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FEATURES

MEXICAN UPRISING 100
Whether it embodies traditional or forward-looking forms, idiomatic mid-century Mexican modernism is the new star in the design firmament
JORGES. ARANGO

UNDER THE HOOD 110
Edsel and Eleanor Ford's staid mansion near Detroit contains a surprising suite of modern rooms by Walter Dorwin Teague
JOSEPHINE SHEA

GLASS CEILING BROKEN 116
Women were long discouraged from entering the world of artful glassmaking. Profiles of three who have changed that state of affairs
PAUL O'DONNELL

P.J.'S FIRST FORAY 122
Philip Johnson's little-known first-completed commission, plus "Man of Vision," page 126, a tribute to the house's longtime resident: the groundbreaking architectural photographer Robert Damora
KARLA CAVARRA BRITTON & JOANNA LEHAN

SUSPENSION BRIDGE 134
With pure, rational architecture that was decades ahead of its time, Franco Albini revived the cultural and civic patrimony of Genoa in the post-war years and beyond
KAY BEA JONES

DEPARTMENTS

22 BEHIND THE NUMBERS
At Christie's, Carlo Mollino's sleek and sensuous furniture scores big again

28 VOICES
A conversation with legendary design intellect and provocateur, architect Gaetano Pesce

44 DESIGNER SPOTLIGHT
What's in a Name? The aesthetic, cerebral—and often pecuniary—attractions of anonymous designs

58 NEW SENSATIONS
Collectors and design professionals discuss their newest enthusiasms and market trends

70 GOING FORWARD
A new section explores the creative ideas and innovations driving contemporary design

78 WORKS ON PAPER
Reviews of recently published books for lovers of architecture and design

82 CURATOR'S EYE
Museum specialists discuss some favorite objects—new and vintage

92 LISTINGS
News, upcoming events, and exhibitions in the world of design

144 CURRENT THINKING
Los Angeles auctioneer Peter Loughrey on playing Sherlock Holmes in the world of art and design

ON THE COVER
A c. 1955 gold-plated brass and Venetian glass necklace by Claire Falkenstein

THIS PAGE
A 2003 blown glass vessel in apricot and aubergine by Sonja Blomdahl. Photograph by Lynn Thompson
RITSUE MISHIMA
JAPANESE // b. 1962
FIVE YEARS AGO, the launch of Design Miami as an adjunct to the Art Basel art fair across Biscayne Bay included a roundtable discussion entitled “Is Design Crashing Art’s Party?” The parley—chaired, if memory serves, by the New York dealer Murray Moss—was intended to answer the question of whether a “design” show had any right to ride on the coattails of a “fine art” fair. In other words, the question was: were design and art of equal stature?

Needless to say, the issue was not resolved that evening. One panelist, the architect Terence Riley, offered the observation that

Enough Already

Alfred Barr, the first chief of New York’s Museum of Modern Art (where Riley was a department head), had made design part of MoMA’s ambit from the start. The designer Gaetano Pesce, another panelist, assayed that art had, like design, always served a function: in many cases, he said, paintings—from the bosomy nudes of the old masters to the notorious L’Origine du monde by Gustave Courbet of 1866—had been commissioned as tasteful (more or less) erotica.

Fast-forward to Design Miami 2009, where another public discussion, led by architect Lee Mindel, touched on the nexus (or lack thereof) of design and art. The most interesting comment came from design collector George Lindemann. One reason he enjoys contemporary design, he said, is that, unlike contemporary artists, designers are willing to listen and adhere to the desires of their patrons.

And so the wheel has come full circle. Gone are the days when artists complied with, or fought, the orders of their patrons. Think of Michelangelo and Pope Julius II and their clash over the Sistine Chapel; Bronzino’s attempts to please the Medici; van Dyck’s currying the favor of Charles I of England; Velázquez’s service to the Bourbons; and so on down to Warhol’s portrait of Ethel Scull. Today, artists do what their intellects and instincts tell them to do. Collectors can like it or lump it.

Thus design, apparently, now presents an opportunity for the re-assertion of the notion of the involved patron, who can direct the course of a commission. This attitude is just a refinement on a trope that design dealers have been pushing for several years now: the idea of manufactured rarity—a.k.a. “limited editions.” The pitch is: “Only ten of these tables/chairs/hot water bottles will be made, so get yours now.” In some cases this representation is valid: a new Wendell Castle chair finished in an automobile-grade paint that costs $5,000 per quart can’t be mass-produced. At other times, the notion is a travesty. A “limited edition” piece can be tweaked slightly after the initial run—add grommets; put on a new finish—and, voila!, you have a fresh “limited edition” series.

But what is most tedious and obnoxious, in my view, is the strident attempt to finesse the delineation between “art” and “design.” It’s not that one field is superior to another: it’s that it’s a false equation. There is no single acceptable and comprehensive definition for the word “art” any more than there is for the word “design.” I would go so far as to say that there are no such things as “art” or “design”—there are only “artists” and “designers,” and they decide how they want to be regarded by the world. The intention of these creative spirits is what matters. So, enough already. Let the creators and their works speak for themselves. The rest of us should shut the hell up.
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Edited by BEATRICE V. THORNTON

CORRECTION: In the Winter 2010 issue of MODERN, the names of the Los Angeles design gallery Modern One and its co-proprietor, Benjamin Storck, were misspelled. We regret the errors.
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What Sold, for How Much, & Why?

LOT 244, Christie’s “Important 20th Century Decorative Arts & Design” sale in New York, December 8, 2009: An ebonized wood-and-glass occasional table designed by CARLO MOLLINO circa 1949-1950. The piece sold for $602,500 off of a pre-auction estimate of $250,000 to $350,000. Some reasons for the unexpectedly high price:

Mollino’s Moment
Carlo Mollino (1905-1973) was the iconoclast nonpareil of twentieth-century Italian design. Unlike Milan-based coevals such as Gio Ponti, he undertook custom assignments almost exclusively, rarely exhibited work internationally, and hardly ever worked far from his native city, Turin. An architect, and designer of furniture, interiors, and theatrical sets, Mollino was also a passionate skier, motorcar racer (and auto designer), pilot, and photographer. In 2005, Christie’s sold a 1949 custom-made oak-and-glass Mollino table for $3.8 million, a record for twentieth-century design eclipsed only by the famed—or notorious—sale last year of a 1917 armchair, by the Parisian avant-garde designer Eileen Gray, for $28 million.

Nonconformist Chic
Simon Andrews, the Christie’s specialist who ushered the Mollino side table into last December’s sale, draws a parallel between Gray and Mollino. Both were balky scions of wealth—he the son of a prosperous engineer; she a member of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy—who, he argues, marched to the hymns of their own design muses. Neither followed a conventional path to modernism. Mollino, says Andrews, had the sensibilities of a “structural engineer,” and indeed delighted in taking artful photos of his furniture pieces broken down into their component parts.

Provenance & Prototype
The Mollino side table was consigned by the Steinberg Foundation of Liechtenstein, holder of one of the great art and design collections in the world. The foundation had purchased the table at a 1984 Paris sale of Mollino work, an event celebrated among design cognoscenti. At that time the side table was touted as having been personally owned by Mollino (Christie’s played down the claim in the December auction catalogue, but mentioned it nonetheless). The fact that a cheaper variation of the table was offered by the American retailer Joseph Singer, beginning in 1951, only added to the value of the table offered by Christie’s: it became the touchstone—the pristine prototype—for a mass-market piece.

As for the Buyer...
Knowledgeable sources in the design market say that the winning bidders were Stefan Edlis and Gael Neeson, noted contemporary art collectors and philanthropists who live in Chicago and Aspen, Colorado. If correct, the information would seem to ratify a pointed (if pointless) argument that design dealers have been strenuously pushing for the past several years: that great design and great art are one and the same.
Kristin McKirdy

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GAETANO PESCE doesn't do "pretty." Throughout a career that began in the mid-1960s, after he completed his studies in Venice, Pesce has been driven not by aesthetics but rather by an interest in both socio-political currents and the fabrication of works—such as his seminal "Golgotha" chair of the early 1970s, made by draping fiberglass-and-polyester "cloth" over a mold—that allowed for subtle, unique variations by the fabricator, even in a piece that could be mass-produced. Pesce spoke recently with MODERN about the ongoing evolution of his ideas:

What in your opinion is the key mission of design today? The time is right for an object to express more than beauty, nice form, and function. Objects have the potential to express points of view. They can have the characteristics of art, expressed even more powerfully than contemporary art. In the past, art was often a product: there was no photography, for example, and thus no way to remember a place you visited. So you had a painter make a landscape. Then the camera came on the scene, and art lost this purpose. But I am convinced that design has a functional and a cultural side, so can be doubly powerful and expressive.

The Design of Politics, Culture, & Chance

A CHAT WITH ARCHITECT
GAETANO PESCE, THE LION
OF INDEPENDENT THINKING
IN THE WORLD OF DESIGN

Interview by BRENT LEWIS
One of a Pair of Arturo Pani Chairs
from his residence in Mexico City, 1949
But today, it seems like designers are mainly concerned with perfection of form—much of it sleek and sexy, and focused on the surface. I agree. Forty years ago last year, I issued a chair [the “La Mama” chair from Pesce’s “Up” series] with a sensual and soft shape, reminiscent of the body of a woman. But a chain connects the chair to a round ottoman. Though the chair is quite comfortable, what it expresses, ironically, is that women are prisoners of prejudices of men. I was trying to say that a designer can express a political view—not in a traditional medium like a magazine article, but in an industrial object made for a household.

You talk about reflecting humanity in design, which in your work means imperfection, leaving room for randomness and chance. This goes back to the Seventies. At that time I was thinking that society is about difference. Individuals are not all the same; there are different cultures, languages, circumstances of origin, etc. Yet political movements of the day insisted that we are all the same. I tried to say that democracy is not only the assurance of equality but the protection of difference. It would be a tragedy not only for people in general but also for designers not to understand this. In standardized industrial production, when an object is different they call it faulty and throw it out. But I prefer the “faulty” pieces: each has a personality and is different.

This is the idea behind your “diversified series” works? Yes. For instance, cars are all much the same, but in the future I hope that they will be unique for each client. I foresee a third industrial revolution that will have that technological capability. When I first considered how the chain of production can change because of atmospheric pressure, or humidity, or how even a worker’s mood can alter a piece, I searched out a new material and designed
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A. Loos/F. O. Schmidt, 1902

A. Loos/F. O. Schmidt, 1905

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VOICES

the "Golgotha" chair. The MoMA bought one immediately because they saw it was a new idea. I'm convinced this is still the future. The time of identical copies is behind us; we are entering a time of originality. I think the market is asking for this today.

It's interesting that you say objects have "personalities." Let me tell you about a lamp I designed, which I call "Verbal Abuse." Remember when we were in school, and there were certain friends who weren't very smart? The teacher might say: "You don't understand, you will never succeed in life." I call that verbal abuse. A young person who is told such a thing can react in two ways. One student will think he doesn't care what his teacher says. Another one will believe what the teacher says, and he starts to bend more and more in shame. In life they are bent people.

Above: The 2009 "Montanara" sofa, covered in images of an Alpine lake and waterfall, is one of Pesce's most fanciful designs. Below: He says the "Sunset in New York" sofa, designed in 1980, took on a new, sadder meaning for him after September 11.

Right, and the lamp is weighed down by lead. The lamp stands up straight, but there are places where people can attach one, two, or three weights until the lamp bends so the light illuminates at an angle to suit their needs. But the lamp is a doubly functional object. One: it is practical. Two: it tells a story about verbal abuse.

I'm confused. Are you saying that human beings sometimes bend when they shouldn't, or that we should remain strong and free? Both. We should be strong, but also remain reasonable. Verbal abuse is a fact of life. The wife or husband receives verbal abuse from his or her spouse every day. So do employees from their employer. The lamp is talking about the verbal abuse that can happen from the school to the workplace to the family and house. But remove the weights and the lamp stands tall.
Have the people who buy your work and your clients changed in forty years?

Fifty or so years ago, I was doing my job and only a few people were interested. Now I do more or less the same kind of work—like a recent sofa, called "Montanara" that represents a landscape of a lake in the Alps. They tell me people like it very much. So that means that something changed from forty years ago. I think people are now more aware of design. But I would like to return to your earlier question about emotion. Please do.

I'd like to talk about the architectural project I designed, mainly for myself, for the World Trade Center site. The "Sunset in New York" sofa I made twenty-nine years ago returned to my thoughts on September 11. I've lived and worked in New York since 1980, and after that day I believed there was a risk of a social, cultural sunset on New York because of the tragedy. We haven't been given a fantastic solution, only arguments and delays. So in a way the tragedy continues. In my project [essentially, a reconstruction of the Twin Towers, connected by a large, heart-shaped bridge], I tried to express something rare in architecture: optimism. When you look at a building, you don't often say, "Now I feel better about things." That kind of expression is simply beyond most architects. With my design I tried to say: "Look, we have a future if we are optimistic. We have a future if we believe in new things."

Please do. I'd like to talk about the architectural project I designed, mainly for myself, for the World Trade Center site. The "Sunset in New York" sofa I made twenty-nine years ago returned to my thoughts on September 11. I've lived and worked in New York since 1980, and after that day I believed there was a risk of a social, cultural sunset on New York because of the tragedy. We haven't been given a fantastic solution, only arguments and delays. So in a way the tragedy continues. In my project [essentially, a reconstruction of the Twin Towers, connected by a large, heart-shaped bridge], I tried to express something rare in architecture: optimism. When you look at a building, you don't often say, "Now I feel better about things." That kind of expression is simply beyond most architects. With my design I tried to say: "Look, we have a future if we are optimistic. We have a future if we believe in new things."

So you hope your designs will reach people on an emotional level? Yes, they should stir the imagination and also have a function. We make a chair that goes to a minority—not because it is for a minority, but because the minority is created as soon as we bring the chair to market. Certain people with a certain mentality will like that chair and others will not. I often make an object, in the end I have two, three, or ten copies. It's different from saying this object is only done in ten copies. I say this object is unique and I repeat it for those who will enjoy it and buy it.

Three of Pesce's 2004 pliable resin XXXL monumental vases, commissioned by the New York design gallery Moss.
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Among top auction houses, the “cover lot”—the item pictured on the front of the glossy sales catalogue—is traditionally the pick of the litter; the sale’s marquee draw. But for his “Modern Design” sale last October, Chicago auctioneer Richard Wright made an unusual, and in retrospect daring, choice of a cover lot image. It showed a man in rear profile lounging on an eccentric orange fabric-upholstered sofa from the 1960s, made of panels of ash plywood that bulged out at their base and furled outward at the top, like flower petals (below). The auction featured items by famous “name” designers such as Oscar Niemeyer, Serge Mouille, and Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand, but arguably the ash sofa—along with a matching club chair, with which the couch was offered en suite—was the most aesthetically interesting lot in the auction. "I'd never seen anything like them," says Wright. "The form was amazing—maybe a little kitschy in an 'I Dream of Jeannie' TV show sort of way—but certainly unique. I thought the estimate was reasonable [$7,000 to $9,000 for the set] and you can't just keep putting iconic pieces on catalogue covers."

By now you will have guessed that the sofa and chair did not find a buyer. And a chief reason, it is safe to presume, is that the pieces were only described in the catalogue as "American, circa 1960"—attributed to no designer, nor to any manufacturer. In any collecting field—it's almost too obvious to state—famous names sell. But anonymous designs have a variety of attractions—practical, aesthetic, and intellectual. Such pieces

Whodunnit?

The many reasons for the allure of designs that can only be ascribed to John and Jane Doe

By Gregory Cerio
can have a special character that is appreciated by even the most seasoned and selective collectors. "A brilliantly designed but anonymous work has a quality all its own—an air of mystery that makes it especially compelling," the famously fastidious modern design collector John Waddell says. "It stands on its own two feet, inviting recognition without having the crutch of a 'name'."

"Without the 'luxury tax', a name carries, anonymous designs are always, relatively speaking, a bargain."

And without the "luxury tax" a name carries, anonymous designs are always, relatively speaking, a bargain. "People collect for all kinds of reasons," says Sally Rosen, owner of the Dallas design gallery nextx20. "Those who collect for investment are only interested in work by known designers."

Anonymous pieces tend to appeal mainly to two groups at seemingly polar ends of the collecting spectrum. At one end, there are those whose hunting and gathering is driven by a kind of emotional response led by their own sense of what it worthy and appealing. Even though this approach does not put meat on his table—"Auctions are all about the name game. I put very few anonymous pieces on the block."—Wright admires it: "I love the idea of buying only what is pleasing to your eye," he says. "It's a method that creates collections that are interesting and idiosyncratic." Rosen points out that some of the greatest collectors of the modern age, such as Peggy Guggenheim, chose things without regard to the ratification of critics or the market (and thus usually got into a field cheaply, before it became fashionable). "They loved what they had and bought it because they had not only connoisseurship and a trained eye, but also because they followed their gut instincts," she says. Waddell, an exemplar of Rosen's remarks, says: "I pay particular attention to anonymous pieces in collections and exhibitions; it's generally a sure eye that put them there."

The other collecting cohort drawn to anonymous designs are those who select objects not with their hearts but with their brains—or, rather, with the idea of putting their brains to work. In 2007, Patrick Parrish and Greg Wooten, principals of the Manhattan gallery Mondo Cane, mounted a group of objects in their space at a sales exhibition under the banner "Anonymous." The event was a success, both financially and educationally. "Several buyers came in and were able to tell us, 'oh, that chair's by so-and-so.' It was a great learning experience," Parrish says. "We've always liked things we don't know. Chances are a piece you've never seen before might be unique, and what's more probably is. But for me, I love anonymous designs because I'm really into the..."
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TO COLLECT VIA THE 'BRAND-NAME' METHOD CAN BE OVERRATED, IF NOT DOWNRIGHT LAZY.

research. Just because a piece is anonymous today doesn't mean it will be next week.” Numerous collectors of modern design share Parrish’s passion for whatever the equivalent of expending shoe-leather is in the Information Age. And odds are their efforts will be rewarded—As Wright says: “In theory, you should be able to document everything made in the second half of the twentieth century.”

It bears mentioning that to collect via the “brand-name” method can be overrated, if not outright lazy. “I remember visiting a collector who rattled off the names of the designers of all his pieces,” Wright says. “Problem was, each piece was a mediocre example of each designer’s work.” Echoing him, Rosen notes that even great designers made pieces that, in the production process, turned out badly. When she looks at a piece by a well-known designer, she says her rule of thumb is “would I buy this piece if it were anonymous?” (Incidental caveat emptor: Rosen advises that you should never buy an anonymous piece over the Internet, or on the basis of a picture: you always want to examine it firsthand to judge the quality of design and craftsmanship.) Plus, there is the “been there, done that” factor. Even an iconic work by a seminal designer can be yawn-inducing. Granting exceptions for special provenance, early production
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Public viewing at Brussels 40 place du Grand Sablon
Wednesday 21st April to Tuesday 27th April 2010 from 10 am to 6 pm

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dates, prototypes, and such, as Parrish says: "When you've seen your five-hundredth example, a piece is not that interesting. If everyone has one, by definition it's not cool."

Besides that, a "famous name" design might have little to do with the famous name at all. "Most of America's celebrated industrial designers maintained offices staffed with people toiling behind the scenes, whose work was sold as that of the name on the door," Waddell says. "Numerous iconic works are ascribed to renowned designers who probably had less to do with them than did some unsung but accomplished designer in the back room." For example, there are the familiar mid-century chandeliers known as "George Nelson Bubble Lamps"—wire-ribbed, polymer-skinned lighting fixtures that come in such shapes as flying saucers, spheres, and cigars. As design historian Jeffrey Head notes in an essay on the Bubble Lamps—which were first issued in 1952 by the Howard Miller company and are now made by Modernica—the chandeliers were designed and engineered not by Nelson but by William C. Renwick, an employee of the firm George Nelson & Associates. Ah, the glory of being an "associate."

Finally, there is perhaps the saddest category of anonymity: the work of those who are unknown despite every effort not to be so. Sally Rosen tells a tale of a piece in her inventory: a wonderful American-made brooch crafted in 14k gold and rounded quartz that would have been the height of suave futuristic design in the late 1950s or early 1960s [shown at top]. "The piece has a signature that's a bit hard to read. I've sent images of it to curators, dealers, and collectors," Rosen says. "But no one recognizes it. At a design fair in Miami, a women came up to my booth and said she had a signed piece at home and wondered if I'd be familiar with the signature. She drew it on a piece of paper. It was the same as the one on my piece. It was so frustrating. But it encouraged me to continue the search." Does the identity of the designer really matter? That's for Rosen, as it is for all design lovers, to decide. □

From top: A 1950s gold-and-quartz brooch signed by an unrecognized maker; a "French c. 1970" acrylic desk that brought a low-ball $7,500 at Wright; an attractive but anonymous 1920s chair in the Mondo Cane inventory.
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Günter Uecker (1930 b.), Gate Nailed Shut for the exhibition "künstlich – klaue – (phobies)", 1983, nails and painted doorframe, 230 x 117 x 30 cm, € 140,000 – 180,000
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Edited by DANIELLE DEVINE

**WEARABLE ART**

"I think one of the great designers under the radar right now is Claire Falkenstein, who was an accomplished American sculptor and who like many artists, designers, and architects also designed jewelry. In the 1950s she was discovered by Peggy Guggenheim, who was so impressed by her work that she hired her to design the front gates of her palazzo in Venice. Falkenstein, like Alexander Calder and Art Smith, designed jewelry using inexpensive materials. Rarely did these artists use gold unless it was something very special."

AL EIBER, M.D., collector

**GREEK DRAMA**

"T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings was a friend and client of mine. He made some of the most beautiful furniture of the mid-century period, first in England, then in America, and finally in Greece, where he retired. His original Klismos chair was produced in London in 1936; the pair I have were made in Athens in the 1980s and have a white lacquer finish, which is very unusual, since he usually used a clear lacquer to show the wood grain."

JACK LENOR LARSEN, designer and collector

**A WOMB OF ONE'S OWN**

"Wendell Castle's 'Enclosed Reclining Environment' from 1969 is one of his earliest pieces and was exhibited in his first show in New York. It is perhaps Wendell's most important piece, and it's a real honor and pleasure to own it. It was designed in his stack-laminated style and has a function, which first attracted me to the piece. I have it in my office and actually do take naps in it."

GEORGE LINDEMAN, collector
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HALL STAND, c.1867, CHRISTOPHER DRESSER FOR COALBROOKDALE
NEW SENSATIONS

FEATS OF CLAY

"I'm a huge fan of Heath Ceramics. Their pieces have a timeless quality that is so rare in this world of temporary trends. They're handmade in the San Francisco area, so it's a local product and there's so little that's handcrafted anymore. My dishware is Heath. We use Heath tiles in our architectural projects; they're beautifully proportioned and reflect the same kind of design priorities and goals that we have in our work. It's about clean lines, simplicity, and a kind of raw, natural material; colors and tones that are of the earth and part of the earth; and a human inconsistency that is joyous."

LEO MARMOL, architect, Los Angeles

BRIEF INK COUNTER

"I never would have thought I'd be excited by a calendar, but the London-based designer Oscar Diaz has designed one that is absolutely amazing. His calendar has a white sheet of paper for each month, with raised numbers for every day. The embossed numbers are attached to a paper wick, which you insert into a bottle of ink—a different color for each month. The incredible thing is that Oscar calibrated the rate at which ink is absorbed into the embossed paper numerals, so that when a day ends, the corresponding paper number is full of ink. The thing is gorgeous and ingenious. Right now, Oscar's calendar is in the prototype stage, but he hopes it will be in production soon."

AMY LAU, interior designer, New York

25 EASY PIECES

"What I love today is the resurgence of great design in simple forms best exemplified by the recent show "The Future at Home: American Furniture 1940-1955" presented by the Museum of the City of New York. The exhibition featured twenty-five pieces of compact, lightweight, and flexible furniture by designers like Carl Anderson and Ross Bellah [chaise from 1942 shown left], Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, which grew in appeal among consumers in the mid-twentieth century, paving the way for the mass-marketed furniture of today."

JAMES P. DRUCKMAN, president & CEO of the New York Design Center
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NEW SENSATIONS

MODERNE MAESTRO
"I was introduced to Gilbert Rohde and his furniture by a friend who is an expert in mid-century modern design. I immediately bought a small ‘ectoplastic’ burl desk from the Herman Miller ‘Paidao’ line of the mid-Thirties. I fell in love with its elegant modern look, sensual biomorphic design, the way the top seems to float, and the leather-upholstered sides. I became intrigued by the fact that Herman Miller brought modernism to America at large, by mass-producing furniture that was flexible, interchangeable, informal, and multifunctional. Rohde is a great American story."

JANE RUSHTON, collector

LOADED MAGAZINE
“Recently I have started collecting issues of Flair, a magazine from the early 1950s. Only twelve issues were ever produced before it folded, due to the high production costs. It was a lifestyle magazine with a very novel approach: each issue was an entirely new experience accompanied by a new logo and die-cut cover, investigating several different categories of modern life—fashion, interior design, art, entertainment, literature, gardening. The layout, use of color, foldouts, and tactile pages were totally ahead of their time, and surely could be a reference for the fantastic set designers of Mad Men.”

LORI GRAHAM, interior designer, Washington, D.C.

“PUNK” ROCKS
“I have noticed, particularly in lighting design, the return of gilt-bronze—a very opulent material popular during the baroque period—used to create beautiful streamlined modern objects. When I’m designing for my clients it’s important that things are not just rare but inherently and timelessly beautiful. I am particularly interested in the work of New York lighting designer Art Donovan. In his ‘Steampunk’ designs he uses, among other things, recycled clocks to create decadent and intelligent designs that are not just pure and functional but beautiful. You can’t quite say if it’s art or design, but why can’t it be both?”

RAJI RADHAKRISHNAN, interior designer, Washington, D.C.
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NEW SENSATIONS

▼ GUILTY TREASURE
“This cabinet by Studio Job's duo Job Smeets and Nynke Tynagel can be seen as a rebellion against the absence of social-political concerns in the design world. They want more for their creations and themselves, and in that sense they could well be at the crossroads of design and art. The inlaid subjects are an inventory of deadly excesses—armed helicopters, nuclear power plants, high-voltage pylons, as well as depictions of surviving animals and skeletons of those unable to escape. The piece presents an 'end of the world' scenario where man is clearly guilty.”

EDWARD MITTERRAND & STÉPHANIE CRAMER, gallerists, Geneva, Switzerland

▲ NICE THREADS
“One of the most influential artists of our time is Sheila Hicks. She is a textile phenomenon with an unbelievable talent for texture, color, and scale. I have so much respect and admiration for her progressive vision; she is truly a revolutionary in the design realm.”

KELLY WEARSTLER, interior designer, Los Angeles

▼ ILLUMINATING IDEAS
“I am a great believer in the power of art to inspire design. The work of artists like James Turrell, for example, has had a significant influence on the work of many architects—the way we design rooms and manipulate light. His explorations into our perceptions of light within a space have led me to focus on a sense of serene, expanded space through the subtle use of indirect light.”

JIM OLSON, partner, Olson Kundig Architects, Seattle
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GLOWING WOOD Luminoso wood paneling comes out of Austria from the firm Litwork. As noted, the material is made by alternating layers of a hardwood—black walnut, black cherry, oak, mahogany, teak, wenge, and maple are all available—with layers of optical fibers. When installed in front of a backlighting source, the Luminoso panels give off a soft radiance. If you place a scrim with an image—a corporate logo, say—in front of the light source, the image will appear on the pane! The arrangement of the optical fibers within the wood can be customized. Kikoski used panels with vertical rows of pinpoint fiber-optics to great effect in the walls behind the bar at the Wright, the new restaurant at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

21st Century Alchemy

INTRODUCING A NEW DEPARTMENT ON THE THEMES & DREAMS DRIVING CONTEMPORARY DESIGN. FIRST UP: MIRACLE MATERIALS

By STEPHEN MILNE

FOR ARCHITECT ANDRE KIKOSKI, it was love at first sight. "This is an amazing material," he says, "so beautiful and ethereal. Is it wood? Is it lighting? Is it poetry!"

Luminoso, the object of Kikoski's ardor, is a composite material in which optical fibers are sandwiched between thin layers of wood. Perhaps only an architect, or an industrial designer, could be sent into raptures by such a new building product. But to a degree that few people realize, the design process is driven not only by drafting, doodling, philosophizing, or imagination, but also by novel, hitherto inconceivable materials. A visit to Material Connexions, a New York City-based global materials consultancy and resource archive, provided an introduction to other products made of elementary natural substances that, via a sort of alchemy, scientists and engineers have endowed with almost supernatural qualities. Here are three of the most intriguing:

An image on a scrim, placed between the backlight source and Luminoso paneling, will appear on the surface of the material.
The 22nd annual International Contemporary Furniture Fair, May 15-18, 2010 will turn New York City’s Jacob K. Javits Convention Center into a global summit for what’s best and what’s next in design.

The 22nd annual International Contemporary Furniture Fair
May 15-18 2010 at New York City’s Jacob K. Javits Convention Center
800-272-SHOW or 603-665-7524 icff.com
FLEXIBLE ROCK  The German firm Richter Veneer Technology has developed a surfacing material made of slate called NanoStone. The company slices rock into ultrathin sheets—little more than one-hundredth of an inch thick—which are then bonded with polyester resin and glass fibers to a slim fleece or leather substrate. Contrary to all laws of physics, you might think, the slate becomes as lightweight and pliable as vinyl. Richter touts NanoStone, which comes in black, gray, or earth tones, as a novel material for covering cabinetry or for wrapping architectural elements such as columns. The product has already been used to accent automobile interiors and, sources say, will be used in a line of Armani handbags.

Though NanoStone is made from real slate, the rock is cut so thinly it will bend like leather.

"TerraSkin has a number of eco-conscious attributes: no trees are farmed, and neither water nor bleach is used in production, thus eliminating worries about water pollution."

PAPER FROM STONE  Perhaps the most surprising new material is called TerraSkin: a paper made from a blend of calcium carbonate and a small quantity of nontoxic resin. Design & Source Production in New York and Johnson Paper of Chicago markets the white sheets, opaque or translucent, which have similar characteristics to regular paper in terms of strength and durability. They can be folded or cut, and are also water-resistant. The product has a number of eco-conscious attributes: no trees are farmed, and neither water nor bleach is used in production, thus eliminating worries about water pollution. And if thrown away, TerraSkin will degrade back into mineral powder within a few months. In terms of printing applications, inks do not bleed because the paper is fiberless (images and type stay sharper), and 20 to 30 percent less ink is required. TerraSkin already has earned hipness points in the design world: the Museum of Modern Art’s stores use it for their shopping bags and gift boxes. And there’s the sweet irony: who’d have thought that after all these centuries, we’d be writing on stone again?

The design stores of New York’s Museum of Modern Art now use TerraSkin, a “paper made from stone,” for their shopping bags.
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Amado Pomodoro (Italian, b. 1926), Rotante primo sezionale n. 1 (Rotating First Section No. 1), 1966, sold for $486,000 January 29, 2010

Nakashima Walnut Desk, to be offered March 27, 2010

63 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116 • 274 Cedar Hill St. Marlborough, MA 01752 • www.skinnerinc.com
JOSEF HOFFMANN (1870–1956)—the human bridge between the historicist design styles of nineteenth century Middle Europe and the advent of the region's modernist movement in the twentieth—wrote his terse Autobiography in or about 1948, though it was not published until 1972. Dry and wry by turns, Hoffmann's story suffers from presumption that the reader already knows much about his life, work, and times. The present re-issue is welcomingly enhanced—if not necessarily invigorated—by copious, comprehensive, and almost too-exacting footnotes. Still, the book, with text in both German and English, provides an authoritative chronology of such seminal events as the founding of the Vienna Secession artists' union in 1897 and the establishment of the Wiener Werkstätte in 1903. Above all, this edition of Hoffmann's autobiography serves as a kind of guidebook for design lovers interested in further exploring the development of modernist work and ideals.

JOSEF HOFFMANN: AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Hatje Cantz, 144 pages, paperback, $30

CHICAGO AND its environs have been such a thoroughly explored crucible of architectural and design innovation—from the work of Daniel Burnham, Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright to that of Mies, Bertrand Goldberg, and Harry Weese—it is hard to believe that any ingenious local architect and designer has not found a niche in the city's pantheon. But as the newly published Edgar Miller and the Handmade Home demonstrates, some brilliant creative spirits somehow slip the notice of the eminences of design studies. Perhaps one reason this is so is in Miller's case lies in the book's subtitle: "Chicago's Forgotten Renaissance Man." "Forgotten" is not the key word: "Renaissance" is. Miller, whose career thrived in the 1920s and 1930s and who died in 1993 at age 94, simply mastered too many skills to be easily categorized. That aside, Miller's oeuvre is amazing: his decorative wood carvings rival those of Eliel Saarinen in his Scandinavian Folklore period; his stained-glass windows are so perfect that those of Wright; his sculptural bas-reliefs are the nonpareil of streamline moderne; and he was a deft painter and muralist. We enjoin you to buy this lavishly illustrated, illuminating volume.

EDGAR MILLER AND THE HANDMADE HOME
By RICHARD CAHAN, MICHAEL WILLIAMS, & ALEXANDER VERTIKOFF
CityFiles Press, 400 pages, $50

ALONG WITH composition of music, the use of color in art and design is undoubtedly the most difficult aesthetic practice to describe in lucid and practical terms. Both disciplines are so fraught with emotion, instinct, and subjectivity that they defy attempts to set concrete principles and guidelines. In 1963, with Interaction of Color, Josef Albers, the Bauhaus-trained artist then teaching at Yale, laid out strategies that were not so much hard-and-fast rules as suggestive and inspirational tenets for exploring the relationships between hues. That year the university press published a painstakingly printed (Albers insisted on perfection), unbound double portfolio of the book—one part silk screens, the other explicatory text—in an edition of 200. It sold out quickly, and more than 200,000 small-format paperback editions of Albers's book have been sold since. Recently, the Yale press released a new large-format, slip-cased, and bound edition of the two volumes that make up Interaction of Color, as carefully prepared as the 1963 original. This lustrous work deserves a place in any ardent modernist's library.

INTERACTION OF COLOR
By JOSEF ALBERS
Yale University Press, 145 color plates, $200

THIS SPACE rarely affords opportunities to review fiction, so we'll seize upon the recent news that the Villa Tugendhat—the Ludwig Mies van der Rohe residential masterpiece, completed in 1930, in the city of Brno in today's Czech Republic—is about to undergo a much-needed restoration to bring to your attention Simon Mawer's wondrous novel The Glass Room. Mawer's book traces the history of the house—which is given the alias "the Villa Landauer"—from the commission granted by a progressive Jewish Austrian automaker and his newlywed gentle wife to the German modernist architect Rainer von Abt (i.e., Mies), and through the structure's subsequent maltreatment and neglect by Czech, German, and Soviet authorities in wars both hot and cold. While the theme of Mawer's novel is the desperate human impulse to find order and harmony in the midst of chaos, the house itself becomes a character in the drama, as a powerful emblem of the force of rationality against blinkered willfulness.

THE GLASS ROOM
By SIMON MAWER
Other Press, 405 pages, paperback, $14.95

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Silver kinetic necklace by Arnaldo Pomodoro.
Pendant is 4 1/2" long x 3" wide, with chain, 17" long. Milan, Italy. C. 1967.

Pop Art pendant/brooch by Roy Lichtenstein. Enamel on silver.
Designed for "Multiples". Signed. 3" high x 2 1/2" wide. C. 1968.

Rare abstract pitcher by Antonio Pineda. Sterling silver.

Butterfly brooch by William Spratling. Sterling silver and bronze.
3 1/4" wide x 4" high. Signed. C. 1940 - 1946.

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Curator's Eye

WE ASKED CUSTODIANS OF LEADING TWENTIETH-CENTURY AND CONTEMPORARY DECORATIVE-ARTS COLLECTIONS TO DISCUSS ONE OBJECT THAT THEY FEEL IS PARTICULARLY NOTEWORTHY. HERE IS A GALLERY OF THEIR CHOICES. Edited by Chloe Lieske

RUDE OSOLNIK CANDLESTICKS
Macassar ebony
Fabricated 1988
Designed 1940s

“AT MID-CENTURY, the lathe was widely regarded as an implement of generic design, better suited to the mass production of chair legs, spindles, and banisters than to experiments in modern aesthetics. But in the early 1950s a handful of artists, including James Prestini, Bob Stocksdale, and Rude Osolnik, were challenging this notion with sleek wooden housewares, turned individually by hand yet exhibiting the crisp lines and efficient execution favored by a post-war society enamored of industrial design. Osolnik’s candlesticks quickly garnered attention, receiving the 1955 Award of Good Design from the Furniture Association of America. Near the end of his six-decade career, the artist claimed to have turned more than 100,000 candlesticks. They elevated Osolnik’s position in the fledgling studio craft movement, and cemented his role as a founder of the field of wood art, which has grown at exponential rates since the 1970s. Osolnik turned candlesticks in a variety of woods, including ebony, of which this set is one of the most sumptuous examples.”

“Osolnik’s candlesticks quickly garnered attention, receiving the 1955 Award of Good Design.”

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Estimate: $10,000-$12,000
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3. ERIC HILTON
Light Bird Alignment, 1988
Steuben Glass, Corning, New York
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In Perspective

Curator's Eye

"The Boby Trolley demonstrates an understanding of the needs of contemporary culture. The piece epitomizes Joe Colombo's design philosophy. He aimed to design equipment for living that is autonomous and flexible and that can be coordinated, converted, and utilized in different ways, so that it always adapts itself to its user. Colombo had a draftsman's storage requirements in mind when he designed the Boby, but it is useful for any home or office, with its revolving drawer units, drop-in trays, and three castors, which enable it to be easily moved. Made of injection-molded plastic, available in a range of bright colors, the Boby helped make plastic a valid material for use in the home and office environment. It's a simple, accessible, and enduring piece of design. What's more, it's perfect for the needs of the modern-day curator!"

Donna Loveday, head of curatorial, Design Museum, London

Joe Colombo
The Boby Trolley
Designed 1969

"The Boby helped make plastic a valid material for use in the home and office environment."
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Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, 1980
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**ARMAN**
Accumulation Colombienne, 1979-80
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HA.com/5043-26001
The Property of Max Factor III sold to benefit various charities.

**FRANK STELLA**
Untitled (Polar Coordinate), 1963
Acrylic, gouache, crayon, glitter and monotype, 38-5/8 x 38 in.
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CATHERINE FUTTER, Helen Jane and R. Hugh "Pat" Uhlmann Curator of Decorative Arts, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO

KENNETH FERGUSON FOUR-LEGGED VESSEL, 1992 Stoneware with slip

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MARCH

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www.mitterand-cramer.com
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Record Pictures: Photographs by Michael Collins
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Animal Architecture
Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin
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www.galerieperrotin.com
Solo show by Daniel Arsham that blurs the line between art, architecture and performance.

The Colors Are Bright
Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin
Paris, France
March 20-May 7, 2010
www.galerieperrotin.com
Solo show of Peter Coffin's films, in installations and sculptures that function through visual, poetic, and at times, ironic analogies.

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APRIL

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www.galleriacolombari.com
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MODERNISM TRACED AN ENERGETIC & ECCENTRIC PATH THROUGH MEXICO, AS TODAY’S DESIGN COLLECTORS ARE JUST BEGINNING TO APPRECIATE

By JORGE S. ARANGO

MEXICAN UPRISING
DOWNTOWN's booth at last year's Los Angeles Antiques Show exhibited iron tables and chairs by Arturo Pani, an upholstered neoclassical sofa and armchairs by Roberto and Mito Block, and other pieces.
If a handful of galleries and auction houses are onto something, however, Mexican twentieth-century design may be the next big thing. “It’s a weird anomaly in the market that it hasn’t received more attention,” says Nicholas Kilner, creative director of the New York design gallery Sebastian+Barquet, which showed nothing but Mexican mid-century furniture at Design Miami last December. “Mexico has an impressive modernist history. There was a vivid design avant-garde that flourished in concert with the rise of artists like Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera.”

Last December at the Chicago auction house Wright, when the hammer fell on a 1960s Pepe Mendoza occasional table, the bidding had risen to more than $8,000, considerably more than the $3,000-to-$5,000 estimate. At a Los Angeles Modern Auctions sale two days before, paddles dropped into laps when the price reached a more reasonable sum—just under $4,300—for a pair of circa 1955 Arturo Pani lounge chairs with an identical estimate.

These were hardly “stop the presses” sales results, but still: Pepe Mendoza? Arturo Pani? Design-savvy as you may be, you could be forgiven for a lack of recognition. Both were Mexican mid-century designers, and although Pani was the brother of internationally renowned architect Mario Pani, neither is likely to produce the “Ah, yes, of course” reaction elicited by names like Ponti or Saarinen. At least not yet.

Fueled by Marxist ideology and mexicanidad—the Mexican embrace of a pre-Colombian identity, which awoke after the country’s 1910 revolution—the nation emerged as a Latin American-flavored incubator of modernist thought in the 1930s. The Bauhaus diaspora was flooding Mexico City with its refugees, among them Hannes Meyer, Josef and Anni Albers, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Michael van Beuren, and Klaus Grabe. Notions of egalitarian, coolly rational design enthralled Mexican architects and designers. Luis Barragán traveled to Paris to attend Le Corbusier’s lectures. The architect Juan O’Gorman—who designed the adjoining studios of Kahlo and Rivera—became almost messianic about rationalism, creating
Clockwise from top:

**ARTURO PANI**

Lounge chair, 1955

Sheaf of Wheat table, 1940s
Gilded iron and glass

Stool, 1960s
Steel and brass

Hand-forged chair, 1940s
Gilded iron
spare-box structures all over Mexico City. Clara Porset, a Cuban designer who fled the Machado dictatorship and settled in Mexico, studied with the Alberses at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Another designer, Diego Matthei, was a pupil of Mathias Goeritz, whose own work was heavily influenced by the Bauhaus.

So why is the importance of furniture produced in this fertile intellectual environment from the 1930s through the 1960s only now coming to light? One issue lies with the country of origin itself, says Ana Elena Mallet, a scholar of Mexican modern design. "There are no literary or academic references to Mexican design in the twentieth century," she says. There are no curricula at Mexican universities, either. "They deal more with technical innovation than history. We're still fighting to conserve many of the historical modern buildings from the first part of the century. Design is just not recognized as an art form in Mexico."

Mallet has been passionately trying to rectify the situation by organizing exhibitions and developing scholarship. Her June 2007 book, *Vida y Diseño en Mexico Siglo XX (Life and Design in 20th Century Mexico)*, is the seminal text on the subject. But she's had a time of it. It took her four years of coaxing to finally place an exhibition about Michael van Beuren at the Museo Franz Mayer, Mexico City's decorative arts and design museum. The show is scheduled to open in June.

Dealers such as Sebastian+Barquet and the Los Angeles galleries Downtown and Blackman Cruz have been stocking up on Mexican twentieth-century design for years, while slowly building a market for the pieces. Adam Blackman and David Cruz were showing...
From top:

MICHAEL VAN BEUREN
Domus chair, 1950
Wood and upholstery
Furniture from Domus's Pine line, 1957
Natural and Lacquered Pine

MICHAEL VAN BEUREN,
KLAUS GRABE, AND MORLEY WEBB
Daybed, 1941
Primavera wood and leather
Mexican work as far back as 1993. "I'm from Mexico, and I grew up with modern furniture," says Cruz, who adds that most buyers are on the West Coast: "The houses are more suited to it here in terms of scale. It fits well. And the pieces have a certain glamour to them. It's a new take on modernism."

This new take is a considerable market driver, believes Carina Villinger, senior specialist/vice president for twentieth-century decorative art and design at Christie's. "Traditionally, the modern market has been focused toward Europe. But now that those markets have been appreciated and researched, people are looking to others." Christie's recently sold a Barragán lounge chair and stool for $13,500 and, in 2008, a Michael van Beuren chaise for $18,750.

**THE FURNITURE** tends to fall into two general camps: early work influenced by neoclassicism, which catered to the Mexican bourgeoisie; and austere furniture influenced by the Bauhaus and the International Style, which appealed to intellectuals and a young entrepreneurial class. Arturo Pani and the French-born brothers Roberto and Mito Block belong to the former. Highly successful interior decorators, they became known primarily for their ironwork, mostly produced during the 1940s and 1950s. The French precedents are clear. Blackman mistook the first Pani piece he encountered for an André Arbus, and Richard Wright at Wright compares some of Pani's work to that of Jean Royère. The difference, says Downtown's co-

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**From top:**

**ROBERTO AND MITO BLOCK**

Occasional table, 1940s
Gilded bronze and glass
Detail of coffee table
Coffee table, 1940s
Gilt-bronze and églomisé
The chair's renewed popularity—it has been seen in decors and galleries everywhere in recent months—seems to vindicate the artist who, at 75, has just been honored with a retrospective at Mexico City's Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes. "Modern design is living a kind of mannerist moment," Friedeberg says, citing the concurrent rage for the animal- and botanically-inspired forms in the work of François-Xavier Lalanne (who died last year) and his wife, Claude. (The Lalannes' pieces have been the cynosure of several recent auctions, most notably the Christie's sale from the estate of Yves Saint Laurent and his partner, Pierre Bergé).

"I always hated good taste, from whatever culture," says Friedeberg. "I find bad taste more interesting."
A WHO'S WHO OF MEXICAN MODERNISM

ARTURO PANI
Occasional tables, 1970
Gilt and enameled steel, marble

FRANCISCO ARTIGAS (1916-96)—A Mies-inspired architect who created furniture for his residential projects. His chunky modernist pieces are fairly scarce.

LUIS BARRAGÁN (1902-88)—An architect whose furnishings are highly desirable, though some claim Clara Porset (see below) was the actual author of his furniture. “It’s a tricky question,” admits Nicholas Kilner of Sebastian+Barquet. “There are no drawings of his furniture designs in his archives.” Yet Kilner cites the famous Casa Prieto, whose owners commissioned Barragán to create an entirely new, top-to-bottom décor: “He even melted down the family silver and had it recast. A man who would go to those lengths—it seems unlikely he wouldn’t design the furniture.”

ROBERTO AND MITO BLOCK (1920s–?)—Decorators with offices on trendy Paseo de la Reforma, these brothers offered an elegant, streamlined neoclassicism: Greek-key motifs, tapered forms. Primarily metalwork, sometimes with verre églomisé elements.

PEDRO FRIEDEBERG (1936–)—The surrealist prankster of the period. His work is often at auction and is handled by many galleries around the world. www.pedrofiedeberg.com

DIEGO MATTHAI (1945–)—Architect and designer who often incorporated modern materials such as chrome into vernacular Mexican forms. www.matthai.net

PEPE MENDOZA (dates unknown)—Information about this designer is sketchy. Supposedly he ran a foundry in Mexico that made decorative hardware. His work is characterized by a cloisonné-type technique, as well as “elaborate metalwork and exhuberant forms,” says Alexander Heminway of the auction house Phillips de Pury. He may have produced hardware for California modernist designers Jerome and Evelyn Ackerman in the 1960s.

ARTURO PANI (1915-81)—The most classical of the lot, he often used luxurious materials such as gilt bronze. Robert Willson, of the L.A. gallery Downtown, says Pani was the go-to decorator for members of Mexico City’s social elite, “like Albert Hadley or someone of that stature in New York.”

CLARA PORSET (1895-1981)—As important as Barragán, says Kilner, though “it’s incredibly rare to come across furniture of hers.” Scholar Ana Elena Mallet says Porset did a very limited number of pieces, and they were largely unappreciated in Mexico, despite her great international acclaim at the time (her furniture for Acapulco’s Pierre Marqués hotel was given away when the building was remodeled). Known for channeling Mexican folk culture into modern forms, “she did what Robsjohn-Gibbings did with classical Greek furniture, but with Mayan pieces,” says Willson.

DON SHOEMAKER (1917-1990)—An American living in Michoacán in the 1960s, he made organic modern furniture from native Mexican woods like cocobolo, caoba, pine, and tropical walnut.

WILLIAM SPRATLING (1900-67)—A famed silversmith and another American ex-pat—he moved to the city of Taxco in 1929. His jewelry, inspired by pre-Columbian forms, is avidly collected. Trained as an architect, Spratling designed some furniture based on Mesoamerican imagery, but examples are extremely rare.

MICHAEL VAN BEUREN (1911-2005)—Mallet calls him “the first industrial designer for the Mexican middle class.” This former Bauhaus student manufactured furniture in Mexico under the “Muebles van Beuren” and “Domus” trademarks. A chaise longue he designed with Klaus Grabe and Morely Webb won first prize in the 1941 Museum of Modern Art competition “Organic Design in Home Furnishings” (which featured some of the first bent-plywood designs by Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen). The chaise was produced for Bloomingdale’s and sold for $69.98.

PEDRO RAMÍREZ VÁZQUEZ (1919–) —A well-known architect who has designed a large number of religious and government structures in Mexico City. His furniture designs appear infrequently in galleries and at auction. His signature furniture piece—the 1964 “Equipal” chair—is generally priced in the range of $10,000.
owner Robert Willson, is scale: “They’re beefed up. I’d call them French on steroids.”

The more rigorously modern designers included Barragán and Porset, as well as William Spratling and van Beuren and architects like Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, Diego Matthai (both still working today), and Francisco Artigas. Alexander Heminway, Phillips de Pury’s New York director of design, says the appeal of this furniture lies in “its sturdiness and warmth of materials.” People like Barragán, he explains, were “absorbing the modernist ideas but melding them with the craft traditions of Mexico. It’s very human, local, and loyal to Mexican tradition.” Many pieces are actually modernist reinterpretations of centuries-old designs, made in villages but ubiquitous in households in every stratum in Mexican society. One example is Pedro Ramírez Vázquez’s 1964 “Equipal” chair, in which a frame of cross-hatched steel rods and a finished leather cushion echo a furniture form—a pigskin seat atop a frame made of reeds or cactus fibers—that dates from pre-Columbian times.

Then there are idiosyncratic figures like Italian-born Pedro Friedeberg (his iconic “Hand” chair defies categorization) and the American expat Don Shoemaker (whose quirky designs celebrate indigenous woods like cocobolo and resemble both Californian Studio design and Brazilian modernist work). Indeed, the far-flung origins of many of these practitioners prompts an interesting question: Can this furniture really be called Mexican? Dealers such as Kilner believe so: “Much of it was a response to Mexico’s visual identity. The designers were responding to something fundamentally Mexican.”

What that “something” is can probably only be felt rather than described. As a nation with a richer and stranger history than most others in the world—so much beauty, so much cruelty; so much joy and so much sorrow—Mexico will always be an enigma, and it should be no surprise that the land would develop a singular, perplexing, and alluring language of design.

Jorge Arango is a design writer, editor, and stylist from New York. He is the co-author of Harlem Style (2002) and Ex Arte (2009).
Easel Ford’s traditionally styled stately home near Detroit harbors a surprising quintet of gemlike modernist spaces by WALTER DORWIN TEAGUE

AT FIRST SIGHT, the house of Edsel Ford—son and only child of automaking giant Henry—and his wife, Eleanor, seems like the archetypal dwelling of an early-twentieth-century captain of industry. Located in the tony Detroit suburb of Grosse Pointe Shores and designed by Albert Kahn, an architect best remembered for his pioneering open-plan factories and office towers, the house, completed in 1929 and now a museum, is an elegant rendition of Old World style. The exterior, with its cradelled sandstone walls and shingled limestone roof, draws its inspiration from homes in the Cotswold region of England. The theme continues inside: on the first floor an English staircase from the 1600s greets guests in the entrance hall, and most of the public rooms are decorated with elaborate ceiling moldings, and fitted with antique wood paneling and furnishings. A magazine of the day described the spaces as a “pageant of English history.”

But there is one room on the first floor that often gives visitors a start: the so-called “Modern Room.” Far from antique paneling, the space is clad in bubinga and oak veneers, squares of taupe-colored leather, and peach-tinted mirrored glass. It is one of a clutch of rooms—including two bedrooms, a study, and a bathroom for his sons—that Ford commissioned from Walter Dorwin Teague in the mid-1930s.

Teague, along with Donald Deskey and Henry Dreyfuss, was one of the most prestigious industrial designers of America’s “Machine Age”—the term for the era when the streamlined art deco look took root in the United States. Teague came from Indiana to New York to study art, and became a prominent graphic designer in the advertising industry, but a trip to Europe in 1926 sparked his interest in modernism. A recommendation from Richard F. Bach at the Metropolitan Museum of Art brought Teague to the attention of the Eastman Kodak Company, where Teague began his industrial design career, creating cameras as well as exhibition spaces.

Teague’s work for Kodak brought him to the attention of executives at the Ford Motor Company—and Edsel Ford, who had an artistic and design-friendly bent and was an enthusiastic fan. As former Ford House vice president Judith Dressel noted in an essay for the Detroit Area Art Deco Society’s newsletter, “Throughout the 1930s, Edsel Ford retained Walter Dorwin Teague to design Ford Motor Company’s pavilions and new-product exhibits at world’s fairs, auto shows and dealer showrooms.” A major Teague project for Ford was to

While the architecture and décor of the Ford house predominately take their cues from Olde English aesthetics seen here in the façade (top left) and the baronial gallery, with its elaborate vaulted ceiling (top right), one public space, the so-called Modern Room (opposite page), designed by Walter Dorwin Teague, offers a vivid, forward-looking counterpoint that testifies to Edsel Ford’s appreciation for the new.
Teague designed a bedroom for the Ford's eldest child, Henry II, that is sleek, bright, elegant, and efficiently organized. The suite included a tidy, tiled bathroom that would not be out of place in a contemporary house.

craft the interior—everything from choosing wall colors to designing attendants' uniforms—in the company's dramatic, Kahn-designed showcase building at the 1933-1934 Chicago Century of Progress exposition.

At work and at home, Edsel Ford embraced the modern spirit. He spearheaded the production of the 1936 Lincoln Zephyr, the first successful aerodynamically streamlined American car. The redesigned rooms at Ford House echo Teague's work at the Chicago fair: smooth wall surfaces, inset wall-mounted mirrors, and low built-in furniture that reinforce the horizontal line. Rooms feature distinctive copper, bronze, or brass trim. In the Modern Room, lighting is provided by concealed overhead cove lights, custom bronze sconces, and floor lamps with tubular glass edging.

Teague included a record player housed within a built-in cabinet, a radio in a coffee table, and a speaker reminiscent of a taillight in the fireplace wall. A custom Steinway piano provided another musical entertainment alternative. With sleek lines uninterrupted by ornament, the grand piano and matching bench—which Steinway vowed never to replicate—are finished in bubinga veneer with the grain applied horizontally, echoing the fireplace wall. Upstairs, Teague designed copper cove lighting fixtures for the bedroom and adjoining study shared by the Fords' younger sons, Benson and William Clay Ford. (The Fords' only daughter, Josephine, preferred to deco-
rate her bedroom with chintz curtains and period English and French antiques.) In the boys’ rooms, the furnishings are low and sleek, and, like the wainscoting, are made with horizontal wood veneer. The wall-to-wall carpeting and upholstery are in soothing earth tones. Art—prints by the expressionist painter Lyonel Feininger, a Waylande Gregory terra-cotta horse head, and Franz Hagenauer statues—enliven the décor while referencing Ford family pastimes, including sailing, horseback riding, and skiing.

Across the hallway, in the bedroom created for the eldest child, Henry Ford II, a work by the famed ceramist Maija Grotell rests on a built-in record player trimmed in oak and curly maple. Along with table lamps, sconces, and fixed reading lights, Teague designed an overhead brass lighting channel that bisects the room. It recalls lighting that Le Corbusier employed in his design for the 1929 Villa Savoye, a residential masterwork in the Paris suburbs. A final, elegant Teague touch is the gray glass-walled bathroom with black floor tiles, which adjoins the room. For sanitary fixtures, Teague used designs from Crane’s “Neuvogue” line by Henry Dreyfuss and Roy Zinkil. A then state-of-the-art gas-fired built-in space heater completes the tableau of what “modern” was in the 1930s.

Eldsel was proud of the modernist spaces he commissioned. A photograph shows him leaning against the Modern Room fireplace wall, enjoying a moment during Josephine’s wedding reception on January 2, 1943. Tragically, Eldsel Ford died later that year. In 1976, after witnessing real estate developers demolish Anna Dodge’s nearby mansion, “Rose Terrace,” to make way for the precursors of today’s McMansions, Eleanor Ford made provisions in her will for the preservation of their family home and these rooms. Now all are invited to share in the intriguing mix of the mannered and the modern at the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House.

Teague chose a slightly darker, earthier color palette for the Ford boys’ combination study and sitting room, and for the bedroom shared by the youngest lads, Benson and William Clay Ford. Notably, the clean-lined, built-in furnishings mitigate against male children’s tendency to create clutter.
GLASS CEILING BROKEN

Women were long discouraged from entering the world of artful glassmaking. Profiles of three who have changed that state of affairs.

By Paul O'Donnell
Right: Ritsue Mishima poses with her 2007 design Virus at the San Francisco gallery Hedge.

Below: Two more iterations of Mishima designs from 2007: Galassia, left, and Cellula coppa, right.


THE WORLD OF ART AND DESIGN is prone to occasional bouts of “glass madness”—the term New York gallery owner Douglas Heller uses to describe the periodic outbursts of aesthetic enthusiasm that give rise to stylistic fads (such as the early-eighteenth-century craze for English cameo glass) and mint the careers of stars such as René Lalique and Louis Comfort Tiffany. With glass appearing in the work of artists such as Jeff Koons and Kiki Smith at one end of the aesthetic spectrum and, at the other, the ubiquitous sight of kitchen islands lit by Venetian glass pendants, the signs are that glass enthusiasm has reached yet another historic highpoint.

The work of the three glass artists profiled here embodies many reasons for the trend. The artists are all motivated by blown glass's transformative spontaneity; they work at the crux of art, design, and craft; and they are women. This last point is not an idle one. As members of the Studio Glass movement, female glassblowers have finally reached parity in what one insider calls “the last bastion of testosterone in the arts.”

RITSUE MISHIMA

Until she walked onto a factory floor on the island of Murano, the center of Venetian glassmaking, 13 years ago, RITSUE MISHIMA had never seen glass blown before. Now supremely skilled and sensitive to the material, Mishima and her work represent the most rarefied of the many developments in the world of glassmaking over the last 30 years: the idea that glass can be used to create pure sculpture.

Born in Kyoto, Mishima was a freelance stylist who worked on advertising photo shoots and floral installations when she came to Italy to live with her then husband. When a friend who had started working with glass invited Mishima to Murano, her first impulse was to ask the Murano masters to make her a vase she could use for flowers. She saw glass as a medium for making only useful things. But as she returned again and again...
SONJA BLOMDAHL
gave up her “hot shop”—a
glassmaker’s atelier with a furnace—in Seattle
last year after more than a quarter-century of
keeping her fire stoked days, nights, and week­
ends. In the 1970s, when the Studio Glass move­
ment was “small, intense, and new,” Blomdahl
says, by definition artists had to have their own
places. But in Seattle these days, she jokes,
“there’s a Starbucks, a yogurt shop, and a hot
shop on every corner,” allowing her to rent fur­
nace time.

Blomdahl can also rely on rented furnace
time because she is turning her own production
toward rondels—relatively easy-to-make discs
of glass that go into room dividers, screens, and
architectural elements—in lieu of the symmetri­
cal containers that have always been her trade­
mark. “Vessels were my preferred form since my
early days,” she says, when she left her native
Massachusetts to be a teaching assistant at Pil­
chuck Glass School, founded in the woods north
of Seattle by one of the original evangelists of
Studio Glass, Dale Chihuly. “People were pushing
glass in a lot of different directions—what I call
rolling it in the dirt. I kept making vessels.” Mixing
disciplined lines with seductive color, Biomdahl's
vases and bowls seem an attempt to render the
art-versus-craft debate moot with sheer beauty.

Because of her name, and an early stint at
Sweden’s famed glass firm Orrefors, critics often
describe the purity of her shapes in terms of
Scandinavian design. But, says Blomdahl a little
wearily, “if my name wasn’t Scandinavian, my
work wouldn’t get labeled that way.” Indeed, the
incalmo technique that most people associate
with her is a Venetian process she learned at Pil­
chuck from the Italian master glassblower Chec­
co Ongaro. Characterized by a transparent band
between layers of colored glass, incalmo changes
glass’s optical effects and provides insight into
the crafting of the object.

Recognizing that she’s a pioneer by virtue
of her gender and her long history in the field,
Blomdahl sees her new architectural pieces as a
way to expand what she calls “my little place in
the world. I want the opportunity to make a new
statement, and new kind of impact.”
A group of *incalmo* vessels by Blomdahl made in 2006.

Opposite page: A tripartite window made of blown glass rondels—the center panel is eight feet tall; the side panels are six feet tall—created in 2007 by Blomdahl and Dick Weiss for a private house in San Francisco.
After working in Frank Gehry’s office in Los Angeles for two years, ALISON BERGER had an epiphany. “I asked myself, ‘How many women architects can I think of?’” she recalls. “Not many, was the answer. I realized it would be hard to really distinguish myself in the field.”

Berger had been blowing glass since she was a teenager in Dallas, and had studied with Dale Chihuly while getting her architecture degree at the Rhode Island School of Design. Glass gave her an alternative vocabulary; her knowledge of design history gave her a subject. “My influences came from the world of industrial design,” Berger says—not only the work of architect-designers like Gio Ponti and Charles Eames, but the anonymous authors of everyday items like inkwells and magnifying lenses.

Berger’s fascination has translated into one-off pieces that suggest both decanters from a
gentleman’s club and antique laboratory beakers. She has created lighting and tabletop designs for home décor purveyors like Holly Hunt and Hermès that balance nostalgia with clean modernity, “I take artifacts and strip them of their decorative connotation,” she says, “It’s reinterpretation without being a reproduction.”

As an architect, Berger saw every building as a vessel for light. She approaches her glasswares (which she hands off to a crew for production) in a similar way—as small structures. “I start with a planned section and an elevation,” she says, but soon the molten glass takes over. “Things happen that far exceed expectation. You get distracted, or you push the material more than you intended. And that’s when you get a shape you could never have imagined.”

Above: Berger’s *Amber Tree Lights* line was designed in 2005.

Right: A fixture within a fixture, Berger created her *Bell Light* in 2004.
A little-heralded house in Westchester County, New York, holds a distinguished place in the history of modern American architecture.

BEFORE PHILIP JOHNSON’S famed Glass House of 1949, there was the Booth House. His first completed commission, Johnson built this house in 1946 in the village of Bedford, New York, for a young advertising executive and his wife, who were interested in a home from which to commute to Manhattan. More importantly, they wanted a residence both practical and yet open to the rustic beauty of the surrounding forest.

The Booth House proved to be an archetype for the principles that would later be at work in the Glass House. The earlier house already demonstrates Johnson’s talent for creating a relationship between a structure and the natural environment. The architect’s design subtly speaks of a poetic sensitivity evident in the house’s material precision and articulated simplicity. Elements such as the dominating island fireplace...
surrounded by a glazed enclosure are also already in place.

Unlike the Glass House, where Johnson shaped the landscape with carefully created vistas, the Booth House was set within an existing topography. Sited on the graded crest of a wooded slope, it takes full advantage of the towering trees that enclose the house. Nature enters into the house as an almost physical presence. While the Glass House has a temple-like quality, the Booth House strives to be only a comforting shelter for daily family life—a fact valued by the late architect and pioneering architectural photographer Robert Damora and his widow, architect Sirkka Damora, who acquired the house in 1955 and lived there appreciatively for 55 years.

Johnson conceived a simple plan for his first commission. The intent was to provide a sophisticated modern habitation at minimal cost. The design echoes the concept of a basic rectangular project with extensive fenestration that Johnson laid out in his article “As Simple as That,” in the July 1945 edition of Ladies’ Home Journal. Johnson’s original plan for the Booth House included a podium of gray block, which would create a level building platform on a slope that dropped ten feet across the diagonal. The house itself would sit at the rear edge of this podium, while a fourteen-square-foot studio building was to sit apart at the downhill corner of the podium. (In fact, neither the podium nor the studio
was ever constructed due to budget constraints. The site was prepared by simply grading the earth. Damora eventually added a separate studio space at the top of the driveway for his photographic work, and created a windowed work space in the partial basement as an archival study.)

Saying that this first house was his own "de Mandrot house" (invoking Le Corbusier's 1932 Maison de Mandrot in Le Pradet, France), Johnson provided for two bedrooms accessible by an open corridor, separated from the main living area by the kitchen. The living area, in turn, is set off by the large masonry fireplace. The house is reached by an uphill gravel road, which calls attention to the subtle features of the house as one approaches it from below, heightening the awareness of the landscape as it varies with the seasons.

As in the Glass House, the dominant feature of the interior is the way the solidity of the brick fireplace is countered by the immateriality of the glass walls—in this case twenty-eight feet of floor to ceiling glass that encloses most of the living space. The windows make it possible, as Sirkka Damora says, to sit mesmerized on a cold winter's night by a warm fire in the expansive brick hearth while watching the snowflakes drift through the trees. This experience is evocative of a remark Johnson made about the Glass House: [continued on page 140]
MAN OF VISION

A tribute to the art and architecture of Robert Damora

By JOANNA LEHAN

"IT HIT ME LIKE A TON OF BRICKS." That is a funny way to describe one's response to an architectural exhibition, but that unintentional pun is how Robert Damora often spoke of his visceral response to Philip Johnson's "Modern Architecture: An International Exhibition" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Damora was a twenty-year-old photographic assistant, and a night student at the New York University School of Architecture, when he visited that watershed 1932 exhibition, which inaugurated MoMA's Department of Architecture. Seven years later he was back, shooting MoMA's newly built West 53rd Street icon of modernism.
Damora created a lush, complex composition of diagonals, shadows, and flora in this 1962 image of a house of his own design, built on Cape Cod.

for The Architectural Forum, the leading journal of the day. Damora was well on his way to becoming the professional Walter Gropius hailed as "the best photographer of architecture in this country."

Damora hit his stride in that golden post-war moment when both modern architecture and the notion of photography as a true art form were at last ensconced in the American cultural canon. This historic conjunction provided fertile ground for architectural photography—previously considered by those in and out of the field as a matter of documentation—to rise to the level of art. Names such as Ezra Stoller and Julius Shulman might become better known, but Damora was deeply admired by peers such as Balthazar Korab—architect Eero Saarinen's lensman of choice—who called him "the dean of American architectural photography."

Graduating from Yale's architectural school in 1953, Damora emerged with a fervent belief in the possibilities of modern architecture. During the 1950s he headed a project for Universal Atlas Cements (part of U.S. Steel) called "Seeds for Architecture," which commissioned such top modernists as Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and Louis Kahn to design exploratory projects using affordable concrete. Damora's own built projects reflected democratic ideals, notably his modular Cape House, Architectural Record's "House of the Year" of 1962, a model home constructed from six pre-fabricated mass-produced components, which could be erected in two days in a variety of forms.

But Damora's most enduring legacy will surely be the work he undertook with his 8-x-10-inch view camera. Familiarity with modern architecture's tenets convinced Damora that a revolutionary type of structure required new approaches to photographic representation. "Modern architecture is concerned with the volume of buildings rather than the façade that captivated Renaissance architecture," he once said. He strove to develop what he called "volumetric" photography, and achieved that goal with technical virtuosity as well as a natural talent for the composition of images.

We can see the radical departure Damora made from static façade photography in a 1948 photograph he made of Marcel Breuer's house in New Canaan, Connecticut. Though the house is relatively small in the frame, the image possesses a sense of expansive space thanks to a composition that moves us through a foreground of dark thicket to the bright, cleared rise on which the house perches. The effect is almost anthropological—as if Damora crept up upon this exotic new breed of dwelling, with its dramatic cantilevered deck, while exploring the pastoral New England woods.

Damora's 1941 photograph of Eliel and Eero Saarinen's Kleinhans Music Hall in Buffalo is another example of his precise and theatrical compositional sense. Two nuns traverse the center of the frame, the twin black columns of their habits echoed in the vertical panels on the Saarinen's curvilinear structure, as well as in the dark tree trunks in the surrounding Frederick Law Olmsted-designed park. Though the visual harmony and evocations of austerity and spirituality seem coincidental, Damora had a clear sense of purpose (not to mention perseverance) when creating this image. The reflecting pool was drained when he arrived, and he had it filled. The nuns, who happened to be nearby, were recruited to stroll the walkway many times before Damora took a shot in which their forms just clear the diagonal shadow in the right corner of the frame.

Robert Damora died last year at the age of 97, having recently enjoyed the launch of a Yale School of Architecture retrospective exhibition, "Robert Damora: 70 Years of Total Architecture." They were indeed 70 years well spent, with consuming twin passions for architecture and photography, and a singular optimism in their potential to elevate the human spirit.

[For more information on Robert Damora and the Booth House, go to www.robertdamora.com]
All but forgotten today, designer Dan Cooper was one of the most suave tastemakers in mid-century America.

SMOOTH OPERATOR

Dan Cooper in 1950

A “Butterfly” table from the PAKTO line of “demountable,” or ready-to-assemble, furnishings that Cooper and his studio began designing in 1942. The pieces packed flat for shipping, and four rooms of furniture could fit in a six-by-six-foot container. The furniture, manufactured by Drexel Furniture Company and sold at Bloomingdale’s and Abraham & Straus, was made of oak plywood veneered with limed oak. The table was included in a MoMA exhibition, “Useful Objects in Wartime: Fifth Annual Exhibition of Useful Objects under $10.00.” The basic “Butterfly” table sold for $7.50.

By WILLIAM L. HAMILTON
HE CASE OF DAN COOPER—you've heard of him?—is a strange one, more like a Ross Macdonald novel than the story of a signal figure in modern design history.

Let's start at the end: A big red-haired man, well-dressed to the point that you could describe him as dapper, probably smoking a cigarette, collapses on a Manhattan sidewalk in March of 1965 and dies of an aneurysm as he is being admitted to St. Luke's Hospital. He's buried in a family plot in Freedom, New Hampshire, a town near the Maine border that had 1,434 residents by the year 2008. At the time of his death, The New York Times—it turns out the man used to be important—gives him a column on the obituary page: "Dan Cooper Dead, Textile Designer." Though the newspaper calls him a "leading decorator," the Times left out a few facts.

The 1948 W. T. Grant house in Greenwich, Connecticut, designed by architect Edward Durell Stone, affords a look at Cooper's post-war high-end residential interior design work. At the same time, though, he commissioned affordable Swedish Modern furnishings to display in his showroom, making him a key figure in introducing America to mid-century Scandinavian design. The fabric at right is an example of Cooper's "Spectrum" pattern.
Left: the PAKTO “Butterfly” table disassembled.

Center: pages from the catalogue to the 1949 MoMA show “Modern Art in Your Life” display the “Butterfly” table alongside art and other furniture embracing organic forms, including a Charles Eames chair and Jean Arp and Alexander Calder artwork.

Below: an armchair from the ready-to-assemble PATKO collection. The fabric on the chair is Cooper’s “Daisies” pattern.

During his forty-one-year career as a designer, Cooper, who established his own firm in 1924, was included in three Museum of Modern Art exhibitions, for furniture and textiles, his work shown alongside that of contemporaries like Charles Eames and Isamu Noguchi, Anni Albers and Louise Bourgeois. His private clients included Nelson Rockefeller, whose New York offices he designed, and the Shah of Iran, who flew him to Tehran to present his plans for a new embassy in Washington—a commission for which he beat out the venerable Paris firm Maison Jansen. He collaborated with the vanguard of modernist architects in America. He was involved with Edward Durell Stone on three important commissions, including the A. Conger Goodyear house in Old Westbury, NY. (Goodyear was president and a founder of the Museum of Modern Art.) Cooper worked with George Nelson on the Manhattan town house of Sherman Fairchild, an inventor and aircraft mogul who was a co-founder of Pan American and American Airlines. The structure, a “machine for living”—in Le Corbusier’s famous phrase—had no streetside windows, and its severity so startled the city that Fortune magazine put it on its cover.

In his showrooms, Cooper introduced New York to the textiles of Britain’s short-lived Omega Workshops and to Scandinavian design. He gave a young Jens Risom, the Danish-born designer, his first job in America. During the war, Cooper promoted and popularized the then novel concepts of ready-to-assemble furniture and prefabricated housing, working on contract with the government. His designs were sold at Bloomingdale’s and Georg Jensen, and by major department stores in Los Angeles, Dallas, and Atlanta. Dan Cooper fabrics eventually draped the country, from turnpike restaurants to corporate headquarters, colleges, libraries, railroads, steamships, and airplanes. Always signed “Dan Cooper” in the selvage, the bold prints and textured weaves in stripes and plaids were the look of post-war America on the move. In an interview, he called the style “carpet-slipper modern,” conjoining—as did Russel and Mary Wright in the 1930s—European modernism with colonial comfort.

By 1950, Cooper’s multi-faceted firm occupied the penthouse of the RCA Building in Rockefeller Center. Publications such as Vogue, Glamour, and Women’s Wear Daily showcased his brief foray into fashion. ABC hung 180 yards of “Rosemont,”
a gold cotton and jute Cooper fabric, as the studio backdrop for the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debate.

Fame, however, fades more quickly than fabric. By 1965, buried in Freedom, Cooper was already unknown. Edward Durell Stone's 1962 autobiography makes no mention of him. In 1989, Diane Montenegro, a master of science candidate in textiles, fashion merchandising, and design at the University of Rhode Island, was shown several of Cooper's fabrics and decided to pursue him. "Nobody had ever heard of him," she said in a recent conversation. "It was like bringing back a ghost."

Montenegro contacted Cooper's surviving sister, Mary Frances Doyle, who was living in Effingham Falls, New Hampshire, in an early-nineteenth-century house filled with her brother's modern designs. Doyle ran Cooper's business for a time after From 1950 to 1954, Cooper's showroom was located in the penthouse of the RCA Building in Rockefeller Center. The space was set up to entertain magazine editors, and could accommodate fashion photo shoots—testimony to Cooper's media savvy. The textile at right is his "Dew" pattern, one of the four fabrics included in a Museum of the City of New York exhibition.
Above: Cooper's office in his showroom on East 70th Street, located in a five-story, 18-room mansion he bought from the Archdiocese of New York in 1944 for $37,000. Cooper sold the building in 1949.

Below: Cooper's "Utopia" pattern commemorates the "Pint House," a modular one-room housing experiment on which he collaborated with Edward Durell Stone in 1940. The fabric depicts Cooper's idea of the American dream: that every family could possess their own clean, efficient, and modern (if small) house.

for a time after his death, closing it nine years later. She had kept everything—textile and wallpaper samples, furniture, and annual albums of designs and news clippings—in oversized books covered in Cooper's fabrics. Montenegro organized the materials and eventually arranged for the archive's deposit at the American Textile History Museum in Lowell, Mass. Her thesis was presented in 2000.

WHO WAS DAN COOPER? It depends on who you ask.

"Not a friendly guy," Jens Risom said recently. "A slightly unusual character who thought of himself as an outstanding artist and designer." Risom, who worked for Cooper for three years designing fabrics and furniture, explained: "He was opinionated and jealous. There was a constant play of 'Is this my design or yours?'"

In fact, Cooper put his own name on everything his showroom produced, and took the credit too, making attributions difficult—part of the problem of appraising Cooper's contribution to American design. For example, Risom executed most of the furniture for the 1940 "House of Ideas," an experimental two-story model home designed by Edward Durell Stone and Cooper for Collier's magazine and built on a terrace at Rockefeller Center. Cooper, a tireless self-promoter—he had two publicists—walked away with the accolades.

Montenegro says she believes Cooper's unorthodox practices, which may have kept him out of the critical canon of
twenty-first-century designers, may ultimately be considered his true significance: his originality as a marketer and his entrepreneurial eye. She compared him to branding standard-bearers of today such as Ralph Lauren and Martha Stewart.

Cooper licensed and sold designs, though rarely manufacturing them, and demanded royalties on the use of his name. His designers, like Risom, were salaried employees who received no extra remuneration. Cooper anticipated several trends, including the post-war market for design that was affordable, attractive, and attuned to a way of life being invented by young middle-class families. And he brought previously exclusive interior decoration to the average homemaker’s door, selling good taste directly to the public as though it were a set of encyclopedias. A successful designer “must study the front page and the economic page,” Cooper told an interviewer in 1961.

In a November 2009 exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York, “The Future at Home: American Furniture, 1940-1955,” Cooper’s work made a modest appearance. In addition to four fabrics, a toy-like “Butterfly” table from his PAKTO line of “demountable,” or ready-to-assemble, furniture quietly took its place among pieces by masters of mid-century modern design, like the proverbial mouse who lives in a mansion. Perhaps it won’t disappear back into the woodwork.

Above: a 1942 publicity photo for the PAKTO furniture collection. The drapery fabric is “Springfever,” one of Cooper’s most popular patterns.

Right: Cooper created the “Metropole” textile pattern, right, as a tribute to corporate America. Large companies were among his chief clients—Alfred P. Sloan of GM commissioned Cooper to decorate the reception room at the GM Futurama exhibit at the 1939 World’s Fair, for example—and he frequently crafted custom fabrics that reflected a firm’s desired public image. When used for curtains or backdrops in reception areas, boardrooms, corporate dining rooms, and such spaces, Cooper’s textiles became a forceful branding element.
SUSPENSION BRIDGE

POST-WAR GENOA'S PAST AND FUTURE WERE PROFOUNDLY VITALIZED BY THE VISIONARY WORK OF ARCHITECT FRANCO ALBINI

By KAY BEA JONES PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN M. HALL
Albini's renovation of the baroque Palazzo Rosso was achieved with means both simple—wall-to-wall carpet, slender lighting armatures—and stirring, such as the suspended spiral staircase that connects all the building's levels.
architect Franco Albini designed furniture, museums, gallery exhibitions, public housing, and urban master plans primarily in Italy during the period that stretched from the Fascist era to the post-war democracy. He was prolific among fellow Milanese progressives. He was a contemporary of other eminent architects such as Gio Ponti, Giuseppe Terragni, and Ernesto Nathan Rogers, and like them helped define the character of modern Italian cities. But Albini’s work stands out—not only for his attention to craft and his sensitivity to local contexts, but more so for his experimental use of glass and steel, employed in commissions that revitalized ancient structures and historic museums. Albini achieved a profound integration of modernity and tradition, with stunningly advanced insertions into painted baroque palaces and dense, stone-clad urban centers. Nowhere was Albini’s work more effective than in Genoa.

As an important port city, Genoa had suffered heavy damage in World War II. Though poised to reinvigorate their country’s cities, Albini and his colleagues met resistance after the conflict. Some of the best examples of new architecture had been affiliated with Fascism, and the modern style was abruptly out of favor. Modernists like Albini—who believed in clean, pure, minimalist form—faced opposition on two fronts: one from adherents of abstract “organic” design; the other from emerging neo-historic movements. Fortunately, Caterina Marcenaro, an art collector and museum curator who oversaw the artistic patrimony of the city of Genoa, shared Albini’s vision. Familiar with his exhibition designs, Marcenaro saw him as the perfect designer to rejuvenate dusty collections and present them to modern audiences. In 1949, she offered Albini his first major museum commission: to redesign the interior of the Palazzo Bianco, an assignment that altered Italian museum design for the rest of the century.

Albini’s keynote was transparency. In early
In the Museum of Sant'Agostino, Albini and his partner, Franca Heig, created a suspended plaster vaulted ceiling to display remnants of frescoes.
Above: in the Sant'Agostino, thick steel beams—symbols of the modern world's graver zeitgeist—stand in contrast to spiritual artwork and artifacts.

Top right and below: two views of ancient relics in the circular stone-clad chambers of the underground Treasure Rooms of the San Lorenzo Museum.

work on domestic and commercial interiors he perfected techniques for crafting suspended shelving and exhibition armatures, as well as expressing a sense of lightness with translucent curtains, reflective surfaces, glass furniture, and bamboo chairs. He loved to dangle forms in open space. In the Palazzo Bianco, Albini removed paintings from monumental frames, and built stairs that hovered over the ground. He used tensile cables and planes of glass to let in daylight, impart a sense of weightlessness, and open up views.

Three subsequent projects in Genoa during the 1950s—a new museum, a public office building, and another baroque palazzo gallery interior—reveal Albini at his most clever, deliberate, and versatile. Following the success of his work on the Palazzo Bianco, Marcenaro commissioned Albini to devise accommodations for the small but precious collection of artifacts of the Cathedral of San Lorenzo. The church's "Treasure Rooms" would hold ancient, delicate relics—including early-Christian sacerdotal vestments and an ark that supposedly holds the ashes of John the Baptist—that demanded a unique space with strictly devised atmospheric conditions. Albini, inspired by the treasure rooms of Atreus in Mycenae, Greece, housed the collection in four underground chambers. The rooms, which have patterned stone paving and cast concrete ceilings made of triangular forms, seem suspended in time—honoring both the past and the present.

Then, located above Genoa's grand Strada Nuova, an inspired instance of Renaissance urban design, sit Albini's new municipal offices. In addition to the town hall, the baroque Palazzo Doria Tursi, Albini stacked ten stories of terraced offices clad in local stone. Each level includes clerestory lighting, dehneated overhangs, and views of the Mediterranean port. It's debatable which aspect of the building is Albini's finest achievement. On the one hand, he ensured that the new structure's impact on the ambience of the historic city center was slight. On the other, the building includes flat grass-covered rooftops that serve as gardens—green architecture a half-century before its time.

In 1952, he began a seven-year interior renovation of the Palazzo Rosso—the building's roof needed replacement, but otherwise the project was similar to the one he undertook on the Palazzo Bianco. A chief aspect of Albini's attempt to modernize the historic art collections of noble Genoese families was to focus light and attention on the artifacts instead of on period furniture and decoration. Yet the Palazzo Rosso's historic frescoes also deserved recognition, and Albini and his partner, Franca Helg, sought ways to reduce the impact of their
Three views of Albini’s addition to Genoa’s city hall show off the green roofs—decades ahead of their time—and the pure lines of the building’s stone staircase.

renovations. Again, they used minimal hardware and suspended glass panels to enhance the flow of daylight while protecting the collection from the elements. Even better, the design team took the paintings with their massive frames, and installed them on pivot mounts with handles, allowing visitors to position them for ideal viewing light. Albini’s boldest intervention was his solution to the problem of the palazzo’s varied floor heights: a suspended spiral stair that is an elegant example of precision and craft.

A few years after completing the Palazzo Rosso, Marcenaro gave Albini his largest museum commission in Genoa: the Museum of Sant’Agostino. The medieval church that stood on the site was devastated by Allied bombing. Now the location would become a museum for displaying fragmentary architectural artifacts, including, statuary, reliefs, and frescoes, from Sant’Agostino and other churches in Genoa that had been destroyed. The collection, consisting largely of carved stone, allowed for daylight to flood the interior. Albini stacked three glass-clad levels, tracing the footprint of original Sant’Agostino church. At this point in his career, however, Albini’s architectural philosophy had changed. He used enormous steel beams to cross long spans, an allusion to the gravity of the modern condition. Inside Sant’Agostino, Albini employed steel in a white marble ramp-stair and in structural elements used to suspend—to striking effect—antique frescoes within a modern equivalent of their original vaulted architecture. The museum was not completed until 1979, two years after Albini’s death.

Albini’s Genoese capolavoro—Italian for “masterpiece”—is the small residence tucked under the Palazzo Rosso’s new roof, commissioned by Marcenaro. Very recently restored and opened to the public, the apartment has few doors, allowing a flow between private areas, workspace, and library, and views from attic windows that look over the narrow carrughi, the characteristic medieval alleyways of Genoa. Masterpieces in her prized collection of artworks were brilliantly installed. Albini’s furniture and lighting designs—bookshelves on tapered columns and bamboo chairs—completed the atmosphere by softening the typically hard lines of modern domestic architecture. Gio Ponti published an article on the curator’s apartment, discreetly calling it “the house of an art lover,” in his magazine Domus in 1955, and stating: “This interior by Albini represents the perfect house, one in which he finds his motive for mixing the ancient and the modern, and that tendency, widespread among our best architects, has come to define the Italian character.” Perhaps there is no finer, nor more economical, tribute to Albini’s work.
The war put these efforts on hold, but following the peace there was an explosion of building in the United States. Many forward-thinking architects suddenly found the opportunity to realize long-dreamed of structural concepts. The Booth House attempts to do just that. It is built of economical materials such as concrete block and plate glass. Like the early "Case Study" houses in Los Angeles, the Booth House investigated the use of unconventional construction techniques to achieve affordability. Interestingly, these explorations predate Frank Lloyd Wright's 1947 master plan for a community in Pleasantville, New York, that introduced his Usonian concept to the Northeast.

Evocative of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House of 1951, the Booth House also speaks of a distilled architectural purity that addresses a simplified and disciplined understanding of dwelling. As Sirkka Damora puts it, "The Mies hallmark of reductive rectilinear design—with minimal interruption of the flow of space within a building and out to the exterior landscape—was clearly evident in Johnson's architecture of the period."

The Booth House proved to be a striking harbinger of the outpouring of mid-century modernist houses created by the Bauhaus-inspired "Harvard Five" (Marcel Breuer, Eliot Noyes, Landis Gores, John Johansen, and Philip Johnson), and other collaborators such as Victor Christ-Janer, in and around New Canaan, Connecticut, to which Bedford is adjacent. Well over 100 modern houses were constructed from 1947 through the 1970s, and given its proximity to the media capital of New York, the area became a backdrop to sell anything desired or perceived to be "modern." In 1949, for example, an organized single-day tour of seven of the original houses drew 5,000 people.

Interestingly, many of these mid-century modern masterpieces of residential architecture acquired long-term inhabitants early in their existence. For the Damoras, their home was not only a prevailing influence on their private family life, but also a full embodiment of their professional aspirations for what Walter Gropius called "total architecture." When one finds an environment that both soothes the soul and expresses one's deepest convictions about life, there is little motivation to move on. As a result, many of these houses have been away from the public eye for a half-century or more as their owners happily and quietly enjoyed these self-sufficient environments.

But now the original generation of owners has reached advanced years, and a number of these houses resurface to public view as they come on the market. In some regrettable cases, the houses have been bought and then demolished to make way for the larger houses characteristic of a more profiteering era. Yet the Booth House still stands as a jewel from a remarkable period in modern American architecture when design, efficiency, economy, and serenity were understood to be mutually compatible and desirable.
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Baby, Are You for Real?

LOS ANGELES AUCTIONEER PETER LOUGHREY OFFERS A TALE OF AESTHETIC DETECTIVE WORK

Occasionally I am asked by a potential purchaser, “How do you know this is real?” Although I’m tempted to answer with a quip about ontology, I know the question is not about philosophy. It’s really about proof—documented proof—of authenticity. What it comes down to is this: “I prove it and you’ll buy it.”

With modern furniture, such concerns can often be satisfied by simply pointing to a label or showing the purchaser a book that features the design. But fine art is much trickier. Recently, I represented a painting by Keith Haring that had apparently never been published. The seller, who was the original owner, had acquired it directly from the artist, and it had never been exhibited. While it had a bold, confident signature, I knew the painting would have to be authenticated before I could sell it. Fortunately, Haring’s works can be reviewed by the Keith Haring Foundation—the recognized authority on the artist’s work.

Ideally an organization like this has the ability to check its records and supply confirmation by way of the artist’s own notes, photographs, or receipts, and provide a smoking gun, if you will. Absent that gun, its opinion is considered conclusive.

I submitted detailed photographs of the work, but the foundation was reluctant to render an opinion and requested a better image of the signature. Getting a tight close-up of the signature meant removing the piece from the original frame. When I did so, I noticed something I hadn’t seen before: a distinct and clear fingerprint in the signature. It appeared to have been left while the paint was wet. I excitedly informed the foundation, but the people there logically reasoned it could be anyone’s fingerprint—perhaps even the framer’s—and in any case they didn’t have Haring’s fingerprints on file. However, they were intrigued.

Haring, when making his early chalk drawings on subway hoardings, had been arrested several times for vandalism. The foundation contacted the New York Police Department to see if it could access his fingerprints. Amazingly, the NYPD sent digital images of the prints to the foundation the same day. Shortly thereafter, the foundation sent me an email saying it was ready to issue an opinion that the work was authentic.

The opinion itself didn’t change anything about the painting. It simply gave the buyer confidence in its authenticity. Or, to put it another way, an answer to the question “How do I know it’s real?” What Plato would think is another matter.

Peter Loughrey is the co-founder and proprietor of Los Angeles Modern Auctions.
Founded in 1989, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery specializes in twentieth century American art.

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