** The Y-Job (1938). Note the elimination of the running boards and “speed lines” running horizontally across the “suitcase” fenders. **RIGHT:** The 1954 GM Motorama at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. The Firebird I gas turbine experimental vehicle is visible near the center of the photograph.

and his staff was the great signifier that differentiated each brand.

Earl might never have played the role he did in Detroit had he not been sidelined by a rugby injury while attending Stanford University. After recuperating, he went to work for his father, J. W. Earl, who had established the Earl Carriage Works in Los Angeles, rechristening it the Earl Automobile Works in 1908. Coach building was moving from the shaping of horse-drawn vehicles to the creation of custom bodies for automotive chassis. By the second decade of the century there was a tremendous demand for unique or highly individualized car bodies from the Hollywood elite. Don Lee, who owned the distribution and sales rights to Cadillac automobiles in six California cities, bought out J. W. Earl in 1919. He was eager for access to both

Earl's clientele and his remarkably talented son, who seemed to understand these patrons. During this period, the younger Earl schooled himself in the kind of showmanship that would stand him in good stead in the coming decades. For the rest of his life he would boast a tan, hundreds of tailored suits, and some of the most remarkable custom automobiles of all time—

The asymmetry of the emerging biomorphism in design in the late 1930s was almost entirely inappropriate for cars, but its often large and rounded contours (found, for example, in Russel Wright's American Modern dinnerware) are related to Earl's aesthetic.

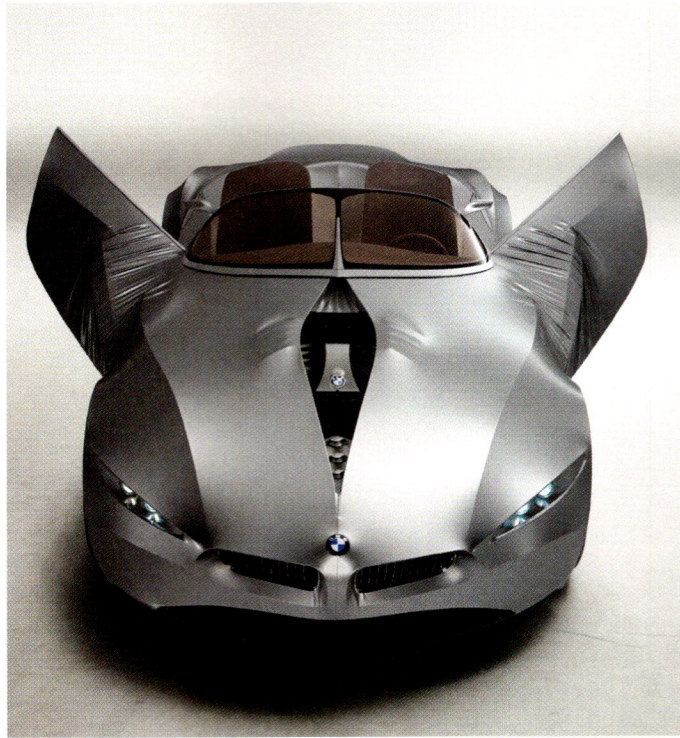
including the “Y-Job” and the LeSabre—as his “daily drivers.”

Earl would eventually create a modern vernacular of forms derived from flight and auto racing with a priority on “longer, lower, and wider” automobiles. The year Earl's '27 LaSalle scored a huge hit was also the year of Lindbergh's flight over the Atlantic. The public was fascinated by streamlining—a smoothing of forms into flowing shapes, initially based on the teardrop. Earl's achievement at this point was to free GM's products from the rectilinear, sheet-metal aesthetic so pronounced in the early enclosed versions of the Model T. In addition, DuPont had introduced Duco paints in the mid-1920s, opening up a world of color for mass-produced cars. Earl had arrived in Detroit at just the right time.

In the rapidly evolving and highly competitive world of auto design in the 1930s, Earl began to think ahead—and to put his thinking into three dimensions. He invented the “concept car” with the Cadillac V-16 Aero-Dynamic Coupe, created for the Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago in 1933–34. But his greatest creation prior to World War II was the 1938 Y-Job, a one-off and fully functioning vehicle that pushed the borders of what was possible in manufacturing with its concealed headlights, aerodynamic envelope, and convertible top, which could be raised and lowered electrically and fully stowed in a compartment behind the driver. Its contours and grille treatment would reach the public years later in the postwar Buicks, known for their massive “dollar grins.”

The asymmetry of the emerging biomorphism in design in the late 1930s was almost entirely inappropriate for cars, but its often large and rounded contours (found, for example, in Russel Wright's American Modern dinnerware) are related to Earl's aesthetic. His

Modernism and the Motor City



Dwight Eisenhower (left) stands in one of the first production 1953 Cadillac Eldorados at his January inauguration. BMW's GINA Light Visionary Concept vehicle (2008). An elastic skin is stretched over a frame with movable components to create a transformable appearance. GINA is the epitome of the concept car—the showcase vehicle pioneered by Harley Earl.

designs attempted to merge and even reconcile new elements from aviation and auto racing with forms derived from the natural world. These cars were disdained by critics for their supposedly superficial, “tacked-on” elements—their fins, applied fenders, and grille treatments. But in fact those swelling, nongeometric forms, coming together and sometimes colliding in complex ways, created a subtle interplay of form and light that was one major goal of Earl and his designers. On the 1953 Buick Skylark, for instance, they used an elegant and attenuated “side spear” to reinforce the complex sculptural body line without mirroring it exactly. This rolled form makes a graceful transition from front to rear fender possible and can hardly be described as tacked on.

Earl's 1951 LeSabre was the epitome of what curators and design critics found suspect. Inspired by the first combat-worthy jet aircraft fielded by the United States, it featured a body crafted from cast magnesium and sheet aluminum and the first wraparound windshield (or “panoramic windscreen” as it was called), an innovation that Earl demanded in spite of the tremendous

Among Earl's triumphs was to elevate design to the boardroom as the vice president of General Motors.

challenges of fabricating it. What was apparent in the Y-Job became blatant in the LeSabre—it was three-dimensional fantasy made flesh, with 360 degrees of appeal.

Even the bright postwar color schemes made popular by Ray

Eames and Alexander Girard were eventually incorporated into the interiors of GM's cars of the 1950s through the efforts of women designers like the largely Pratt Institute-educated “Damsels of Design”—surrogates for the woman consumer. These women also brought a new concern for ergonomics to the cars' interiors. It was Earl who encouraged and supported them.

Although he never sketched while instructing his designers and was notoriously inarticulate, few of his staff questioned Earl's ability to inspire them to create what he wanted. The solution he was reaching for always seemed inevitable once it had taken shape. Among his other triumphs was to elevate design to the boardroom as a vice president of General Motors. While today's consumers complain about dull copycat designs, the spirit of Earl lives on in figures like Chris Bangle, chief of design at BMW group. Bangle's departure from BMW in February 2009 has been regarded as a seismic event in the world of automotive styling. The influence he wielded over BMW's designs was at least partially determined by the system Earl established at GM's Art and Colour Section more than eighty years ago. Bangle left behind *his* greatest concept car—the GINA Light Visionary Model—as a roadmap of where he saw BMW's design ethos headed. Like Earl's greatest creations, it is a stunning fusion of the mechanical and the seemingly organic—causing it to be dubbed “the Seven of Nine Car,” a reference to the liberated cyborg character in *Star Trek Voyager* with her skintight uniform. I think Harley Earl would have loved it.

Russell Flinchum is author of *Henry Dreyfuss, Industrial Designer: The Man in the Brown Suit* (1997), and *American Design* (2008).

Driving Force

In Detroit, architecture and art developed in concert with the fortunes of the auto industry

If one word could capture the essence of Detroit—or, at least, the Detroit that was—it is “power.” Built in the service of the automotive industry, modern Detroit is a monument to the power of the machine, the power of labor, and the power of capital. In no way is this better reflected than in the city’s architecture and public art. Though the contemporary Detroit skyline is dominated by the towers of the now dated and even somewhat bland Renaissance Center, which opened in 1977, the city’s downtown and its outlying areas feature a number of modernist and proto-modernist structures. Built mostly between 1910 and 1930, the heyday of the rise of the automakers, they convey a sense of progress, optimism, and efficiency. But most of all, they celebrate strength.

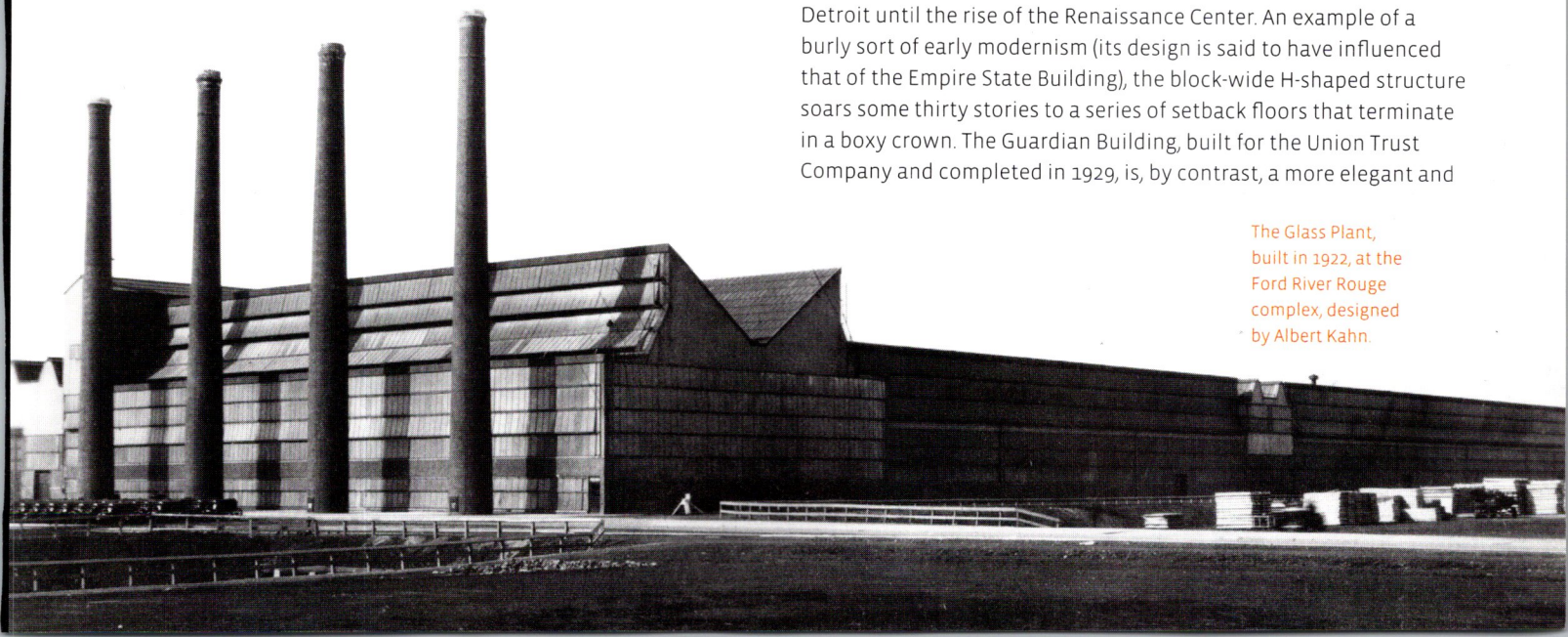
Appropriately, the first truly modern building in Detroit was a factory. It was designed by Albert Kahn, who, though often called “the man who built Detroit,” is frequently overlooked in the history of American architecture. Born in Westphalia in 1869, Kahn was the son of an itinerant rabbi and hapless businessman, who took his family to Detroit in 1880. Rather than go to school, young Albert worked odd jobs to help support the household. He harbored dreams of becoming an artist until he discovered he was color-blind. Kahn could draw, however, and he won a post as an apprentice draftsman at a Detroit architecture firm. Impressed by his diligence and orderly mind—qualities that would serve Kahn well throughout his career—a partner took the immigrant under his wing and tutored him in architectural practice. In 1891, Kahn won a grant to take a year’s architectural tour of Europe. He returned to Detroit, worked as a chief designer, and opened his own firm in 1902 (it still exists). An early factory commission for Packard—which Kahn finished on time and on budget—brought him to the attention of Henry Ford. From 1909 to 1914, Kahn worked on a multistory assembly-line plant for

the Model T, and in 1918 Ford asked him to help realize his dream of a factory where all aspects of manufacture took place on one floor under one roof. The result, built over a period of ten years, was the Ford River Rouge complex, Kahn’s masterpiece: a 16-million-square-foot powerhouse that was, at the time, the world’s largest integrated factory. The structures Kahn devised—completely without exterior ornament—incorporated steel frames, widely spaced interior support columns, windowed walls, and roofs covered in a sawtooth arrangement of louvered windows that provided both light and ventilation. The River Rouge project drew plaudits from Le Corbusier and members of the Bauhaus, who saw the buildings as a perfect manifestation of the modernist call for spaces that were pure in form, flexible in layout, and completely subordinated to function.

Kahn, though, was a sort of accidental modernist. He had no programmatic agenda. His chief attributes as an architect were his organizational skills, an ability to collaborate with engineers and other designers, boundless energy, and a talent for precisely meeting the needs of his clients. But when commissions brought him from factory sites to the office towers of downtown Detroit, Kahn evinced a further gift for designing buildings that projected the public image sought by the corporations that hired him. His 1923 General Motors Building—now called Cadillac Place—is composed of four fifteen-story rectangular volumes connected by a central spine and has an air of solidity, trustworthiness, and permanence. The Fisher Building, completed in 1928 for the more flamboyant auto body makers, is a Moderne masterwork, with strong vertical lines rising in steps to a gilded spire.

All across downtown Detroit in the late 1920s, developers built towers that spoke of the city’s self-assurance. Two of the greatest were designed by architect Wirt C. Rowland. The Penobscot Building, finished in 1928, was, at forty-seven stories, the tallest building in Detroit until the rise of the Renaissance Center. An example of a burly sort of early modernism (its design is said to have influenced that of the Empire State Building), the block-wide H-shaped structure soars some thirty stories to a series of setback floors that terminate in a boxy crown. The Guardian Building, built for the Union Trust Company and completed in 1929, is, by contrast, a more elegant and

The Glass Plant, built in 1922, at the Ford River Rouge complex, designed by Albert Kahn.



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elaborate office tower. Slender in comparison to the Penobscot, the Guardian rises forty floors and is decorated with bands of shimmering tiles, made by the local firm Pewabic Pottery, arrayed in stylized Native American motifs. The chief aesthetic joys of the Guardian Building are its Moderne lobby and former main banking floor: The walls and vaulted ceiling feature a wondrous, rainbow-hued composition of Pewabic and Rookwood tiles, as well as allegorical mosaics and an ornate steel gate that separates the elevator lobby from the bank room.

Such office towers topped out at an inauspicious moment. The Great Depression hit the auto industry hard, and brought the city's architectural boom to a halt. World War II revived Detroit's economy, as manufacturers converted their plants to build military equipment, earning the city the sobriquet "the Arsenal of Democracy." Hundreds of thousands of workers were drawn to the city in search of defense industry jobs. In this, however, the seeds of the city's sociological decline were being sown. Many of the arriving workers—thanks to the Roosevelt Administration's fair-employment acts—were African

Americans. In 1943, a three-day race riot broke out, and was quelled only with the help of federal troops. Detroit's population peaked at 1.8 million in 1950, after which the ugly phenomenon of "white flight" to the suburbs—

The Great Depression hit the auto industry hard, and brought the city's architectural boom to a halt.

aided by cars and the highways built to accommodate them—began, eventually halving the city's residential population. Most significant, commercial building began to take place outside the city limits in townships north of the city such as Southfield, where a complex reputed to be America's first suburban shopping mall opened in 1954, followed in later years by an array of corporate office parks.

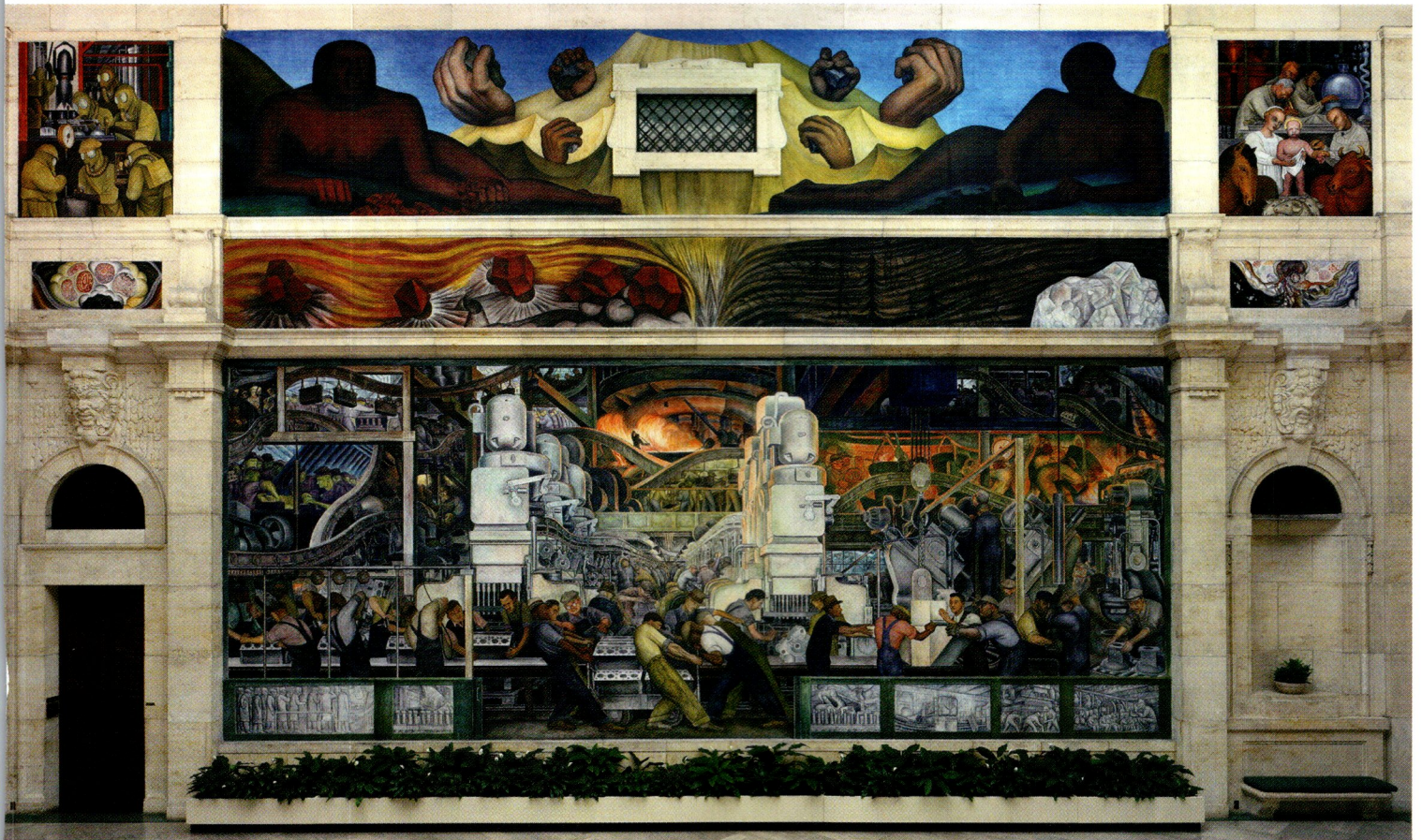
Because of these trends, unlike other American cities, postwar Detroit proper did not see the creation of notable examples of buildings in the "high modernist" (or "International" style). But there are two key exceptions. One, located just east of downtown, is Lafayette Park, a seventy-eight-acre complex of five apartment towers (all fewer than thirty stories in height) surrounding parkland, laid out by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Apartment buildings, it should be noted, are an anomaly in Detroit, which was always a city of single-family houses—a reflection of the middle-class prosperity created by the auto industry. Built between 1956 and 1963, Lafayette Park was intended to provide junior executives an alternative to the suburbs. The complex, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is a model of modernist theory realized: simple rectangular structures, clad in tinted glass and aluminum, surround a landscaped communal greensward. There is a peaceful air to the site, yet it also feels a bit like Brasília—a strangely separate world.

The other is the General Motors Technical Center, the location of the firm's R&D and design departments and perhaps the most striking, and even glamorous, corporate campus ever built in the modernist style. Built from 1949 to 1955, the center was designed by Eero Saarinen. Though the architect sacrificed nothing to operating efficiency, it is the aesthetic flourishes he brought to the center

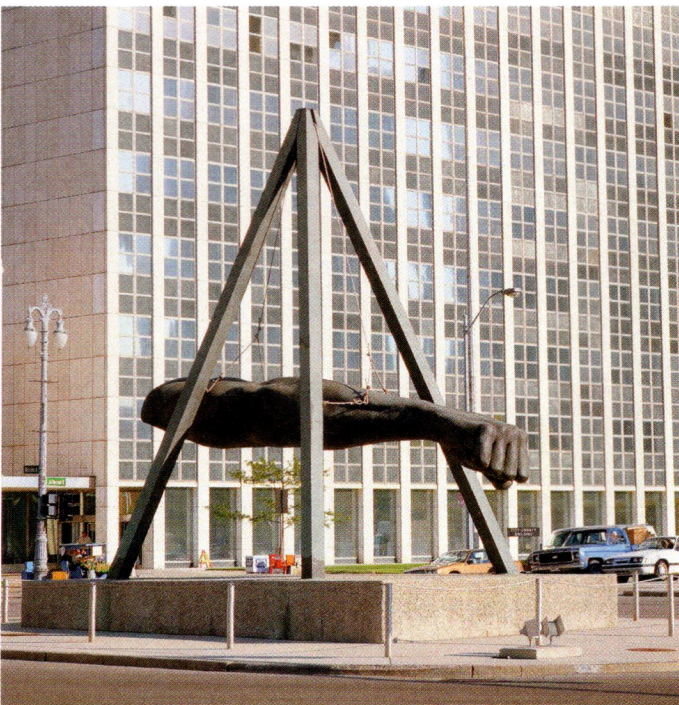


CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

The 1923 General Motors Building designed by Albert Kahn. The Penobscot Building designed by Wirt C. Rowland, 1928. The lobby of the 1929 Guardian Building, also designed by Rowland, features stunningly-patterned tiles made by Pewabic Pottery and Rookwood. One panel of Diego Rivera's mural, *Detroit Industry* (north wall), painted from 1932–33 for the Detroit Institute of Arts



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that make it so memorable. The core of the complex is a rectangular twenty-two-acre man-made lake, dotted with islands, equipped with a fountain whose jetting patterns were choreographed by Alexander Calder, and a glistening metal water tower with a bulb-shaped top that sprouts from the lake to a height of some ten stories. Near one corner of the lake sits a flying-saucer-like auditorium and exhibition space. The short sides of the lake are fronted at one end by the Research & Development Center at one end and the Design Center at the other. Saarinen lavished particular care on the lobbies of these buildings. The R&D Center features a spiral staircase and plywood ceiling panels, steam-bent to produce a circular protrusion. Visitors to the Design Center—where famed GM auto designer Harley Earl's office is preserved as a museum—are greeted at an amusing white teacup-shaped reception desk. Across the floor is a magnificent staircase, designed by Kevin Roche, composed of three-quarter-ton marble treads that are suspended from the ceiling on steel rods.

But Saarinen's most sublime work came in the treatment of the engineering buildings that line one long side of the lake (the other side is landscaped). The architect clad each building in glazed ceramic bricks in a different hue. As a GM document explains: "Saarinen said he wanted the Tech Center to resemble autumn leaves reflecting the late afternoon sun, so he selected brick colors of crimson, orange, yellow, blue, and neutrals of olive, slate and black." In a commission for an industrial behemoth, it is an almost shockingly poetic stroke.

Design in Detroit has conveyed the city's sense of strength and resilience not only in private buildings but also in its public spaces and public art. The raw steel girder columns of lamented old Tiger Stadium had a kind of brutal beauty and served as a perfect frame for the feats of legendary Tigers sluggers like Hank Greenberg and Al Kaline. In 1932, Edsel Ford commissioned Diego Rivera to paint murals for the Detroit Institute of Arts, the centerpieces of which are rich and complex narrative depictions of workers at their machines in the River Rouge plant. More recent years saw the installation, in 1978, of an Isamu Noguchi fountain in the riverfront Hart Plaza. If not Noguchi's finest work, the fountain—composed of a circular form supported by two thick legs—evinces a spirit of indomitability. But the most affecting public artwork in Detroit is a tribute to a son of the city: Joe Louis, the greatest prizefighter in history. Commissioned

The lobby of the Design Center at the GM Technical Center (top), features a staircase designed by Kevin Roche. An aerial view of the Technical Center designed by Eero Saarinen, 1949–1955. Robert Graham's 1986 sculpture, *Joe Louis's Fist* (below), sited in downtown Detroit.

by Time Inc., sculpted by Robert Graham, and installed in downtown Detroit in 1986, the bronze sculpture, supported by a pyramidal frame, is a twenty-four-foot-long depiction of Louis's right arm in the act of throwing a punch. The statue is a monument to raw power, but also to the ability to fight back—as Louis did in 1938, when, after losing his title to Max Schmeling, he battered the German fighter in a rematch lasting just over two minutes. In today's Detroit, it is such a spirit that the city must summon once again.

—Gregory Cerio



A view of the Institute of Science at the Cranbrook Academy of Art.

American Bauhaus

Established by newspaper magnate George G. Booth, the Cranbrook Academy of Art helped to make Detroit the crucible of American modernist design

The ninetieth anniversary of the Bauhaus—the multidisciplinary design school founded in Weimar, Germany, in 1919—is being celebrated this year with an outpouring of retrospective exhibitions and publications more commonly associated with centennials. It will be interesting to see if all the hoopla will also provide a much-needed corrective to the myths and misrepresentations that have surrounded the Bauhaus almost since its inception, during the chaotic aftermath of Germany's defeat in World War I. For despite its having existed for a mere fourteen years, the Bauhaus (its name a neologism based on the German words for “build” and “house”) has become synonymous with the modern movement as most people commonly understand the term.

Three decades ago, this name recognition was seized upon by revisionist critics and historians who launched a systematic campaign to turn “Bauhaus” into a pejorative, a development typified by Tom Wolfe's cartoonish 1981 polemic, *From Bauhaus to Our House*. However, during the preceding half-century, applying its name to other schools was considered a high compliment, as when the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (established nine years after its German counterpart), began to be described as America's Bauhaus (*notwithstanding the short-lived*

New Bauhaus founded in Chicago in 1937, which eventually merged with the Illinois Institute of Technology).

There were, to be sure, several important parallels between the two institutions. Both were premised on a basic belief in the integration of all aspects of design, a tenet derived directly from the arts and crafts movement. Both fostered a communal ethos that stressed life and art as one and the same. And both developed a set of fundamental principles that gave a unified character to objects produced under their auspices.

Nevertheless, looking back with further perspective on the Bauhaus and Cranbrook considered side by side, one striking difference overshadows all those similarities. The Bauhaus is now most often remembered for its teachers rather than its students. With a faculty that at times included such undisputed twentieth-century masters as the architects Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (both served as director of the Bauhaus), the photographer László Moholy-Nagy, the painters Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee, and the artist and theatrical designer Oskar Schlemmer (to mention only the best-known instructors), that hotbed of creative innovation seemed guaranteed to produce the art stars of tomorrow.

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However, a variety of unanticipated factors—the rise of Hitler, the diaspora of European modernists, the cataclysm of World War II, and the disruption or destruction of countless careers just at their outset—prevented aspiring *Bauhäusler* from attaining the renown of their legendary instructors. In contrast, the Cranbrook Academy of Art brings to mind not so much its distinguished though relatively obscure faculty, but rather its students, a veritable who's who of twentieth-century American architecture and design.

The Cranbrook alumni roster shines with a host of stellar figures in their fields: the sculptor and furniture designer Harry Bertoia, the multidisciplinary geniuses Charles and Ray Eames, the furniture and interiors entrepreneur Florence Knoll, the textiles wizard Jack Lenor Larsen, the interior design Benjamin Baldwin, and the architects Ralph Rapson and Eero Saarinen, the urban planner Edmund Bacon, and a pantheon of art potters including Waylande Gregory, Leza McVey, and Toshiko Takaezu, as well as the ceramist-turned-glassmaker Harvey Littleton. It is no overstatement to assert that the applied arts in twentieth-century America would be unthinkable without Cranbrook's immense contribution.

Cranbrook stands apart as a rare heartland exemplar of cultural ferment in a nation where emergent talent has long tended to gravitate toward the two coasts. On the other hand, Cranbrook can also be seen as a latter-day manifestation of the utopian communities that arose in this country during the nineteenth century—the Shakers on the East Coast, New Harmony in Indiana—groups that emanated from a variety of religious and philosophical beliefs. But America was geared to commerce and industrialization, not to spiritual aspirations.

Still many people recognized that the industrial revolution had led to profound changes in the manufacture of goods of every kind. During the nineteenth century, this realization prompted design reform movements that were no less idealistic than contemporary utopian communities. Repelled by ugly and shoddy machine-made objects, reformers urged a return to the beauty and integrity of preindustrial craftsmanship, but had a rude awakening when confronted by economic reality.

In mid-Victorian England, medieval-inspired guilds and workshops hoped to provide affordable alternatives to factory-made junk, but these labor-intensive goods cost just as much to produce as luxury items. American enterprises with similar goals—particularly



Roycroft, the design reform cooperative founded by Elbert Hubbard in East Aurora, New York, in 1895—gave new impetus to the arts and crafts movement in the United States, even as it faded in Britain and continental Europe. But by the time World War I rocked European civilization to its foundations, the idealism of such groups seemed to many a thing of the past. So whatever their disparities, the Bauhaus and Cranbrook seem especially heroic in their emergence in the aftermath of that cataclysm.

No industrial innovation affected the United States more than the automobile, which during the first two decades of the twentieth century transformed the nation in general and the nascent car capital of Detroit in particular. The Detroit newspaper magnate George G. Booth, a Canadian-born Anglophile who became passionately attached to Michigan, was an ardent proponent of the arts and crafts philosophy, and his vision for a world-class design school that would be both high-minded and pragmatic reflected that time and place to perfection. So did the house he built for himself and his wife in the Detroit suburb then called Bloomfield Township.

Completed in 1908, the arts and crafts style Booth mansion was designed by Albert Kahn, the architect best known for his mega-scale industrial structures. That crossover between the aesthetic and the functional now seems prophetic of George Booth's ensuing sponsorship of an enterprise that would surpass the Bauhaus in implementing a new alliance of art and industry.

In 1922, the *Chicago Tribune* held a much-publicized competition for the design of its new headquarters in the Loop. The coveted commission was given to Raymond Hood and John Mead Howells, but the proposal most widely praised was that of the contest's



FROM LEFT:
The "Life Without Beauty" arch on the Cranbrook campus. Eiel Saarinen surrounded by students on the steps of the Peristyle, May 1941. Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, January 1941. Jack Lenor Larsen in the weaving studio, 1954.

runner-up, the Finnish architect Eiel Saarinen. The lucky loser was so lionized that he relocated to the United States when he was offered a professorship at the University of Michigan. Among his pupils was Henry Booth, son of the newspaper owner. Through that connection, Saarinen began discussions with the publisher, and before long plans for the Cranbrook Academy began to take shape.

Booth offered Saarinen an opportunity staggering in its creative potential. The architect was asked not only to design the entire campus for the new institution but also to devise its curriculum, a dream like combination of practical and philosophical authority. Although Saarinen continued his private practice, after he moved to Bloomfield Hills in 1925, his role as president of the Cranbrook Academy (which in addition to the art school also comprised primary and secondary schools) turned out to be a godsend when the Great Depression left many other architects in desperate straits.

During the quarter century from 1925 until Saarinen's death in 1950, Cranbrook's architecture and the designs produced there bore the strong imprint of the architect's roots in National Romanticism, Finland's distinctively folkloric version of the arts and crafts movement. Few other American architectural ensembles rival Cranbrook in its comprehensive consistency and the almost obsessive attention lavished on every imaginable detail. That tour de force understandably dazzles most people, but I must confess that much of Saarinen's micro-designed masterpiece strikes me as claustrophobic and bourgeois, qualities that make Cranbrook's later redirection into high modernism seem all the more remarkable.

Eiel Saarinen's astoundingly precocious son, Eero, was schooled at Cranbrook and formally joined his father's office in 1936 at the age

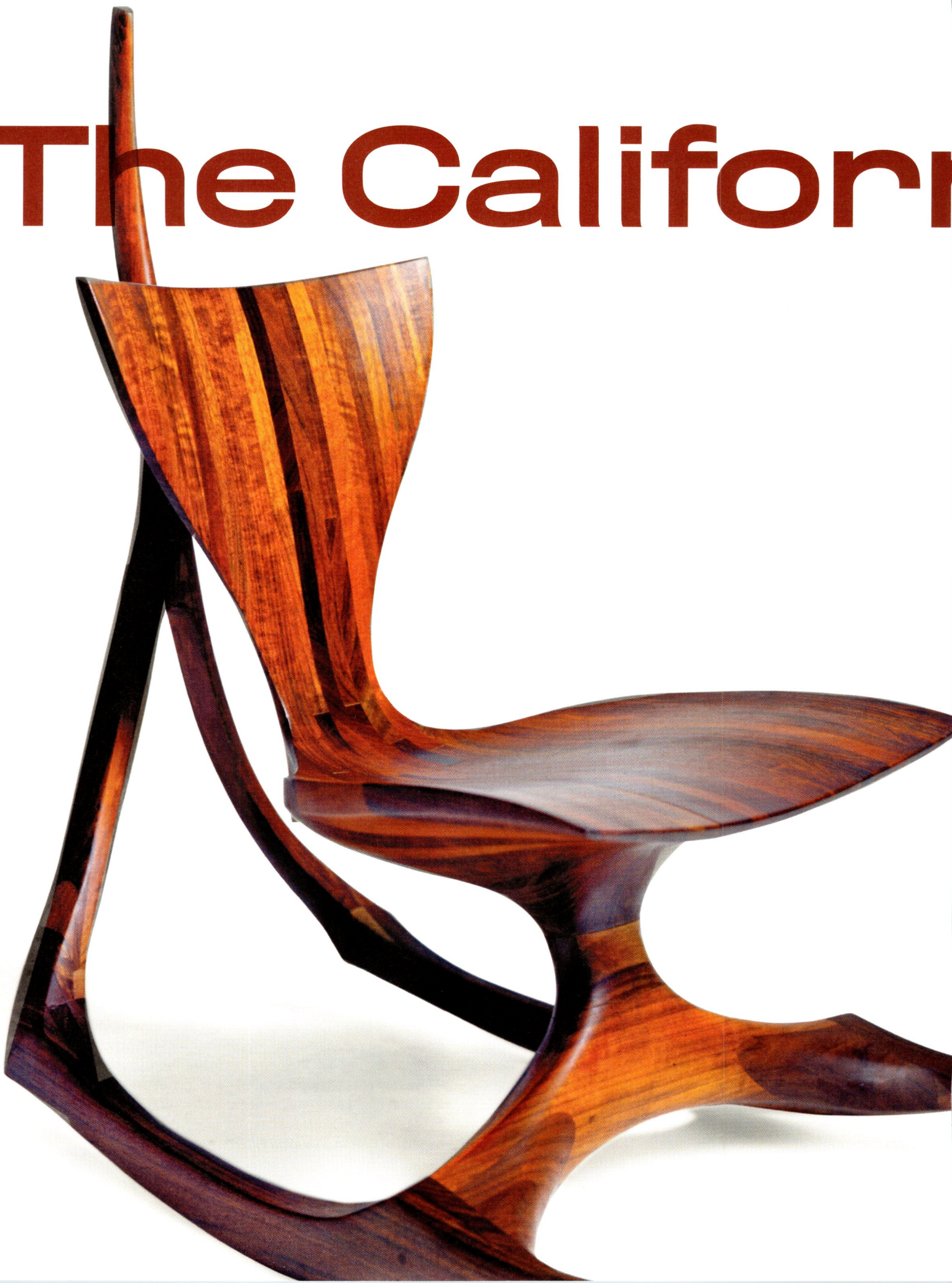
of twenty-six. However, he'd been designing elements of his father's projects since he was at least fourteen, and exerted more and more influence on their joint designs as the years passed. Looking at the Saarinen firm's output, one can see a gradual paring down of forms and progressive omission of decorative flourishes that finally led to a style much like that of the Bauhaus by the time Eiel died in 1950.

The legendary directors of the Bauhaus had reestablished themselves in America—Gropius at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology—but in a sense they were playing catch-up in contrast to the uninterrupted growth and constantly evolving aesthetic of Cranbrook. Eero Saarinen's General Motors Technical Center of 1949-1956 in Warren, Michigan, which was furnished with pieces manufactured by another postwar Michigan bastion of high-style design—the Herman Miller Company—might be seen as the apogee of Booth's vision for his home state as a new national center for the best in American design.

Now, at a time when leaders are searching for new strategies to revive the manufacturing base of our once thriving industrial heartland, it would be wise to reconsider the high place Michigan commanded just half a century ago in the international design world. It might do so once again, and an instructive template for how that might be accomplished still exists at the dream factory George Booth and Eiel Saarinen conjured up just a few miles outside of Detroit. —**Martin Filler**

Martin Filler is a regular contributor to *The New York Review of Books* and *The Magazine ANTIQUES*.

The Californi



nia Dynamic

The eccentricity, rarity, and craftsmanship of first-generation studio furniture from the Golden State have given it much more than local appeal
BY GREGORY CERIO



Two stack-laminated wood pieces from the early 1970s by Jack Rogers Hopkins: a walnut rocker, opposite page, and, this page, an Edition chair—the only design Hopkins ever repeated—from the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Photos: courtesy of Todd Merrill | Antriques (rocker), courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

One fellow went to Japan to learn the techniques of the nation's folk-art pottery, and returned to the Bay Area to make such ceramics, as well as wooden furniture, for which he used a chain saw as his primary tool. Another was a San Diego State art teacher who made furniture as an avocation, and blithely destroyed his single greatest work when it failed to sell, because he was more interested in the act of creation than in the end product. A third was an unhappy Manhattan businessman who was so enthralled by late-1940s modern-design exhibitions that he pulled up stakes, moved to San Francisco, and taught himself to craft wooden furniture.

It can fairly be said that *anyone* who partook in the postwar American studio furniture movement—the so-called “first generation,” who worked from the 1950s and beyond—had a distinctive (if not eccentric) outlook on life and craftsmanship. But the leading artist/artisans who called California home displayed idiosyncratic tendencies, both personally and stylistically, that were somehow more compelling than those of their peers elsewhere. The term “California roundover”—as opposed to “East Coast hard-edge”—was coined to describe the flowing forms of the West Coast craftsmen and –women, but the phrase fails to capture the verve and open-to-anything-ness of their designs. “Regionalism has been an aspect of American decorative arts since the seventeenth century, kind of like local accents,” says Gerald Ward, curator of a seminal exhibition, “The Maker’s Hand: American Studio Furniture, 1940–1990,” at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 2003. “There’s definitely a California studio design ethos. I think of those designers as a little more freewheeling—more experimental and playful.”

One factor behind the development of a California design style is that scores of cultural organizations around the state hosted craft exhibitions. The most prestigious were the vetted “California Design” shows, held from 1954 to 1976, at the Pasadena Art Museum (now the



The signature piece by Sam Maloof is the revved-up rocking chair, this page, made of black walnut with ebony accents. The best-known design by Bay Area woodworker Arthur “Espenet” Carpenter is his rosewood-and-leather Wishbone Chair, opposite page, top. Opposite page, below, a 1960’s ladder-back armchair by John Nyquist, executed in black walnut.



Norton Simon Museum). These expositions not only showcased the work of studio furniture makers, but also fostered a cross-pollination of ideas. “The California Design exhibits helped create a sense of community that encouraged and validated the work of the artisans,” says Gerard O’Brien, the owner of Reform Gallery in Los Angeles, who is regarded as the leading market maker in California studio design. What’s more, most of the California artisans served in the armed forces, and were able to follow their muses—to one extent or another—because of the benefits of the G.I. Bill of Rights. (One irony is that the most famous East Coast-based studio craftsman, George Nakashima, learned traditional Asian woodworking techniques while in a Japanese-American internment camp.)

TRADITION TRANSFORMED

The Californians are roughly divided into two camps: those who created fluid interpretations of classical furniture forms, and those who drew inspiration from the landscape and organic shapes, or relied on their intuitive sense of the possibilities of the wood they shaped. Among the first group—and, in fact, among all California studio furniture designers—the best known is Sam Maloof, the subject of museum exhibitions, monographs, and a documentary film, and the first craftsman to receive one of the vaunted MacArthur Foundation fellowships. Born in 1916 and still at work in San Bernardino County, Maloof started out in the late 1940s by making simple furniture for his home. Media attention and commissions—most notably from the industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss—allowed Maloof to design full-time. He developed a sensibility much like that of midcentury Scandinavian designers such as Hans Wegner: a concern for functionality and superb craftsmanship, and an appreciation of the natural beauty of wood shaped in soft, sensuous lines. His signature pieces are his rocking chairs, which feature tall, flared backs, flattened spindles, and long, slender rockers with a shallow S-curve. The chairs have become so famous that they have overshadowed Maloof’s equally artful cabinets, tables, and other seating pieces.

Other California quasi-traditionalists of note include John Nyquist, whose trademark details are wide, curved back supports that he arranges either vertically or in horizontal ladders. John Kapel studied

at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan and worked under George Nelson at the Herman Miller company before chucking it all and moving west. “Kapel is very undervalued,” says O’Brien. “He sold many designs to the manufacturer Glenn of California, but his studio work is especially great.” Many of Kapel’s studio chairs feature a single wide, sinuous back splat, which lends the pieces an air of both muscularity and grace.

CREATIVE CRAFTWORK

Arthur Carpenter occupied a kind of middle ground among California studio furniture makers. Since his work did not draw directly on historical antecedents, it can be said that he had more weight on the leg in the camp of the organic or sculptural designers. Still, Carpenter considered himself a woodworker, with no pretensions to artistry. As he told the magazine *Fine Woodworking* in 1982, a good chair, foremost, “looks like a chair—it doesn’t look like an eagle or a tree—you know right away where to put your butt.”

Carpenter took some time deciding where to park his own. Brooklyn-born and Dartmouth-schooled, he saw service in World War II and returned to New York City to take a job with a company that imported Asian decorative arts. In 1947, Carpenter found himself repeatedly visiting the “Good Design” show of utilitarian objects at



the Museum of Modern Art, and was particularly drawn to the simple purity of the wooden bowls and platters of James Prestini. After a sort of existential epiphany, Carpenter moved to San Francisco, bought a lathe, and opened a shop in the Mission District, selling woodworking supplies and his own turned bowls and vessels (which, in a few years' time, would be displayed at MoMA).

Carpenter—who had begun to sign his work using his paternal grandmother's maiden name, Espenet—expanded his repertoire incrementally to include chairs and desks and other furnishings, and moved to the north side of the Bay, to the town of Bolinas. Avid to design beautiful forms, but also mindful of the need for rapid production, Carpenter was willing to sacrifice the sanctity of craft for expediency. For his best-known piece, the Wishbone chair—so named for the forked, arcing legs that support a webbed hide seat—he struggled to create a proper mortise-and-tenon joint to attach the legs to the chair rail. Finally, he gave up and used a metal bolt, covering the attachment with a wooden plug. Later, he mastered the bandsaw—an electric table saw that incorporates a high-speed vertical blade—and used it to make quick, organically rounded drawer fronts, and sweepingly curved furniture side supports, with profiles reminiscent of the work of Alexander Calder and Joan Miró. For all his lack of pretension, Carpenter, who died in 2006 at the age of 86, had become a kind of groovy Gustav Stickley, and a guru to two generations of Northern California craftspeople.

SCULPTURAL STYLES

Two California studio furniture makers who did aspire to artistry merit special mention, though their styles could not have been more different. The first is Jack Roger Hopkins, who learned to use woodworking tools as a boy, served as an Army photographer during the war, earned degrees in fine art upon his return from action, and ultimately became a college art teacher. But all his adult life he sought a medium to express his artistic bent, from painting to jewelry and, later in life, ceramics. In the mid-1960s, he tried his hand at furniture, at which he excelled. “Hopkins is fantastic in every sense of the word—I think he saw himself as a sculptor, playing with shapes and forms inspired by birds and wind-carved rock formations,” says Todd Merrill, a New York dealer and co-editor and author of *Modern Americana: Studio Furniture from High Craft to High Glam* (Rizzoli, 2008). “Some of his designs are far-out, wild pieces, but each one was meant to be used.”

Hopkins had several idiosyncratic tendencies. To begin with, he may be the only American studio furniture maker who never employed assistants. (Nakashima, for example, had as many as a dozen—which helps account for the relatively large number of his pieces in the market.) Second, he used an old technique called “stack lamination”—in which shaped wooden planks are glued atop one another to build up a form that is then carved, chiseled, and sanded—in a unique way. Hopkins's stacks were wider than those normally used, and he mixed woods, so that the finished piece had a unique and striking banded effect created by contrasting grains and colors. Finally, Hopkins's pieces often incorporate multiple furniture forms in one design. His *Edition chair*, the only design he ever repeated, features an attenuated arm that acts as a side table. He also designed a seating piece that combined a reading lamp, a shelf, arms that support a person holding a book at eye level.

A good chair, foremost, “looks like a chair—it doesn’t look like an eagle or a tree—you know right away where to put your butt.”



Hopkins frequently combined several furniture forms in one piece; one example is the lounge chair and ottoman, opposite page, incorporating a lamp and a side table. J.B. Blunk, who worked primarily with a chain-saw, was still able to realize surprisingly delicate effects, as in the detailing on the wall-mounted headboard, right.



The oddest and perhaps most significant design Hopkins ever achieved was one he called the Womb Room—a one-piece furniture environment, made in 1972, made from mahogany and measuring thirteen feet wide, by six feet deep, and about seven feet tall. Its enfolding, winglike projections encompassed a chair, a radio and speaker, a bookshelf, a side table, and a brass-covered lamp. Visitors to the 1973 “California Design” exhibition were wowed—but none of them bought it. Hopkins, who died in 2006, hauled the piece back to his workshop and dismantled it bit by bit: he used some parts in other designs, and some he burned for firewood. “If you can’t destroy your own work, you shouldn’t be an artist,” he is quoted as saying in *Modern Americana*. As Merrill adds: “For Hopkins, furniture was a very personal expression. It was all about the making, not about the having.”

While Hopkins carefully mapped out his designs in notes and sketches, J.B. Blunk’s work was about spontaneity and what he called “surprise.” In a way, his entire life’s work can be said to have been dictated by chance, and that’s one reason Gerard O’Brien insists that “Blunk is not really a designer, but a sculptor. His pieces are almost accidentally furniture.”

The serial coincidences in Blunk’s life are notable. He graduated from UCLA, where he took intensive courses in ceramics, in 1949. Within a few months, he was drafted to serve in the Korean War. After a two-year hitch, Blunk arranged to be discharged in Japan, so he could further his education in pottery. While visiting a *mingei*—or folk pottery—gallery, he happened to meet Isamu Noguchi, who took Blunk under his wing and sent him to apprentice with a Japanese master potter. When Blunk completed his studies and went home to California in 1954, Noguchi introduced him to the surrealist painter Gordon Onslow Ford, who invited Blunk to build a house and studio for himself on Ford’s property north of San Francisco in return for helping to build Ford’s new house. Blunk got his first taste of woodworking while fabricating the curvilinear roof beams of the structure. Though he knew nothing about joinery, Blunk, as way of thanking Ford for his largesse, built him a chair from a hunk of redwood, carving it with a chain saw. And thus a career in a new medium was born.

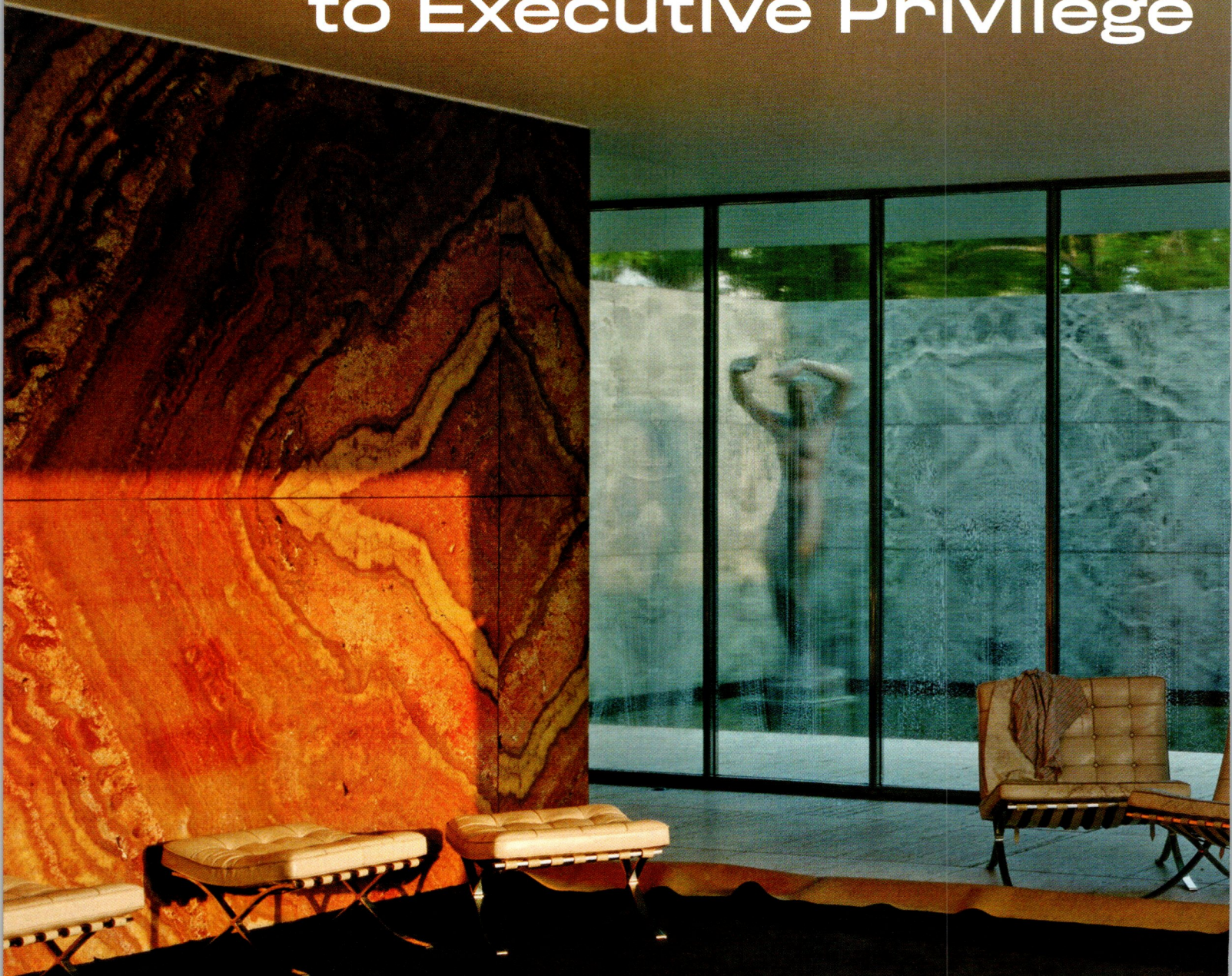
The vogue for folk art in the 1960s and 1970s, and the air of energy and romance attached to abstract expressionism, helped Buck earn commissions, both private and public—including a fifteen-by-ten-foot outdoor seating piece for the University of California at Santa Cruz and a thirteen-foot-in-diameter circular bench made from a section of redwood burl for the Oakland Museum. As O’Brien explains, “For J.B., each piece of wood suggested a shape. He never drew chalk cut lines on a piece. He just eyed it, started up the chain saw, and went to work. The pieces he made are monumental and brutal, but at the same time sinuous and sublime.”

MATURING MARKET

Ah, California. Joni Mitchell asked in song, “Will you take me as I am?” In the Golden State the answer is always yes. The Pacific Coast has fostered the work of other exceptional studio furniture makers, such as Mabel Hutchinson, a watercolorist who, inspired by the assemblage pieces of Louise Nevelson, created doors made of carved and found pieces of wood. Her husband, Milon, was also a notable woodworker. There is also Jocko Johnson, a race-car designer by trade, whose hobby was making furniture with swooping lines that suggest the dynamism of the tarmac.

Four years ago Peter Loughrey, the head of Los Angeles Modern Auctions, sold a rosewood table jointly crafted by Johnson and Milon Hutchinson for \$8,900. Today, he estimates, that piece would be worth \$40,000 to \$50,000. “What the Californians have going for them is that they didn’t make a lot of things,” says Gerard O’Brien. Jack Roger Hopkins, for example, built something in the area of 750 pieces in his career, according to Todd Merrill’s calculations. Though works by the postwar designers were hard to find just a few years ago, they are beginning to trickle into the market. Espenet Wishbone chairs go for about \$15,000 at auction; Hopkins’s Edition chairs have fetched \$60,000, and Blunk’s smaller works, such as coffee tables, garner about \$45,000. The market appears to have a bright future. “The big attraction, at least initially, was a reaction against the iconic piece—people were simply tired of seeing the same thing,” says Loughrey. “But what’s most attractive to me—and I think to a lot of others—about studio furniture from California is the handmade element you present in good design. Somehow, it’s just more honorable.”

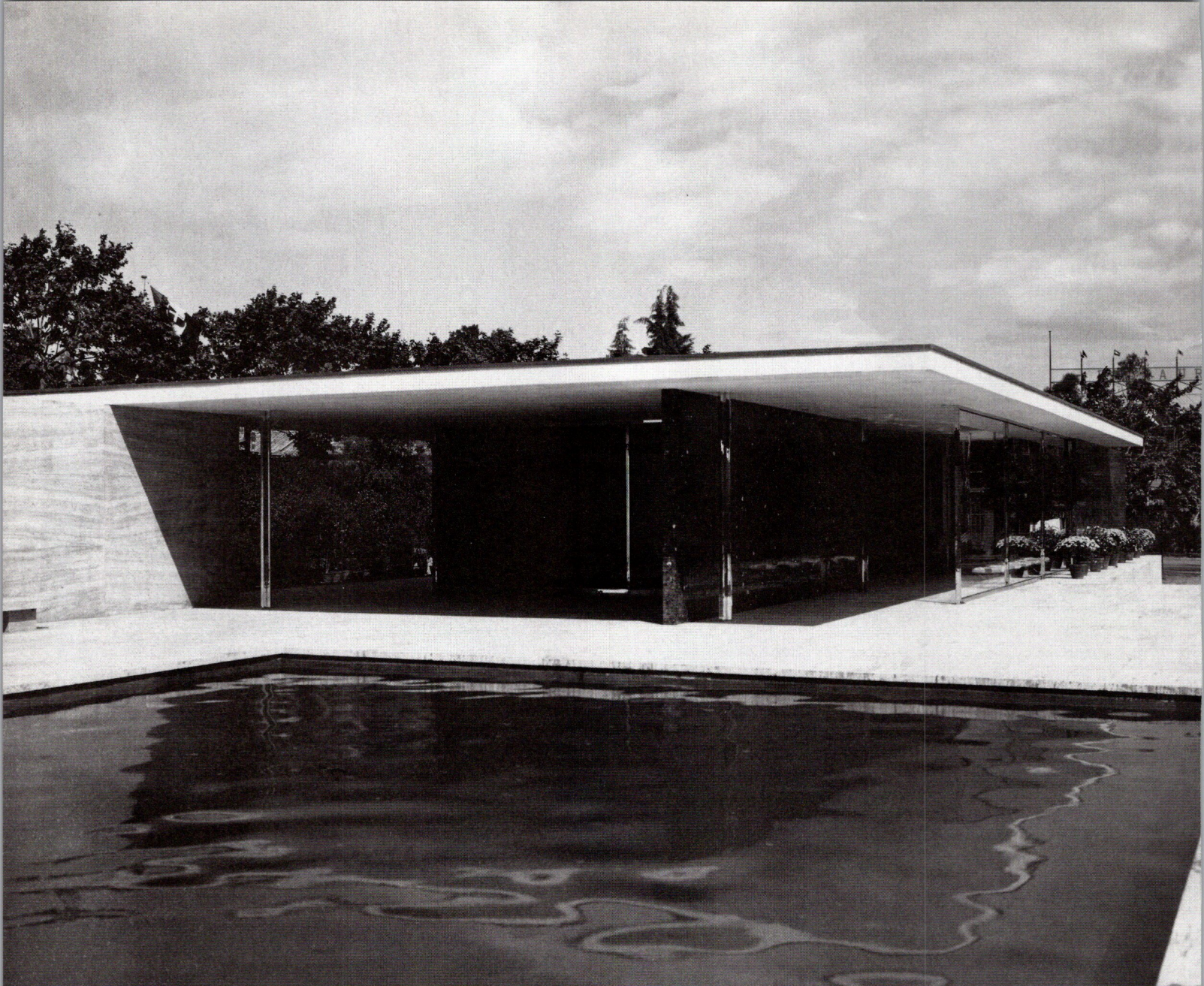
From Royal Prerogative to Executive Privilege



Eight decades after its debut, the Barcelona chair—
designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich—
still exudes the regal aura of its first incarnation.

BY MARTIN FILLER





The steel-and-leather Barcelona chair

of 1928-29 was created by the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and his long-time interior-design associate (and lover), Lilly Reich, as part of her decorative scheme for his famous German Pavilion at the 1929 International Exposition of Barcelona. In the eight decades since its introduction, this deep, low-slung, armless lounge seat has become to captains of industry what the Hermès Kelly bag is to fashionistas or the Purdey twelve-bore shotgun is to British aristocrats: a costly trophy that epitomizes quality, utility, luxury, and longevity.

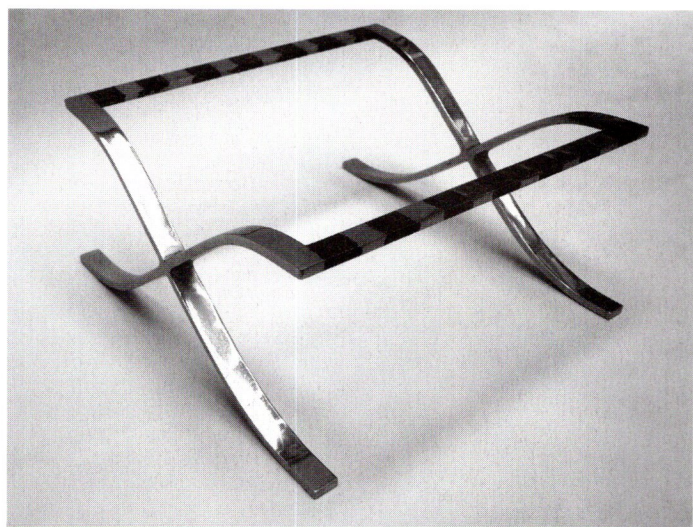
PREVIOUS SPREAD: *Morning Cleaning*, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona, a 1999 cinematographic photograph by Jeff Wall of the replica of the 1929 pavilion. Opposite page: The original German Pavilion in 1929. Mies van der Rohe in his offices in a 1935 portrait by Hildegard Heise, this page, right. Below: The X-base of a low seat recovered from the 1929 pavilion.



Elegant and ageless, the Barcelona chair may be the nearest that early modernists came to fulfilling their dream of halting the millennium's relentless march of styles—romanesque, Gothic, renaissance, mannerist, baroque, rococo, neoclassical, neo-Gothic, arts and crafts, art nouveau—with a rationalized approach to architecture and design called the International Style, which they believed would remain unimprovable and therefore eternal. But time overtook them too, and the relatively short ascendancy of the International Style—from about 1930 to 1980—has been followed by design trends of ever-accelerating evanescence.

Among the unapologetic status symbols of early modernism, the Barcelona chair was and always will be a luxury item. The authorized model, still made by Knoll International, retails for about \$11,000, thanks to details impossible to omit or fudge without destroying the character of the whole. This saving grace has kept even its innumerable knockoffs from looking cheap in the way that mass-produced copies of other chair designs frequently do.

The Barcelona chair is most familiar upholstered in black or tan cowhide reminiscent of an attaché case, businesslike and masculine in a way that increased the chair's appeal in the postwar workplace. But the surprising fact is that the 1929 originals were covered in white kid, as impractical as the spotless decor of the period's Hollywood movie sets. That buttery-soft, immaculate leather—then most often associated with gloves de rigueur for ladies in the presence of royalty—was a



witty acknowledgment of the design's origin as a modern throne, a regal provenance unknown to most people who've sat in subsequent copies.

At the Barcelona exposition, Germany's trade goods were not displayed in the pavilion proper, but rather in a separate installation (also by Mies and Reich) elsewhere on the fairgrounds. That division of labor freed the German Pavilion to be a showcase for the new architecture already synonymous with the cultural ferment of the Weimar Republic and its influential Bauhaus design school. But when Spain's King Alfonso XIII and Queen Victoria Eugenia agreed to inaugurate the German Pavilion, furniture for their visit was hurriedly added to the project.

Following custom, the monarchs were to autograph a golden book and listen to welcoming remarks, a ceremony which required a table for the guest register and a pair of chairs for *los reyes* to sit in while official greetings were pronounced. The Spanish court's strict protocol dictated that almost everyone must stand in the sovereigns' company. The few grandees permitted to sit had to make do with low, backless footstools, a vestige of the *tabourets* and *pliants* used at Versailles. For the grandees, Mies and Reich devised matching squared-topped stools, a design that has since become better known as the ottoman for later versions of the Barcelona chair.

On opening day—May 26, 1929—Mies took care to don the cutaway tailcoat, striped trousers, and black silk top hat prescribed for formal daytime ceremonies. King Alfonso and Queen Ena (as Victoria Eugenia was known, to distinguish her from other namesakes of her grandmother Queen Victoria of England) apparently never sat down during their whirlwind stop, and thus neither could anyone else. That one point of etiquette rendered all the expensive seating redundant.

No one knows what happened to the furnishings after the fair closed and the structure was torn down, early in 1930. (The building was reconstructed on its original site in 1986 in honor of Mies's centennial.) Only the pavilion's book-signing console is known to have survived. With a rectangular smoked-glass surface supported by a pair of X-shaped, chrome-plated steel legs—similar to but higher than those of the footstools—it appeared on the antiques market decades later and was bought by British collector Peter Palumbo, Baron Palumbo of Walbrook, who placed it in Mies's Farnsworth House of 1947-51 in Plano, Illinois, which Palumbo bought from its original owner in 1962 and sold to a landmarks conservancy in 2003.

In selecting white kid for the first two Barcelona chairs and their attendant stools, Reich followed a key Miesian principle: rich materials convey greater power when presented simply. Though cost-conscious modernists favored industrial components that gave their schemes a machinelike austerity, Mies encouraged his clients to indulge in top-of-the-line materials such as burnished bronze, Macassar ebony, and verd antique marble. He gave those venerable materials contemporary impact by applying them in large-scale, but minimally detailed, expanses. Like a chef who knew better than to gussy up a slab of foie gras with superfluous garnishes, Mies served luxury straight up, with a boldness that never failed to impress.

At the Barcelona pavilion, he pulled off his all-time showstopper: an interior screen wall faced with large book-matched panels of golden

Moroccan onyx, near which the white royal chairs were placed at a right angle. Aglow with inner fire, this mineral room divider was breathtaking. (When the pavilion was rebuilt in 1986, the same rare onyx could no longer be quarried in Morocco, but an approximate specimen was found in Algeria.)

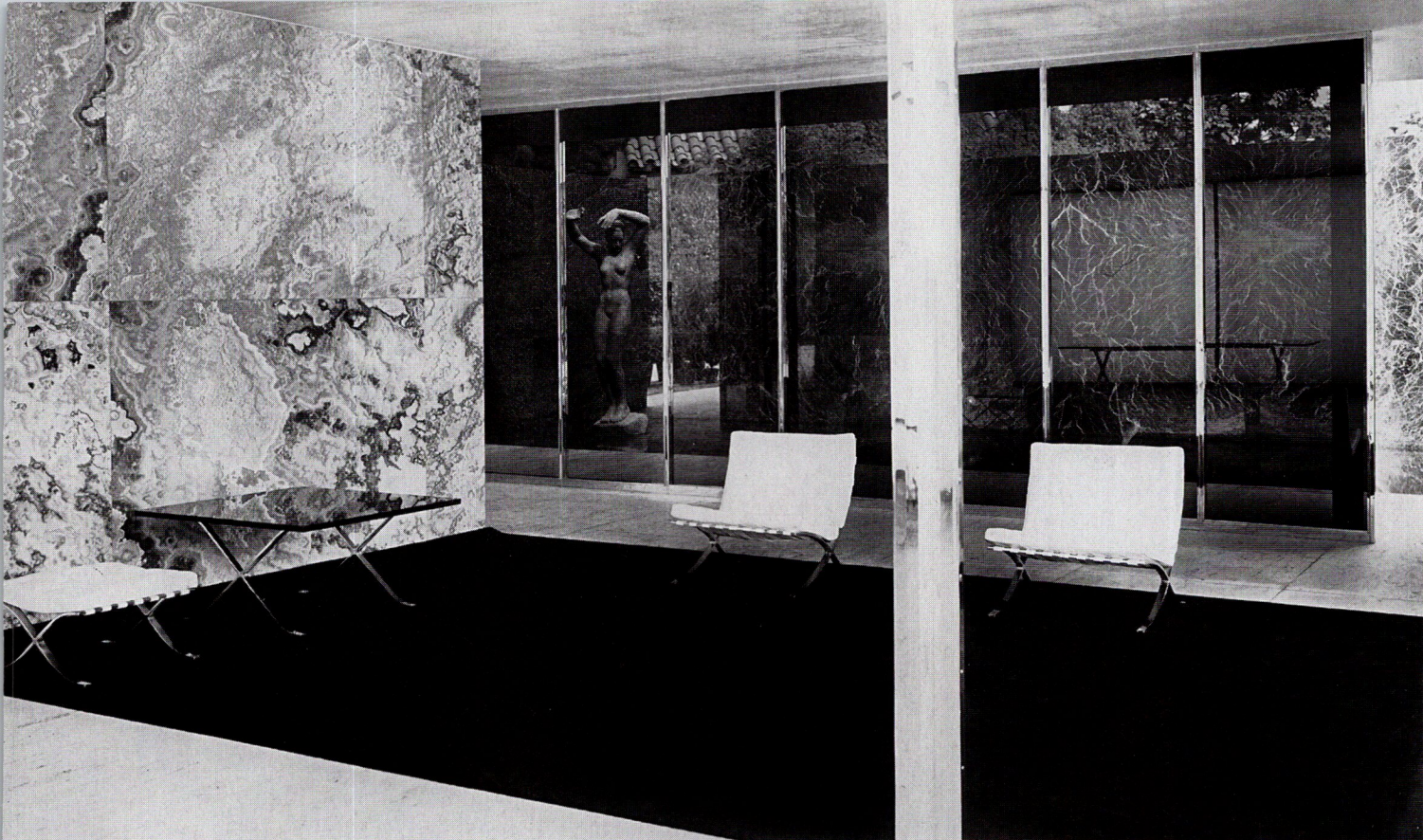
In a reference as subtle but unmistakable as the kid-glove upholstery, Reich based her color scheme for the pavilion's main interior space on the red-gold-and-black horizontally striped flag of the Weimar Republic. The Barcelona chairs sat atop a rectangle of coal-black broadloom carpeting, and the plate-glass window walls were hung with ceiling-to-floor crimson velvet curtains, which created a broad band equivalent to that of the golden wall.

The centrality of Reich's role in Mies's career was not fully appreciated until she was honored with a monographic exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1996. She was among several forgotten female associates of celebrated modernist masters—including Charlotte Perriand, *éminence grise* behind furniture that is usually ascribed to Le Corbusier alone—who were finally raised from obscurity after decades of neglect.

It is often impossible to determine who was responsible for what in any creative collaboration, even between such compulsive record-keepers as Charles and Ray Eames. Suffice it to say that Mies received his first furniture patent in 1927 only after he began working with Reich, and never got another after 1937, when he ended their partnership (personal

Originally upholstered in impractical white kid, the Barcelona chair was an unapologetic





Two photos by Eduard Ludwig, opposite page, show Lilly Reich working in the Mies van der Rohe studios in 1939. Above, a period image shows the guest-book table, the only intact piece of furniture to survive from the 1929 pavilion.

status symbol of early modernism that was and always will be a costly luxury item.

as well as professional) upon coming to the United States and sending her back to Germany soon after he bade her to join him here.

Initially, Mies and Reich's much-admired chair was reproduced by several European makers in small quantities. When he settled permanently in the U.S., in 1938, Mies reassigned production rights to the modern furniture company established by another German émigré, Hans Knoll. Only after World War II did Knoll and his wife, the Cranbrook Academy of Art alumna Florence Schust Knoll, realize the Barcelona chair's untapped potential. They had Mies tidy up several details, and, in 1950, introduced the improved re-edition, which became an overnight success.

For the new version, the 1929 model's chrome-plated steel was replaced with stainless steel. To achieve a more refined effect, Mies thinned down the crossing of the languidly curved bypass supports. He also gave a crisper outline to the down-filled back and seat cushions by reinforcing their button tufting and channel welting—a modular grid of five horizontal squares and four vertical—to prevent the baggy spread typical of older European models.

Mies's most energetic American advocate, Philip Johnson, owned a pair of Barcelona chairs, made for the New York City apartment Reich decorated for him in 1930-31. But when he used the design in his widely publicized Glass House of 1948-49 in New Canaan, Connecticut, the chair became more famous still. It caught on in image-conscious business

offices to such a degree that by the late 1950s Barcelona pairs became an international corporate status symbol—or cliché, depending upon your point of view.

Critics have often noted the design's affinities to the ancient Greek klismos chair and its many neoclassical reincarnations. In some less specific but persistent way, the Barcelona chair's concave/convex stance reminds me of the insouciant mannequin posture—shoulders pulled back, pelvis thrust forward—decreed by the couturiere Coco Chanel to best show off her clothes for the modern woman.

It has been said that all designers create in their own image. If the comparatively low ceilings of houses by Frank Lloyd Wright relate to his less-than-average height, the width of the Barcelona chair—a capacious 29 ½ inches—might well reflect the stocky builds of Mies and Reich, both older than springtime during their supreme collaboration. Autobiographical or not, their Barcelona chair seems perennially fresh, like every other great work of art.

Modern Mise-en-scène

A gallery of four stellar interiors illustrates a few of the methods by which modern design and architecture can shape a décor.

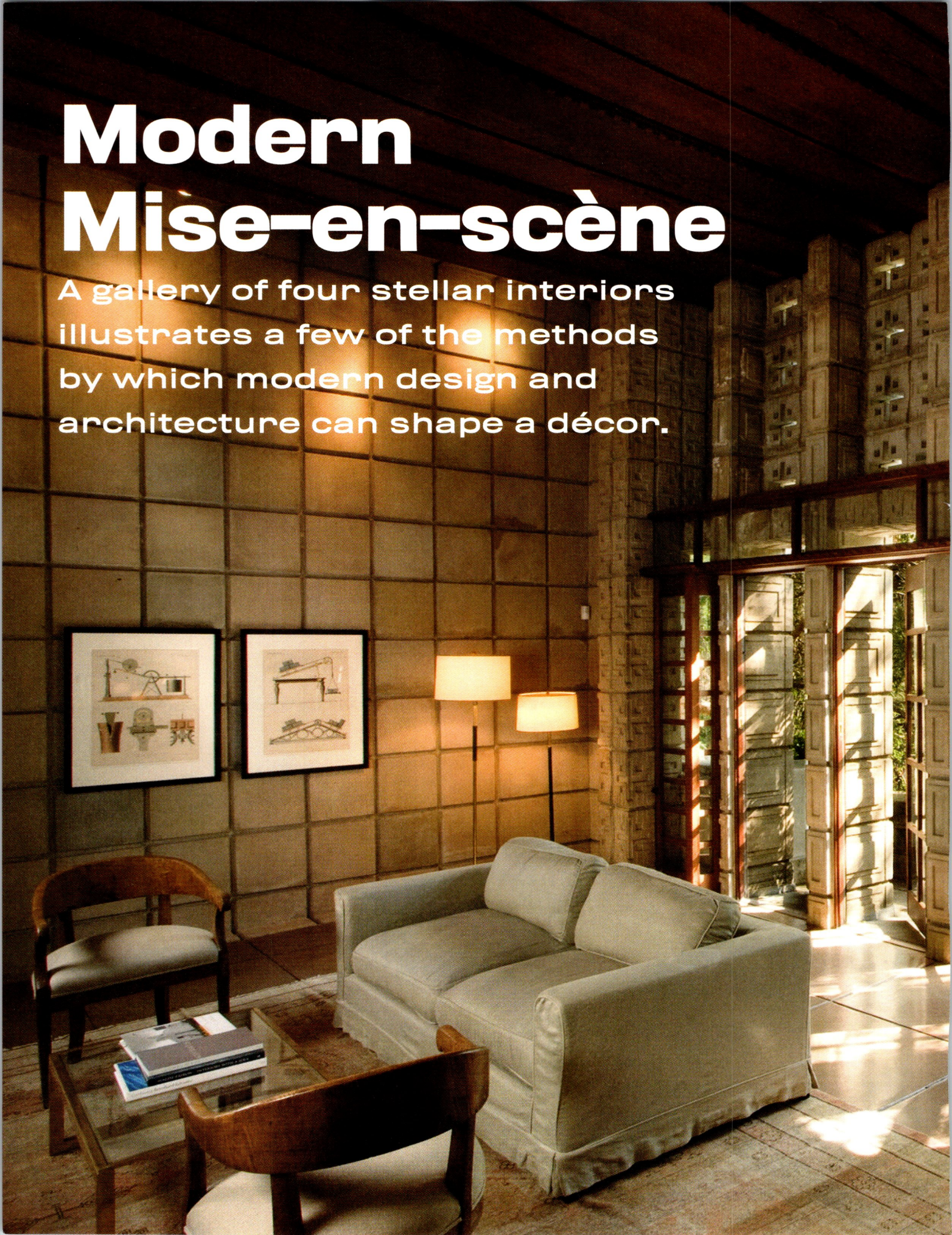




Photo: courtesy of architectureforsale.com, International Marketplace for Architecture

Architecture as Décor

Frank Lloyd Wright's Millard House in Pasadena, California, was built in 1923 and is touted as the first of his Usonian designs. The surfaces of Wright's "textile blocks" bring ornamental detailing to the interiors. But, more importantly, note how the pierced concrete blocks and the casement doorways shape and define the sunlight, effectively creating an ever-changing pattern in the space. Wright, in essence, furnished the room with light—an effect that is amplified by the dark wood ceilings. Like it? The four bedroom house and studio, which sit on a one-acre site, are available through architectureforsale.com, priced at \$7,733,000.





The Built-In

A happy marriage of architecture and interior design, built-in furnishings have been popular with twentieth-century architects as diverse as Richard Neutra and John Lautner. Arguably neither one of them, however, used built-ins with the brio that Bruce Goff did in a Houston house he originally designed in 1958 and remodeled twenty years later. A long built-in banquette defines the border of the living room; elsewhere in the space beyond he created semicircular settees that he placed below round windows. In the foreground, at left, is an inset of tiles and pennies—inlaid in a matrix of green cement—that Goff designed to surround a fountain, which has been replaced with a planter. The typically idiosyncratic Goff lighting fixture on a pole is the last to remain from a series of such elements deployed to partition the large living area.



**Fashion-forward
Furnishing**

Live in the moment. This 1980s Manhattan apartment by designer Karl Springer captures the spirit of the era perfectly. The larger pieces, including the dining table and the palisander sofa, have an art deco inspired form, but also lend the space a foundation of solidity and formality—a nod, perhaps, to the fact that those flush days were fueled by Wall Street investment banking. The surfaces, however, are all flash and exoticism: from the Lucite side chair with a snakeskin-covered seat and the bouncily patterned sofa upholstery to the copper-leafed walls, bronze mushroom-cap lamps, and an African tribal stool repurposed as a coffee table. Against the backdrop of an amazing cityscape view, it is the ultimate “go-go” interior.



Photo: Peter Aaron/Esto





The Collector's Home

The judicious accrual of fine objects is the most common way to furnish a space with important design. Here, in his apartment, Paris gallerist Patrick Seguin put together a décor with pieces by a virtual who's who of postwar French design masters—chairs by Jean Prouvé, a Jean Royère sofa, stools and a coffee table by Charlotte Perriand, and lighting by Serge Mouille and Prouvé. The dynamic yet restrained lines of the furniture perfectly complement an art collection that includes pieces by Alexander Calder, Ed Ruscha, and a 1975 Andy Warhol silkscreen of photographer Tina Freeman.



Above, a unique handblown glass "Biomorphic Bubble," designed in 2008 by Jeff Zimmerman. Opposite page: Brazilian designer Julia Krantz's eight-foot long "Sofá Güell," a one-of-a-kind 2008 piece made of stack-laminated plywood.



Room for the New

By showing emerging talent alongside icons of the last century, a Manhattan gallery joins a small and adventurous group of design dealers in doing what art galleries have done for years

BY JEN RENZI

Vintage-furniture dealers Zesty Meyers and Evan Snyderman are like truffle hunters, sniffing out undiscovered designers for their Tribeca gallery, R 20th Century. “We’ve never sold a piece of Prouvé or Nakashima,” says Snyderman. “That’s not our thing. Our niche is sourcing overlooked or underexposed talent for which we can build a new market.” Research missions have taken them as far afield as Sweden, birthplace of California modernist Greta Magnusson Grossman, and Brazil, home of mid-century masters such as Sergio Rodrigues and Joaquim Tenreiro.



More recently, though, the hunt for the Next Great Thing has taken them to an entirely unexpected place: the twenty-first century. The gallery’s assemblage of twentieth-century pieces—Verner Panton lighting, Poul Kjaerholm lounges—is now joined by voluptuous laminated-wood sofas by emerging Brazilian star Julia Krantz and porcelain chandeliers by David Wiseman of California. “Five years ago, I never imagined we’d be selling contemporary design,” Snyderman says. “And now it accounts for 30 to 40 percent of our business.” The new move began as something of a fluke: In 2004, the duo’s friend artist Jeff Zimmerman brought over a series of his glass sculptures and asked if they’d consider exhibiting them. “Which we did out of friendship,” Meyers recalls. “But then we sold everything overnight. It was *insane*.”





Above, Jeff Zimmerman's eight-foot long 2006 design "Vine" is made of brass and opaline glass. Hugo França's "Marare" coffee table, opposite page, top, is a 2007 design made of solid *gameleira* wood. Krantz's "Poltrona Maia" lounge chair, opposite page, bottom, was designed in 2008. It was made in an edition of ten, plus four artist's proofs.

R is not the only gallery to pair modernist masterworks with limited-edition furnishings by contemporary designers. Cristina Grajales shows Michele Oka Doner and Christophe Côme alongside Jean Royère and Carlo Mollino; Magen H Gallery commingles postwar French gems and kinetic Forrest Myers chairs; Johnson Trading Gallery nurtures the careers of Max Lamb and Aranda/Lasch while dealing Noguchis and Nakashimas. But the business model for this kind of gallery is only just emerging. It's far more common for a contemporary-art gallery to expand into cutting-edge design (see Gagosian, Sonnabend, Lehmann Maupin) than for vintage-design dealers to make that same transition. Handling living, breathing talent demands a rather different skill set and a more adventurous eye than honoring the legacy of the late and the great.

Meyers and Snyderman are particularly adept at artist relations—probably because they are artists themselves. Before launching the gallery in 1997, both were members of a performance-art group that crafted installations from molten glass. (Zimmerman was also a member.) They thus have an insider's understanding of exhibition logistics and the magic of the creative process—not to mention the fragility of the artist's ego. Many of the designers in the R stable sought the dealers out for these reasons, including Brazilian designer Hugo França, who sculpts monumental furnishings from giant hunks of salvaged *pequi* wood. "Hugo came to us because he wasn't happy with his previous representation," says Snyderman. "He had such a great story to tell about the intensive, primitive way his pieces are made, [and that story hadn't gotten out]."

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David Wiseman, who works in Los Angeles, designed the bronze-and-porcelain illuminated branch, opposite page, in 2008. França's pequi wood "Yurua" armchair, above, is a 2005 design. His eight-foot-long "Mesa Joatinga" coffee table, below, was designed in 2005 and made of pequi.

A creative visionary with a hearty respect for craftsmanship and design history, França fits into R's mold. "We have a unique take on the contemporary market," Meyers explains. "The designers we represent are directly connected to the making process." Even Wendell Castle, who has worked with a crew of assistants since the 1960s, still hand-carves the wood molds in which his fiberglass pieces are cast. The result is something unique and uniquely appealing to R's clientele, many of whom are art collectors. "This audience wants something they can have ownership of," Meyers says. "Commissioning a one-off gives them something tailored to their needs that's also incredibly personal." It's a win-win situation: R builds a closer relationship with its clients through the artists, and the resulting design is a true collaboration—and a true original.

Contemporary designs—whether one-offs or limited editions—offer something else to collectors weaned on contemporary art: the perception of a safer investment. With new designers, R can create and control the market. This is much harder to do in the vintage arena, where price differentials are common and confusing. "We have a lot to learn from the French, who understand the importance of dealers partnering to control pricing in a way that makes sense to the collector and builds their confidence," says Snyderman. "So if they find the same chair in two galleries, it'll be the same price. American dealers have been less willing to communicate until very recently, when shows like Art Basel and London Design brought us together and provided an opportunity for us to ask each other, 'How can we better our business?'"

Investing in emerging talent is not without risk. Meyers and Snyderman believe they are fostering the next generation of Greta Grossmans and Verner Pantons, so they have both a financial and an emotional stake in the artists' success; they have funded the production of new editions, sourced wood for some designers, and helped hire studio assistants for others. But how well Zimmerman or Wiseman withstand the test of time remains to be seen.

Working with contemporary designers is also a way for R to stave off the inevitable: as the market for vintage furniture expands, there will be less of it to sell. "We are going to run out of material one day," Meyers laments. "And did we work this hard to let it all go? We don't want to hoard pieces, but we can't replace a lot of what we sell. People still haven't realized that when we say, 'This the only one we've ever seen,' it's truly the only one we've ever seen! Once things are gone, they're gone forever."

Jen Renzi is a New York writer who specializes in design.



Current Thinking

Industrial Handicraft

The adventurous arbiter of taste, Murray Moss, considers an intriguing contemporary-design project—the Clay Furniture of Maarten Baas

“Until recently, the art and design markets have made only halfhearted and self-conscious acknowledgment of the sculptural, or artistic, qualities inherent in industrially produced objects. The Dutch designer Maarten Baas’s Clay Furniture, introduced in 2006, attempts to address the matter directly. In industrial design, the act of form-giving—the revelation of the designer’s hand in the process—is often concealed through the use of computer modeling. But it is there nonetheless.

“In his Clay Furniture, Baas uses a classical form of artistry—the kind of clay modeling that has been employed throughout history in rendering the human form. But he uses it to create portraits of ordinary chairs, benches, and tables. To fashion these pieces, Baas molds industrial clay around the welded metal ‘skeletons’ of his designs. When the clay dries, the objects are painted with colored lacquer, stamped ‘BAAS,’ signed, and dated.

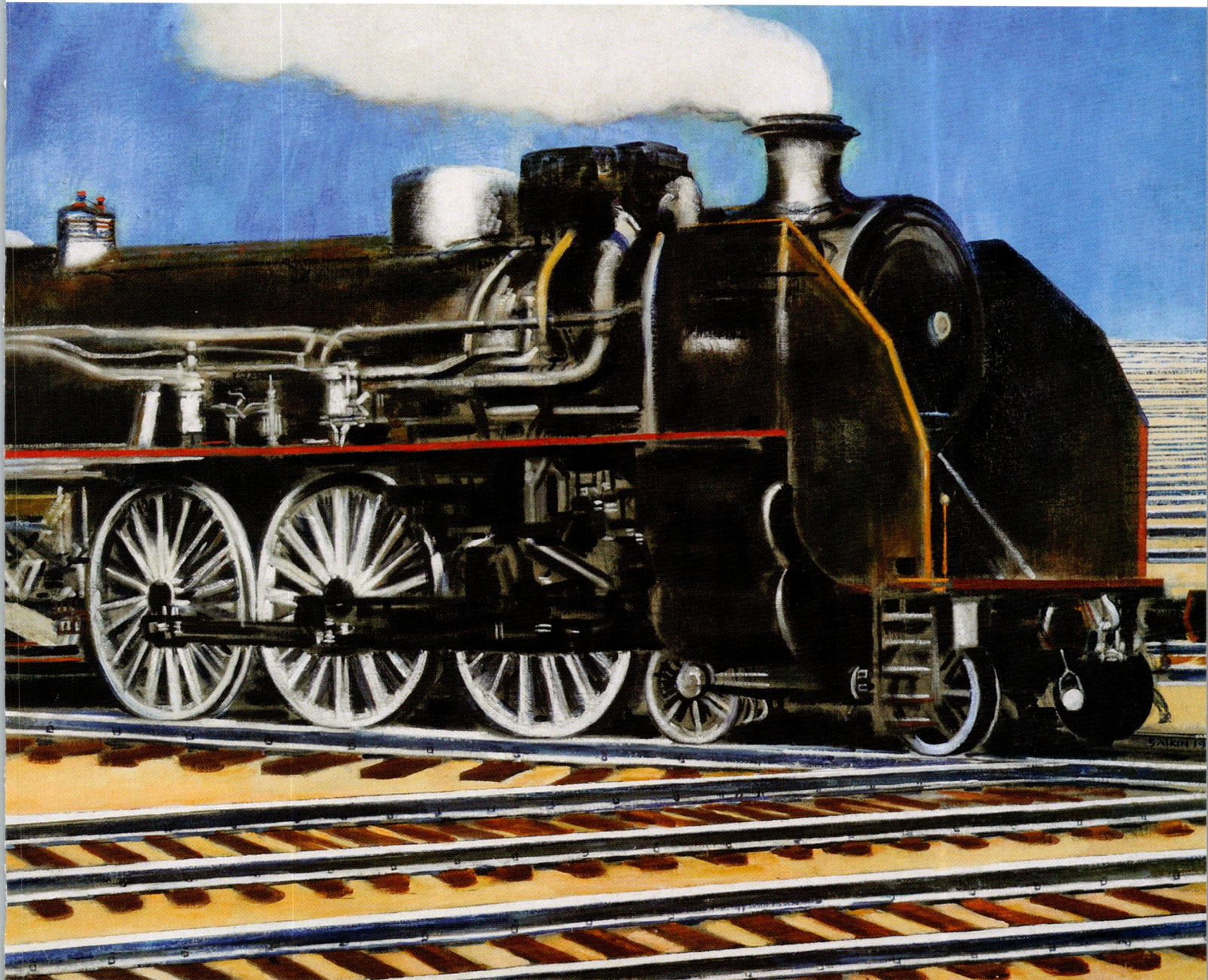
“Neither purely functional commodity nor purely art, these pieces are expressive hybrids—both object and objet d’art. Baas’s clay forms are only one current manifestation of a long line of works created in the twentieth century by artist/designers such as Ettore Sottsass, Shiro Kuramata,

Gaetano Pesce, and Bruno Munari. These pioneers, who refused to work within the strict boundaries of a given field, led the way not only for Baas but also for Ron Arad, Hella Jongerius, Studio Job, and many other contemporary artists and designers: all are creative minds who move effortlessly from factory to studio, from the design of a teaspoon to architecture, and from one medium to another in an effort to explore every aspect of ‘making.’”

Murray Moss is the owner of MOSS art and design galleries and stores in New York and Los Angeles.



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EMILE SALKIN, (1900–1977) *LOCOMOTIVE* 1977. Oil on canvas. Height: 45 3/8 inches – Width: 57 inches

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