CHAPTER 17

DESIGN

During the 1920s in the United States, many people who had once described themselves as involved in the graphic arts, the industrial arts, the craft arts, or the arts allied to architecture—even architects themselves—began to be referred to as *designers*. They were seen as serving industry. They could take any object or product—a shoe, a chair, a book, a poster, an automobile, or a building—and make it appealing,

and thereby persuade the public to buy it or a client to build it. In fact, design is so intimately tied to industry that its origins as a profession can be traced back only to the beginnings of the industrial age.

DESIGN, CRAFT, AND FINE ART

On May 1, 1759, in Staffordshire, England, a 28-year-old man by the name of Josiah Wedgwood opened his own pottery manufacturing plant. With extraordinary foresight, Wedgwood chose to make two very different kinds of pottery; one he called "ornamental ware" (Fig. 542), the other "useful ware" (Fig. 543). The first were elegant handmade luxury items, the work of highly skilled craftsmen. The second were described in his catalogue as "a species of earthenware for the table, quite new in appearance . . . manufactured with ease and expedition, and consequently cheap." This new earthenware was made by machine. Until this moment, almost everything people used was handmade, and thus unique. With the advent of machine mass-manufacturing, the look of the world changed forever.

Fig. 542 Josiah Wedgwood, *Apotheosis of Homer Vase*, 1786.
Blue Jasper ware, height 18 in. Courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Barlaston, Staffordshire, England.

Fig. 543 Wedgwood Queen's Ware kitchen ware, c. 1850
Courtesy of the Wedgwood Museum, Trust Limited, Barlaston, Staffordshire, England.

Wedgwood's business illustrates very clearly how the art of design has been differentiated from, on the one hand, the traditional **crafts** and, on the other, the so-called *fine arts*, like painting or sculpture. As we said in Chapter 14, when we speak of crafts, we are generally referring to *handmade* objects created by highly skilled artisans to serve useful functions. Designers are different from craftspeople in that they often have nothing to do with the actual making of the object, which is produced by mechanical means. A craft object is one-of-a-kind, and in order for it to sell, only one person needs to like it. But designers create objects that are multiples. Their job is to make objects attractive to as large a public as possible. Thus, they must appeal to the whims of fashion.

In these terms, craftspeople and fine artists have more in common with one another than either do with designers. They both equally share a hands-on relation to the objects they make. Wedgwood's ornamental ware, upon which he himself often worked, is more craft than is his useful ware, which was mechanically produced. In fact, Wedgwood's ornamental ware is aesthetic in its intention and was meant to be received as an object of fine art. But his useful ware was meant to be used daily, on the table. Another way of putting this is to say that

Fig. 544 Josiah Wedgwood, copy of *Portland Vase*, c. 1790.
Black Jasper ware, Height 10 in.
Courtesy of the Trustees Wedgwood Museum, Trust Limited, Barlaston, Staffordshire, England.

the word "ornamental" serves, in Wedgwood's usage, to remove the object from the ordinary, to separate it from the "useful," to lend it the status of art.

Though the Wedgwood factory has continued to produce various kinds of ornamental ware, Wedgwood's copy of the Portland Vase (Fig. 544) was his crowning achievement. The original, made around 25 B.C.E in Rome, is a cameo deep blue (virtually black) glass vase that the Dowager Duchess of Portland purchased in 1784 for her private museum. The duchess died within a year of her purchase, and her entire estate was auctioned off, but the vase stayed in the family when the third Duke of Portland bought it in June 1786. It was subsequently lent to Wedgwood so that he might copy it, and he contracted to sell a number of these copies to a group of "gentlemen" subscribers.

It took Wedgwood four years to reproduce the vase successfully. He was able to match the deep blue-black of the original, but the ornamental ware for which he is best known is generally of a much lighter blue, as pictured on the previous page. Some fifty numbered and unnumbered first-edition copies of the Portland vase survive, and the factory has continued to produce editions over the years, most recently in 1980 for the 250th anniversary of Josiah's birth.

But Wedgwood's success as a manufacturer did not depend on such "ornamental" wares of refined taste and elegance. Rather his "useful" ware supported his business. His cream-colored earthenware (dubbed Queen's Ware because the English royal family quickly became interested in it), was made by casting liquid clay in molds instead of by throwing individual pieces and shaping them by hand. Designs were chosen from a pattern book (Fig. 545) and printed by mechanical means directly on the pottery. Because Wedgwood could mass-produce his earthenware both quickly and efficiently, a reliable, quality tableware was made available to the middle-class markets of Europe and America.

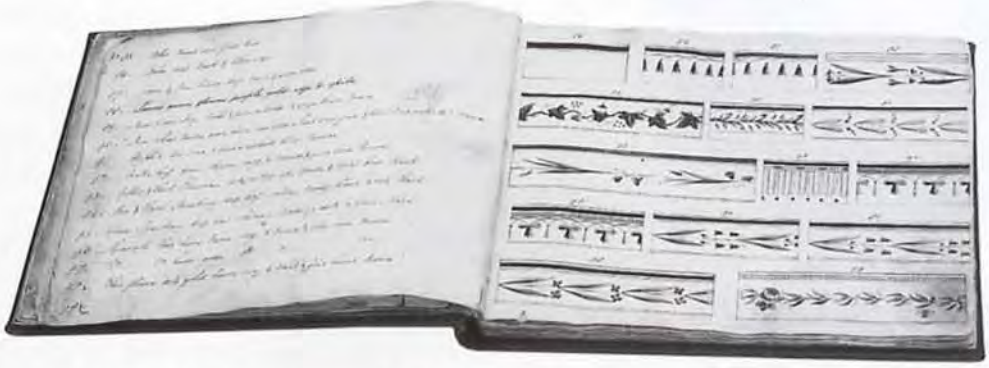

Fig. 545 First Wedgwood pattern book with border designs for Queen's Ware, 1774–1814.
Courtesy of the Trustees Wedgwood Museum, Trust Limited, Barlaston, Staffordshire, England.

Fig. 546 (left) Joseph Paxton,
Crystal Palace, Great Exposition, London, 1851.
1,848 ft. long, 408 ft. wide.
Marburg/Art Resources, New York.

Fig. 547 (below) Philip Webb,
The Red House, Bexley Heath, UK, 1859.
Photo: Charlotte Wood.

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT

During the first half of the nineteenth century, as mass production became more and more the norm in England, the quality and aesthetic value of mass-produced goods declined. In order to expose England to the sorry state of modern design in the country, Henry Cole, a British civil servant who was himself a designer, organized the Great Exposition of 1851. The industrial production on exhibit demonstrated, once and for all, just how bad the situation was. Almost everyone agreed with the assessment of Owen Jones: "We have no principles, no unity; the architect, the upholsterer, the weaver, the calico-painter, and the potter, run each their independent course; each struggles fruitlessly, each produces in art novelty without beauty, or beauty without intelligence."

The building that housed the exhibition in Hyde Park was an altogether different proposition. A totally new type of building, which became known as the Crystal Palace (Fig. 546), it was designed by Joseph Paxton, who had once served as gardener to the Duke of Devonshire and had no formal training as an architect. Constructed of more than 900,000 square feet of glass set in prefabricated wood and cast iron, it was three stories tall and measured 1,848 by 408 feet. It required only nine months to build, and it hailed in a new age in construction. As one architect wrote at the time, "From such beginnings what glories may be in reserve. . . . We may trust ourselves to dream, but we dare not predict."

Not everyone agreed. A. W. N. Pugin, who had collaborated on the new Gothic-style Houses of Parliament, called the Crystal Palace a "glass monster," and the essayist and reformer John Ruskin, who likewise had championed a return to a preindustrial Gothic style

in his book *The Stones of Venice,* called it a "cucumber frame." Under their influence, William Morris, a poet, artist, and ardent socialist, dedicated himself to the renewal of English design through the renewal of medieval craft traditions. In his own words: "At this time, the revival of Gothic architecture was making great progress in England. . . . I threw myself into these movements with all my heart; got a friend [Philip Webb] to build me a house very medieval in spirit . . . and set myself to decorating it." Built of traditional red brick, the house was called the Red House (Fig. 547), and nothing could be further in style from the Crystal Palace. Where the latter reveals itself to be the product of manufacture—engineered out of prefabricated, factory-made parts and assembled, with minimal cost, by unspecialized workers in a matter of a few months—the former is a purposefully rural, even archaic building that rejects the industrial spirit of Paxton's Palace. It signaled, Morris hoped, a return to craft traditions in which workers were intimately tied to the design and manufacture of their products from start to finish.

Fig. 548 Morris and Company, *The Woodpecker*, 1885.
Wool tapestry designed by Morris.
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, England.

Fig. 549 Morris and Company, Sussex rush-seated chairs.
William Morris Gallery, London.

Morris longed to return to a handmade craft tradition for two related reasons. He felt that the mass manufacturing process alienated workers from their labor, and he also missed the quality of handmade items. Industrial laborers had no stake in what they made, and thus no pride in their work. The result, he felt, was both shoddy workmanship and unhappy workers.

As a result of the experience of building the Red House and attempting to furnish it with objects of a medieval, handcrafted nature, a project that was frustrated at every turn, Morris decided to take matters into his own hands. In 1861 he founded the firm that would become Morris and Company. It was dedicated "to undertake any species of decoration, mural or otherwise, from pictures, properly so-called, down to the consideration of the smallest work susceptible of art beauty." To this end, the company was soon producing stained glass, painted tiles, furniture, embroidery, table glass, metalwork, chintzes, wallpaper, woven hangings, tapestries, and carpets.

In his designs, Morris constantly emphasized two principles, simplicity and utility. However, it is difficult, at first glance, to see "simplicity" in work such as *The Woodpecker* (Fig. 548). For Morris, however, the natural and organic were by definition simple. Thus the pattern possesses, in Morris's words, a "logical sequence of form, this *growth* looks as if it could not have been otherwise." Anything, according to Morris, "is beautiful if it is in accord with nature." "I must have," he said, "unmistakable suggestions of gardens and fields, and strange trees, boughs, and tendrils."

Morris's desire for simplicity—"simplicity of life," as he put it, "begetting simplicity of taste"—soon led him to create what he called "workaday furniture," the best examples of which are the company's line of Sussex rush-seated chairs (Fig. 549). Such furniture was meant to be "simple to the last degree" and to appeal to the common man. As Wedgwood had done one hundred years earlier, Morris quickly came to distinguish this "workaday" furniture from his more costly "state furniture," for which, he wrote, "we need not spare ornament . . . but [may] make them as elaborate and elegant as we can with carving or inlaying or paintings; these are the blossoms of

the art of furniture." A sofa designed by Morris's friend, the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and displayed by Morris and Company at the International Exhibition of 1862 (Fig. 550), is the "state" version of the Sussex settee. Covered in rich, dark green velvet, each of the three panels in the back contains a personifications of Love, hand-painted by Rossetti. As Morris's colleague Walter Crane put it: "The great advantage . . . of the Morrisian method is that it leads itself to either simplicity or splendor. You might be almost plain enough to please Thoreau, with a rush bottomed chair, piece of matting, and oaken trestle-table; or you might have gold and luster gleaming from the side-board, and jeweled light in your windows, and walls hung with rich arras tapestry."

Perhaps nothing more underscores Morris's aesthetic taste than his work as bookmaker and typographer at the Kelmscott Press, which he founded in 1888. His edition of Chaucer's works (Fig. 551), is a direct expression of his belief in the values and practices of the Middle Ages. Morris commissioned handmade, wire-molded, linen paper similar to that used in fifteenth-century Bologna. He designed a font, appropriately called Chaucer, which was based on Gothic script. In order to make it more legible, he widened most letterforms, increased the differences between similar characters, and made curved characters rounder. "Books should be beautiful," he argued, "by force of mere typography." But he stopped at nothing to make the Chaucer beautiful in every detail. He set his type by hand, insisting upon a standard spacing between letters, words, and lines. He positioned material on the page in the manner of medieval bookmakers, designed fourteen large borders, eighteen different frames for the illustrations, and twenty-six large initial words for the text. Finally, he commissioned eighty-seven illustrations from the English painter Sir Edward Burne-Jones. The book, he felt, should be like architecture, every detail—paper, ink, type, spacing, margins, illustrations, and ornament—all working together as a single design unit.

By the 1870s, embroidered wall hangings were among the most popular items produced by Morris and Company. At first, Morris's wife, Jane, headed a large group of women, some of whom worked for the company full-

Fig. 550 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Sofa, 1862.
Wood, upholstered in velvet, width 74⅞ in.
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England.

Fig. 551 William Morris (design) and Edward Burne-Jones (illustration), Page opening Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer Newly Augmented*, Kelmscott Press, 1896.
Size: 16 7/8 x 35 1/4 in. Harvard University Art Museums.
Gift of Mrs. Howard J. Sachs in memory of Howard J. Sachs, 1971.37.
© President and Fellows of Harvard College.

time and others who worked more occasionally. In 1885, his daughter May, then twenty-three years old, took over management of the embroidery section. For a quarter of a century, until about 1910, May Morris trained many women in the art of embroidery at her Hammersmith Terrace workshops, and many designs attributed to her father after 1885 are actually her own (apparently, she thought it important, at least from a commercial point of view, to give her father the credit).

The bed hangings below were designed by her in 1916 for a lady's bedroom, "in which elaboration and luxury have been purposefully avoided" (Fig. 552). Shown at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in London in the same year, the embroidery work was done by May Morris, the teacher Mary Newill, and Newill's students at the Birmingham School of Art. The fact that most of the women who worked for Morris and Company were relegated to the embroidery division demonstrates the rigidity of sex roles in English society at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, May Morris, a successful businesswoman, author, and lecturer, was an important role model for the women of her day. In 1907, she helped to found the Women's Guild of Art, the purpose of which was to provide a "centre and a bond for the women who were doing decorative work and all the various crafts."

Fig. 552 May Morris, Bed Hangings, 1916.
Wool crewel on linen, cotton lined, 76¼ × 54 in.
Collection: Cranbrook Art Museum, Gift of George G. Booth.
Photo: R. H. Hensleigh. Accession number CAM 1955.402.

William Morris claimed that his chief purpose as a designer was to elevate the circumstances of the common man. "Every man's house will be fair and decent," he wrote, "all the works of man that we live amongst will be in harmony with nature . . . and every man will have his share of the *best.*" But common people were in no position to afford the elegant creations of Morris and Company. Unlike Wedgwood, whose common, "useful" ware made the most money for the firm, it was the more expensive productions—the state furniture, tapestries, and embroideries—that kept Morris and Co. financially afloat. Inevitably, Morris was forced to confront the inescapable conclusion that to handcraft an object made it prohibitively expensive. With resignation and probably no small regret, he came to accept the necessity of mass manufacture.

In the United States, Gustav Stickley's magazine *The Craftsman*, first published in 1901 in Syracuse, New York, was the most important supporter of the Arts and Crafts tradition. The magazine's self-proclaimed mission was "to promote and to extend the principles established by [William] Morris," and its first issue was dedicated exclusively to Morris. Likewise, the inaugural issue of *House Beautiful*, published in Chicago in 1896, included articles on Morris and the English Arts and Crafts movement. Stickley, recognizing the expense of Morris's handcrafted furniture and the philosophical dilemma that Morris faced in continuing to make it, accepted the necessity of machine manufacturing his own work. Massive in appearance, lacking ornamentation, its aesthetic appeal depended, instead, on the beauty of its wood, usually oak (Fig. 553).

By the turn of the century, architect Frank Lloyd Wright was also deeply involved in furniture design. Like Morris before him, Wright felt compelled to design furniture for the interiors of his Prairie Houses that matched the design of the building as a whole (Fig. 554). Though geometric, his designs were rooted in

Fig. 553 Gustav Stickley, settee (for the Craftsman Workshops), 1909.
Oak and leather, back 58 3/4 × 71 7/8 × 22 in., seat 19 × 62 in.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John J. Evans, Jr., 1971.748.

Fig. 554 Frank Lloyd Wright, Robie House, dining room with original furniture designed by Wright, 1909.
Courtesy Frank Lloyd Wright Archives, Scottsdale, Arizona.

nature (see Figs. 516 and 517). "It is quite impossible," Wright wrote, "to consider the building as one thing, its furnishings another and its setting and environment still another. The Spirit in which these buildings are conceived sees these all together at work as one thing." The table lamp designed for the Lawrence Dana House in Springfield, Illinois (Fig. 555) is meant to reflect the dominant decorative feature of the house—a geometric rendering of the sumac plant that is found abundantly in the neighboring Illinois countryside, chosen because the site of the house itself was particularly lacking in vegetation. Given a very large budget, Wright designed 450 glass panels and 200 light fixtures for the house that are variations on the basic sumac theme. Each piece is unique and individually crafted.

Among them, the furniture designs of Morris, Stickley, and Wright point out the basic issues that design faced in the twentieth century. The first dilemma, to which we have been paying particular attention, was whether the product should be handcrafted or mass-manufactured. But formal issues have arisen as well. If we compare Wright's designs to Morris's, we can see that they use line completely differently. Even though both find the source of their forms in nature, Wright's forms are rectilinear and geometric, Morris's curvilinear and organic. Both believed in "simplicity," but the word meant different things to the two men. Morris, as we have seen, equated simplicity with the natural. Wright, on the other hand, designed furniture for his houses because, he said, "simple things . . . were nowhere at hand. A piece of wood without a moulding was an anomaly, plain fabrics were nowhere to be found in stock." To Wright, simplicity meant plainness. The history of design continually confronts the choice between the geometric and the organic. The major design movement at the turn of the century, Art Nouveau, chose the latter.

Fig. 555 Frank Lloyd Wright, Table lamp, Susan Lawrence Dana House, 1903.
Bronze, leaded glass. Photo: Douglas Carr.
Courtesy The Dana-Thomas House, The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

Fig. 556 Louis Comfort Tiffany, Tiffany Studios, Water-lily table lamp, c. 1904–1915.
Leaded Favrile glass and bronze, height 26½ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of Hugh J. Grant, 1974 (1974.214.15ab). Photograph ©1984 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 557 Louis Comfort Tiffany, Tiffany Glass & Decorating Co. (1893–1902), Corona, New York, *Peacock Vase*, c. 1893–1896.
Favrile glass, height 14⅛ in.; width 11½ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of H. O. Havemeyer, 1896 (96.17.10). Photograph © 1987 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

ART NOUVEAU

The day after Christmas in 1895, a shop opened in Paris named the Galeries de l'Art Nouveau. It was operated by one S. Bing, whose first name was Siegfried, though art history has almost universally referred to him as Samuel, perpetuating a mistake made in his obituary in 1905. Bing's new gallery was a success, and in 1900, at the Universal Exposition in Paris, he opened his own pavilion, Art Nouveau Bing. By the time the Exposition ended, the name **Art Nouveau** had come to designate not merely the work he displayed but a decorative arts movement of international dimension.

Bing had visited the United States in 1894. The result was a short book titled *Artistic Culture in America*, in which he praised American architecture, painting, and sculpture, but most of all its arts and crafts. The American who fascinated him most was the glassmaker Louis Comfort Tiffany, son of the founder of the famous New York jewelry firm, Tiffany and Co. The younger Tiffany's work inspired Bing to create his new design movement, and Bing contracted with the American to produce a series of stained glass windows designed by such French artists as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Pierre Bonnard. Because oil lamps were at that very moment being replaced by electric lights—Thomas Edison had startled the French public with his demonstration of electricity at the 1889 International Exhibition—Bing placed considerable emphasis on new, modern modes of lighting. From his point of view, a new light and a new art went hand in hand. And Tiffany's stained-glass lamps (Fig. 556), backlit by electric light, brought a completely new sense of vibrant color to interior space.

Even more than his stained glass, Bing admired Tiffany's iridescent Favrile glassware, which was named after the obsolete English word for handmade, "fabrile." The distinctive feature of this type of glassware is that nothing of the design is painted, etched, or burned into the surface. Instead, every detail is built up by the craftsperson out of what Tiffany liked to call "genuine glass." In the vase illustrated in Fig. 557, we can see many of the design characteristics most often associated with Art Nouveau, from the wavelike line of the peacock feathers to the self-conscious asymmetry of the whole. In fact, the formal vocabulary of Art Nouveau could be said to consist of young saplings and shoots, willow trees, buds, vines—anything organic and undulating, including snakes and, especially, women's hair. The Dutch artist Jan Toorop's advertising poster for a peanut-based salad oil (Fig. 558) flattens the long, spiraling hair of the two women preparing salad into a pattern very like the elaborate wrought-iron grillwork also characteristic of Art Nouveau design. Writing about Bing's installation at the the 1900 Universal Exposition, one writer described Art Nouveau's use of line this way: "[In] the encounter of the two lines . . . the ornamenting art is born—an indescribable curving and whirling ornament, which laces and winds itself with almost convulsive energy across the surface of the [design]!"

The organic, curvilinear qualities of Art Nouveau easily lent themselves to the development of an intensely personal and expressive style. In the hands of a master, such as the Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí, a level of formal invention was achieved that constitutes one of the most important artistic expressions of the period. Gaudí's Church of the Sagrada Familia (Fig. 559) is a twisting, spiraling, almost fluid mass of forms. In the architect's hands, masonry has been transformed into some pliable, natural material that seems as infinitely manipulable as his fantastic imagination is large.

Yet, for many, Art Nouveau seemed excessively subjective and personal, especially for public forms such as architecture. In Vienna, particularly, where Art Nouveau had flourished under the banner of the *Jugendstil*—literally, "the style of youth"—the curvilinear and

Fig. 558 Jan Toorop, poster for *Delftsche Slaolie* (Salad Oil), 1894.
Dutch advertisement poster. Scala/Art Resource, New York.

Fig. 559 Antoni Gaudí, Church of the Sagrada Familia, 1883–1926.
Spanish National Tourist Office.

Fig. 560 Josef Hoffman, Palais Stoclet, Brussels, 1905–1911.
Foto Marburg/Art Resource, New York.

Fig. 561 Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), *Fulfillment (Stoclet Frieze)*, c. 1905–09.
Tempera, x/c. Osterreichische Galerie, Vienna, Austria/Bridgeman Art Library.

organic qualities of Art Nouveau gave way to symmetry and simple geometry. Consider, for instance, the Palais Stoclet in Brussels (Fig. 560), designed by the Viennese architect Josef Hoffman. The exterior is starkly white and geometrical, and quite plain. But the interior is luxurious. Hoffman ringed the walls of the dining room, for instance, in marble inlaid with mosaics of glass and semiprecious stones including onyx and malachite designed by the Viennese painter Gustav Klimt (Fig. 561). The theme of the mosaics was openly sexual. Here, the journey of life's fulfillment is reached in the embrace of male and female. For Hoffman, the interior of the house was private space, a place where fantasy and emotion could have free reign. Through the example of buildings like the Palais Stoclet, Art Nouveau became associated with an interior world of aristocratic wealth, refinement, and even emotional abandon, but it was also a style that realized the necessity of presenting, in its exteriors, a public face of order, simplicity, and control. In other words, the type of geometric and rectilinear design practiced by Frank Lloyd Wright began to find favor, and by the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes—the International Exposition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts—in Paris in 1925, it held sway.

ART DECO

The Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes was planned as early as 1907, during the height of Art Nouveau, but logistical problems—especially the outbreak of World War I—postponed it for almost twenty years. A very influential event, the exposition was the most extensive international showcase of the style of design then called *Art Moderne* and, since 1968, better known as **Art Deco**.

Not only did individual designers build their own exhibition spaces, but all of the great French department stores, as well as the leading French manufacturers, built lavish pavilions as well. Throughout, the emphasis was on a particularly French sense of fashionable luxury. There was no evidence anywhere of the practical side of design—no concern with either utility or function. The cabinet designed by the French furniture company Süe et Mare (Fig. 562) is typical of the most elaborate form of the Art Deco style featured at the 1925 exposition. Made of ebony, the preferred wood of Art Deco designers because it was extremely rare and, therefore, expensive, and inlaid with mother-of-pearl, abalone, and silver, the cabinet is extraordinarily opulent. This richness of materials, together with the slightly asymmetrical and organic floral design of the cabinet door, link the piece to the earlier style of Art Nouveau.

But there was another type of Art Deco that, while equally interested in surface decoration, preferred more up-to-date materials—chrome, steel, and Bakelite plastic—and sought to give expression to everyday *"moderne"* life. The *Skyscraper Bookcase* by the American designer Paul T. Frankl (Fig. 563), made of maple wood and Bakelite, is all sharp angles that rise into the air, like the brand-new skyscrapers that were beginning to dominate America's urban landscape.

Fig. 562 Louis Süe and Andre Mare, *Cabinet*, 1927.
Ebony, mother-of-pearl, silver, height 61⅞; width 35⅛; depth 15¾ in.
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.
Gift of Sydney and Frances Lewis Foundation.
Photo: Katherine Wetel © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Fig. 563 Paul T. Frankl, *Skyscraper Bookcase*, 1925–1930.
Maple wood and bakelite, height 79⅛ in.; width 34⅛ in.; depth 18⅛ in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Theodore R. Gamble, Jr. Gift, in honor of his mother, Mrs. Theodore Robert Gamble, 1982 (1982.30ab).

Fig. 564 (left) Edouardo Garcia Benito, *Vogue*, May 25, 1929 cover.
Illustration of head on blue background.

Fig. 565 (right) Unidentified illustrator, Corset, *Vogue*, October 25, 1924.
Courtesy of Vogue/Condé Nast Publications Inc.

This movement toward the geometric is perhaps the defining characteristic of Art Deco. Even the leading fashion magazines of the day reflect this in their covers and layouts. In Edouardo Benito's *Vogue* magazine cover (Fig. 564), we can see an impulse toward simplicity and rectilinearity comparable to Frankl's bookcase. The world of fashion embraced the new geometric look. During the 1920s, the boyish silhouette became increasingly fashionable. The curves of the female body were suppressed (Fig. 565), and the waistline disappeared in tubular, "barrel"-line skirts. Even long, wavy hair, one of the defining features of Art Nouveau style, was abandoned, and the schoolboyish "Eton crop" became the hairstyle of the day.

THE AVANT-GARDES

At the 1925 Paris Exposition, one designer's pavilion stood apart from all the rest, not because it was better than the others, but because it was so different. As early as 1920, a French architect by the name of Le Corbusier had written in his new magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* (The New Spirit) that "decorative art, as opposed to the machine phenomenon is the final twitch of the old manual modes; a dying thing." He proposed a *"Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau"* (Pavilion of the New Spirit) for the exposition that would contain "only standard things created by industry in factories and mass-produced; objects truly of the style of today."

To Le Corbusier, to make expensive, handcrafted objects, such as the cabinet by Süe et Mare (Fig. 562), amounted to making antiques in a contemporary world. From his point of view, the other designers at the 1925 exposition were out of step with the times. The modern world was dominated by the machine, and though designers had shown disgust for machine manufacture ever since the time of Morris and Company, they did so at the risk of living forever in the past. "The house," Le Corbusier declared, "is a machine for living."

Le Corbusier's "new spirit" horrified the exposition's organizers, and, accordingly, they gave him a parcel of ground for his pavilion between two wings of the Grand Palais, with a tree, which could not be removed, growing right in the middle of it. Undaunted, Le Corbusier built right around the tree, cutting a hole in the roof to accommodate it (Fig. 566). The pavilion was built of concrete, steel, and glass, and its walls were plain white. So distressed were Exposition officials that they ordered a high fence to be built completely around the site in order to hide it from public view. Le Corbusier appealed to the Ministry of Fine Arts, and finally the fence was removed. "Right now," Le Corbusier announced in triumph, "one thing is sure: 1925 marks the decisive

Fig. 566 Le Corbusier, Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau.
Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris, 1925.
Copyrighted from: Le Corbusier, *My Work* (London: Architectural Press, 1960), p. 72.

turning point in the quarrel between the old and the new. After 1925, the antique lovers will have virtually ended their lives, and productive industrial effort will be based on the 'new.' "

The geometric starkness of Le Corbusier's design had been anticipated by developments in the arts that began to take place in Europe before World War I. A number of new **avant-garde** (from the French meaning "advance guard") groups had sprung up, often with radical political agendas, and dedicated to overturning the traditional and established means of art-making through experimental techniques and styles.

One of the most important was the **De Stijl** movement in Holland. De Stijl, which is Dutch for "The Style," took its lead, like all the avant-garde styles, from the painting of Picasso and Braque, in which the elements of the real world were simplified into a vocabulary of geometric forms. The De Stijl artists, chief among them Mondrian (see Fig. 731), simplified the vocabulary of art and design even further, employing only the primary colors—red, blue, and yellow—plus black and white. Their design relied on a vertical and horizontal grid, often dynamically broken by a curve or a circle or a diagonal line. Rather than enclosing forms, their compositions seemed to *open* out into the space surrounding them.

Gerrit Rietveld's famous chair (Fig. 567) is a summation of these De Stijl design principles. The chair is designed *against*, as it were, the traditional elements of the armchair. Both the arms and the base of the chair are insistently locked in a vertical and horizontal grid. But the two planes that function as the seat and the back seem almost to float free from the closed-in structure of the frame. Rietveld dramatized their separateness from the black grid of frame by painting the seat blue and the back red.

Rietveld's Schröder House, built in 1925, is an extension of the principles guiding his chair design. The interior of the box-shaped house is completely open in plan. The view represented here (Fig. 568) is from the living and dining area toward a bedroom. Sliding walls can shut off the space for privacy, but it is the sense of openness that is most important to Rietveld. Space implies movement. The more open the space, the more possibility for movement in it. Rietveld's design, in other words, is meant to immerse its occupants in a dynamic situation

Fig. 567 Gerrit Rietveld, *Red and Blue Chair*, c. 1918.
Wood, painted, height 34⅛; width 26; depth 26½ in.; seat height: 13 in.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson.
Licensed by Scala-Art Resource, New York.
Photograph © 1999 Museum of Modern Art, New York/
© 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Beeldrecht, Amstrdam.

Fig. 568 Gerrit Rietveld, First floor, 1987, view of the stairwell/landing and the living-dining area. In the foreground is the Red and Blue Chair. Rietveld Schröderhlis, 1924, Utrecht, The Netherlands. c/o Stichting Beedldrect, Anstelveen.
Collection: Centraal Museum Utrecht/Rietveld-Schröder Archive. Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague. © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Beeldrecht, Amstrdam.

Fig. 569 El Lissitzky, *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, 1919.
Lithograph. Collection: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Holland.

that might, idealistically, release their own creative energies.

This notion of dynamic space can also be found in the work of the Russian **Constructivists**, who worked in the new postrevolutionary Soviet state and who dreamed of uniting art and everyday life through mass-production and industry. The artist, they believed, should "go into the factory, where the real body of life is made." They believed, especially, in employing nonobjective formal elements in functional ways. El Lissitzky's design for the poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (Fig. 569), for instance, is a formal design with propagandistic aims. It presents the "Red" Bolshevik cause as an aggressive red triangle attacking a defensive and static "White" Russian circle. Although the elements employed are starkly simple, the implications are disturbingly sexual—as if the Reds are male and active, while the Whites are female and passive—and the sense of aggressive action, originating both literally and figuratively from "the left," is unmistakable.

This same sense of geometrical simplification can be found in Alexander Rodchenko's design for a catalogue cover for the Russian exhibition at the 1925 Paris Exposition (Fig. 570). Rodchenko had designed the interiors and furnishings of the Workers' Club, which was included in the Soviet exhibit at the Exposition, and the cover design echoes and embodies his design for the Club. The furniture, as Rodchenko described it, emphasized "simplicity of use, standardisation, and the necessity of being able to expand or contract the numbers of its parts." It was painted in only four colors—white, red, grey, and black—alone or in combination, and employed only rectilinear geometric forms. Chairs could be stacked and folded, tables could serve as screens and display boards if turned on their sides, and everything was moveable and interchangeable.

Typography, too, reflected this emphasis on standardization and simplicity. Gone were the ornamental effects of **serif** type styles—that is, letter forms, such as the font used in this text, which have small lines at the end of the letter's main stroke—and in their place plain and geometric **sanserif** ("without serif") fonts came to the fore. One of the great proponents of this new typography was the French poster designer Cassandre. "The poster is not meant to be a unique specimen conceived to satisfy a single art lover," Cassandre wrote, "but a mass-produced object that must have a commercial function. Designing a poster means solving a technical and commercial problem . . . in a lan-

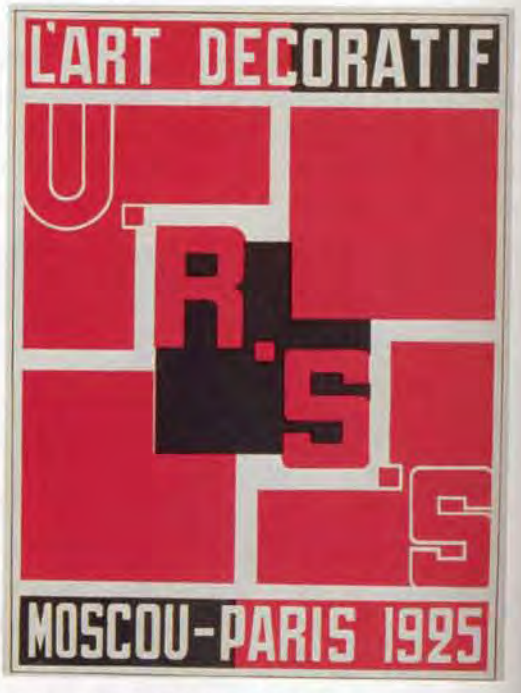

Fig. 570 Alexander Rodchenko, *L'Art Décoratif, Moscow-Paris*, 1925.
Design for catalog cover, Russian section, Exposition International des Arts Decoratifs et Industriel, Paris, 1925.
Rodchenko Archive, Moscow, Russia. Scala/Art Resource, New York.

guage that can be understood by the common man." This meant the poster had to be read by the common man, and in a world where people moved by train, subway, and automobile, passing by commercial images at speed, type had to be plain and simple. Cassandre's poster for the newspaper *L'Intransigeant* (Fig. 571) embodies his geometrical tendencies. Its simple, clear shapes, merging perspective lines created by the electrical wires and transformers, and its bold uppercase typography are all organized around three circles—the eye, ear, and mouth. Cassandre does not even include the full name of the paper—he can convey his message more simply—nor its entire slogan, *"Le plus fort tirage de journaux du soir"* ("The best-selling evening paper"), which, is cropped simply to read *"Le plus fort"* ("the strongest"). This play with words evidences the poster's debt avant-garde art—to the oblique angle of the print, evident in El Lissitzky's design for the poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, and to Cubist collage (see Fig. 346), which constantly includes only fragments of newspaper, usually to the same kind of witty effect.

Fig. 571 Cassandre, poster for *"L'Intransigeant,"*, 1925.

Cassandre's poster campaign Cassandre created for the apertif Dubonnet (Fig. 572) is conceived entirely as a play on words. A man sits at a café table gazing at a glass of wine in his hand. The copy reads simply DUBO, or "du beau" ("something beautiful"). Next, we read DUBON, "du bon" ("something good"), and the color that was evident only in the glass, arm, and face in the first scene now extends to his stomach. Finally, above the full brand name, the fully-colored, and apparently content gentleman, pours himself another glass. The geometrical letterforms of the sanserif capitals echo the forms of the man himself—the "D" in his hat, the "B" in his elbow, the "N" in his leg's relation to the chair, and the "T" in the table. In another version of the campaign, Cassandre split the image into three separate posters, to be seen consecutively from the window of a train. His typographic style, thus viewed by millions, helped to popularize the geometric simplicity championed by the avant-gardes.

Fig. 572 Cassandre, poster for Dubonnet, 1932.

Fig. 573 Marcel Breuer, *Armchair,* model B3, late 1927 or early 1928.
Chrome-plated tubular steel with canvas slings, height 28⅛ × width 30¼ × depth 27¾ in.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Herbert Bayer. Photograph Licensed by Scala-Art Resource, New York.

THE BAUHAUS

At the German pavilion at the 1925 Paris Exposition, one could see a variety of new machines designed to make the trials of everyday life easier—for instance, an electric washing machine and an electric armoire in which clothes could be tumble-dried. When asked who could afford such things, Walter Gropius, who in 1919 had founded a school of arts and crafts in Weimar, Germany, known as the **Bauhaus**, replied, "To begin with, royalty. Later on, everybody."

Like Le Corbusier, Gropius saw in the machine the salvation of humanity. And he thoroughly sympathized with Le Corbusier, whose major difficulty in putting together his Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau had been the unavailability of furniture that would satisfy his desire for "standard things created by industry in factories and mass-produced; objects truly of the style of today." Ironically, at almost exactly that moment, Marcel Breuer, a furniture designer working at Gropius's Bauhaus, was doing just that.

In the spring of 1925, Breuer purchased a new bicycle, manufactured out of tubular steel by the Adler company. Impressed by the bicycle's strength—it could easily support the weight of two riders—its lightness, and its apparent indestructibility, Breuer envisioned furniture made of this most modern of materials. "In fact," Breuer later recalled, speaking of the armchair that he began to design soon after his purchase (Fig. 573), "I took the pipe dimensions from my bicycle. I didn't know where else to get it or how to figure it out."

The chair is clearly related to Rietveld's *Red and Blue Chair* (Fig. 567), consisting of

two diagonals for seat and back set in a cubic frame. It is easily mass-produced—and, in fact, is still in production today. But its appeal was due, perhaps most of all, to the fact that it looked absolutely new, and it soon became an icon of the machine age. Gropius quickly saw how appropriate Breuer's design would be for the new Bauhaus building in Dessau. By early 1926, Breuer was at work designing modular tubular-steel seating for the school's auditorium, as well as stools and side chairs to be used throughout the educational complex. As a result, Breuer's furniture became identified with the Bauhaus.

But the Bauhaus was much more. In 1919, Gropius was determined to break down the barriers between the crafts and the fine arts and to rescue each from its isolation by training craftspeople, painters, and sculptors to work on cooperative ventures. There was, Gropius said, "no essential difference" between the crafts and the fine arts. There were no "teachers" either; there were only "masters, journeymen, and apprentices." All of this led to what Gropius believed was the one place where all of the media could interact and all of the arts work cooperatively together. "The ultimate aim of all creative activity," Gropius declared, "is the building," and the name itself is derived from the German words for building (*Bau*) and house (*Haus*).

We can understand Gropius's goals if we look at Herbert Bayer's design for the cover of the first issue of *Bauhaus* magazine, which was published in 1928 (Fig. 574). Each of the three-dimensional forms—cube, sphere, and cone—casts a two-dimensional shadow. The design is marked by the letter forms Bayer employs in the masthead. This is Bayer's Universal Alphabet, which he created to eliminate what he believed to be needless typographical flourishes, including capital letters. Bayer, furthermore, constructed the image in the studio and then photographed it, relying on mechanical reproduction instead of the handcrafted, highly individualistic medium of drawing. The pencil and triangle suggest that any drawing to be done is mechanical drawing, governed by geometry and mathematics. Finally, the story on the cover of the first issue of *Bauhaus* is concerned with architecture, to Gropius the ultimate creative activity.

Fig. 574 Herbert Bayer, Cover for *Bauhaus 1*, 1928.
Photomontage. Photo: Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin.

Fig. 575 Burlington Northern Co.Burlington *Zephyr #9900*, 1934.
Photo Courtesy of Burlington Northern & Santa Fe Railway Co.

STREAMLINING

Even as the geometry of the machine began to dominate design, finding particular favor among the architects of the International Style (see Chapter 16), in the ebb and flow between the organic and the geometric that dominates design history, the organic began to flow back into the scene as a result of advances in scientific knowledge. In 1926, the Daniel Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics granted $2.5 million to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the California Institute of Technology, the University of Michigan, and New York University to build wind tunnels. Designers quickly discovered that by eliminating extraneous detail on the surface of a plane, boat, automobile, or train, and by rounding its edges so that each subform merged into the next by means of smooth transitional curves, air would flow smoothly across the surface of the machine. Drag would thereby be dramatically reduced, and the machine could move faster with less expenditure of energy. "Streamlining" became the transportation cry of the day.

The nation's railroads were quickly redesigned to take advantage of this new technological information. Since a standard train engine would expend 350 horsepower more than a streamlined one operating at top speed, at 70 to 110 mph, streamlining would increase pulling capacity by 12 percent. It was clearly economical for the railroads to streamline.

At just after five o'clock on the morning of May 26, 1934, a brand new streamlined train called the Burlington *Zephyr* (Fig. 575) departed Union Station in Denver bound for Chicago. Normally, the 1,015-mile trip took twenty-six hours, but this day, averaging 77.61 miles per hour and reaching a top speed of 112 miles per hour, the *Zephyr* arrived in Chicago in a mere thirteen hours and five minutes. The total fuel cost for the haul, at 5¢ per gallon, was only $14.64. When the train arrived later that same evening at the Century of Progress Exposition on the Chicago lakefront, it was mobbed by a wildly enthusiastic public. If the railroad was enthralled by the streamlined train's efficiency, the public was captivated by its speed. It was, in fact, through the mystique of speed that the Burlington Railroad meant to recapture dwindling passenger revenues. Ralph Budd, president of the railroad, deliberately chose not to paint the *Zephyr's* stainless steel sheath. To him it signified "the motif of speed" itself.

But the *Zephyr* was more than its sheath. It weighed one-third less than a conventional train, and its center of gravity was so much lower that it could take curves at 60 miles per hour that a normal train could only negotiate at 40. Because regular welding techniques severely damaged stainless steel, engineers had invented and patented an electric welding process to join its stainless steel parts. All in all, the train became the symbol of a new age. After its trips

to Chicago, it traveled more than thirty thousand miles, visiting 222 cities. Well over two million people paid a dime each to tour it, and millions more viewed it from the outside. Late in the year, it became the feature attraction of a new film, *The Silver Streak*, a somewhat improbable drama about a high-speed train commandeered to deliver iron lungs to a disease-stricken Nevada town.

Wind-tunnel testing had revealed that the ideal streamlined form most closely resembled a teardrop. A long train could hardly achieve such a shape—at best it resembled a snake. But the automobile offered other possibilities. The first production-model streamlined car was the Chrysler *Airflow* (Fig. 576), which abandoned the teardrop ideal and adopted the look of the new streamlined trains. (It is pictured here with the 1934 Union Pacific *Streamliner.*) The man who inspired Chrysler to develop the automobile was Norman Bel Geddes. Bel Geddes was a poster and theatrical designer when he began experimenting, in the late 1920s, with the design of planes, boats, automobiles, and trains—things he thought of as "more vitally akin to life today than the theatre." After the stock market crash in 1929, his staff of twenty engineers, architects, and draftsmen found themselves with little or nothing to do, so Bel Geddes turned them loose on a series of imaginative projects, including the challenge to dream up some way to transport "a thousand luxury lovers from New York to Paris fast. Forget the limitations." The specific result was his *Air Liner Number 4* (Fig. 577), designed with the assistance of Dr. Otto Koller, a veteran airplane designer. With a wingspan of 528 feet, Bel Geddes estimated that it could carry 451 passengers and 115 crew members from Chicago to London in forty-two hours. Its passenger decks included a dining room, game deck, solarium, barber shop and beauty salon, nursery, and private suites for all on board. Among the crew were a nursemaid, a physician, a masseuse and a masseur, wine stewards, waiters, and an orchestra.

Although Bel Geddes insisted that the plane could be built, it was the theatricality and daring of the proposal that really captured the imagination of the American public. Bel Geddes was something of a showman. In November 1932, he published a book titled *Horizons* that included most of the experimental designs

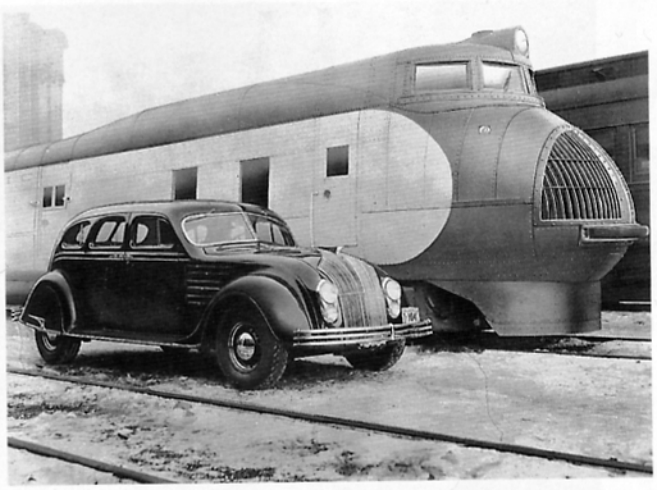

Fig. 576 Chrysler *Airflow* 4-door sedan, 1934.
Chrysler Historical Collection, Detroit, Michigan.

he and his staff had been working on since the stock market collapse. It was wildly popular. And its popularity prompted Chrysler to go forward with the *Airflow.* Walter P. Chrysler hired Bel Geddes to coordinate publicity for the new automobile. In one ad, Bel Geddes himself, tabbed "America's foremost industrial designer," was the spokesman, calling the *Airflow* "the first sincere and authentic streamlined car . . . the first *real* motor car." Despite this, the car was not a success. Though it drew record orders after its introduction in January 1934, the company failed to reach full production before April, by which time many orders had been withdrawn, and serious production defects were evident in those cars the company did manage to get off the line. The *Airflow* attracted more than eleven thousand buyers in 1934, but by 1937 only forty-six hundred were sold, and Chrysler dropped the model.

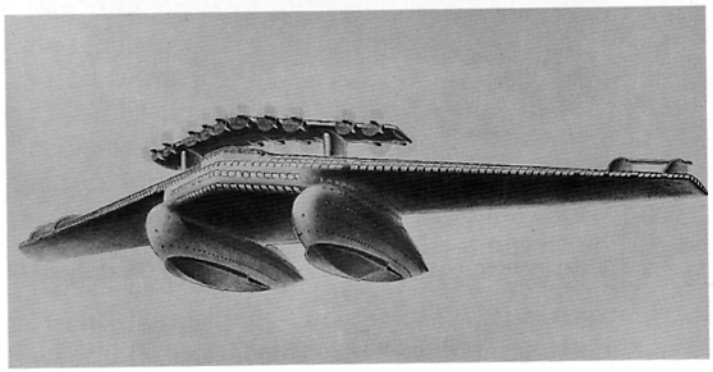

Fig. 577 Norman Bel Geddes, with Dr. Otto Koller, *Air Liner Number 4*, 1929.
Norman Bel Geddes Collection, Theatre Arts Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, by permission of Edith Lutyens Bel Geddes, Executrix.

Fig. 578 Russel Wright, American Modern dinnerware, designed 1937, introduced 1939.
Glazed earthenware. Department of Special Collections, Russell Wright papers. Syracuse University Library.

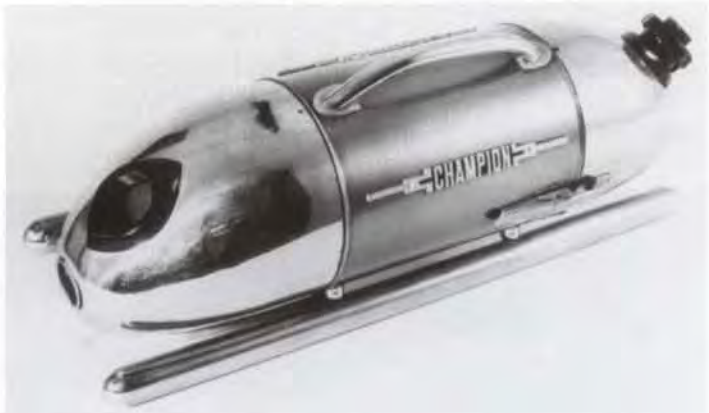

Fig. 579 Staubsauger, *Champion* vacuum cleaner, Type OK, Holland, late 1930s.
© Photo Bungartz/Die Neue Sammlung, Staatliches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Munich.

However, streamlining had caught on, and other designers quickly joined the rush. One of the most successful American designers, Raymond Loewy, declared that streamlining was "the perfect interpretation of the modern beat." To Russel Wright, the designer of the tableware illustrated here (Fig. 578), streamlining captured the "American character." It was the essence of a "distinct American design." Almost overnight, European designers began employing streamlining in their own product design, as evidenced by a Dutch chromium-plated vacuum cleaner from the late 1930s (Fig. 579). Suddenly, to be modern, a thing had to be streamlined. Even more important, to be streamlined was to be distinctly American in style. Thus, to be modern was to be American, an equation that dominated industrial and product design worldwide through at least the 1960s.

Fig. 580 Installation view of the exhibition *Organic Design in Home Furnishings*.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. September 24–November 9, 1941.
Licensed by Scala-Art Resource, New York.
Photo Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York.

THE FORTIES AND FIFTIES

The fully organic forms of Russel Wright's "American Modern" dinnerware announce a major shift in direction away from design dominated by the right angle and toward a looser, more curvilinear style. This direction was further highlighted when, in 1940, the Museum of Modern Art held a competition titled "Organic Design in Home Furnishings." The first prize in that competition was awarded jointly to Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, both young instructors at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. Under the direction of the architect Eliel Saarinen, Eero's father, Cranbrook was similar in many respects to the Bauhaus, especially in terms of its emphasis on interdisciplinary work on architectural environments. It was, however, considerably more open to experiment and innovation than the Bauhaus, and the Eames-Saarinen entry in the Museum of Modern Art competition was the direct result of the elder Saarinen encouraging his young staff to rethink entirely just what furniture should be.

All of the furniture submitted to the show by Eames and Saarinen (Fig. 580) used molded plywood shells in which the wood veneers were laminated to layers of glue. The resulting forms almost demand to be seen from more than a single point of view. The problem, as Eames wrote, "becomes a sculptural one." The furniture was very strong, comfortable, and reasonably priced. Because of the war, production and distribution were necessarily limited, but in 1946, the Herman Miller Company made five thousand units of a chair Eames designed with his wife, Ray Eames, also a Cranbrook graduate (Fig. 581). Instantly popular and still in production today, the chair consists of two molded-plywood forms that float on elegantly simple steel rods. The effect is amazingly dynamic: the back panel has been described as "a rectangle about to turn into an oval," and the seat almost seems to have molded itself to the sitter in advance.

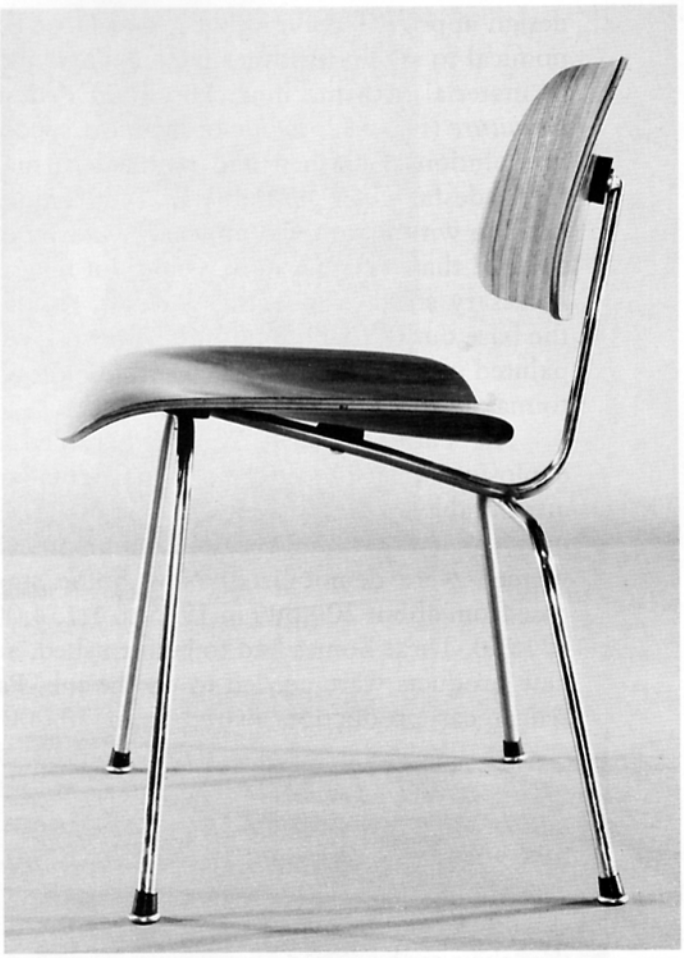

Fig. 581 Charles and Ray Eames, side chair, model DCM, 1946.
Molded ash plywood, steel rods, and rubber shock mounts,
height 28¾ × width 19½ × depth 20 in.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Herman Miller Furniture Company.
Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, New York.
Photograph © 1999 Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Eero Saarinen took the innovations he and Eames had made in the "Organic Design in Home Furnishings" competition in a somewhat different direction. Unlike Eames, who in his 1946 chair had clearly abandoned the notion of the one-piece unit as impractical, Saarinen continued to seek a more unified

design approach, feeling that it was more economical to stamp furniture from a single piece of material in a machine. His *Tulip Pedestal Furniture* (Fig. 582) is one of his most successful solutions. Saarinen had planned to make the pedestal chair entirely out of plastic, in keeping with his unified approach, but he discovered that a plastic stem would not take the necessary strain. Forced, as a result, to make the base out of cast aluminum, he nevertheless painted it the same color as the plastic in order to make the chair appear of a piece.

The end of World War II heralded an explosion of new American design, particularly attributable to the rapid expansion of the economy, as twelve million military men and women were demobilized. New home starts rose from about 200,000 in 1945 to 1,154,000 in 1950. These homes had to be furnished, and new products were needed to do the job. Passenger car production soared from 70,000 a year in 1945 to 6,665,000 in 1950, and in the following ten years, Americans built and sold more than fifty-eight million automobiles. In tune with the organic look of the new furniture design, these cars soon sported fins, suggesting both that they moved as gracefully as fish and that their speed was so great that they needed stabilizers. The fins were inspired by the tail fins on the U.S. Air Force's P-38 "Lightning" fighter plane, which Harley Earl, chief stylist at General Motors, had seen during the war. He designed them into the 1948 Cadillac as an aerodynamic symbol. But by 1959, when the craze hit its peak, fins no longer had anything to do with aerodynamics. As the Cadillac (Fig. 583) made clear, it had simply become a matter of the bigger the better.

In many ways, the Cadillac's excess defines American style in the 1950s. This was the decade that brought the world fast food (both the McDonald's hamburger and the TV dinner), Las Vegas, *Playboy* magazine, and a TV in almost every home. But there were, in the 1950s, statements of real elegance. One of the most notable was the graphic design of the Swiss school, notably that of Armin Hofmann. Recognizing, in his words, that "the whole of sensory perception has been shifted by the photographic image," he freely incorporated photographs into his poster designs. Like Saarinen in his air terminal designs (Figs. 526–528), Hofmann emphasized finding a symbolic form or image appropriate to the content of his message. The poster for the ballet *Giselle* (Fig. 584) immediately conveys the idea of dance. It does this through the studied contrast between light and dark, between the blurred, speeding form of the dancer and the static clarity of the type, between, finally, the geometry of the design and the organic movement of the body. By these means, Hofmann arrives at a synthesis of the competing stylistic forces at work in the history of modern design.

Fig. 582 Eero Saarinen, *Tulip Pedestal Furniture*, 1955–1957.
Chairs: plastic seat, painted metal base; tables: wood or marble top, plastic laminate base.
Saarinen Collection designed by Eero Saarinen in 1956 and 1957. Courtesy Knoll Inc.

Fig. 583 General Motors 1959 Cadillac Fleetwood.
General Motors Media Archives.

CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

One way to view the evolution of design since 1960 is to recognize a growing tendency to accept the splits between the organic and the geometric and the natural and the mechanical that dominate its history as not so much an either/or situation as a question of both/and. In its unification of competing and contrasting elements, Hofmann's graphic design anticipates this synthesis. So, indeed, does the Eames chair, with its contrasting steel-support structure and molded plywood seat and back.

But, as we suggested in the earlier discussion of postmodernism, the contemporary has been marked by a willingness to incorporate anything and everything into a given design. This is not simply a question of the organic versus the geometric. It is, even more, a question of the collisions of competing cultures of an almost incomprehensible diversity and range. On our shrinking globe, united by television and the telephone, by the fax machine and the copier, e-mail, and the World Wide Web, and especially by increasingly interdependent economies, we are learning to accept, perhaps faster than we realize, a plurality of styles.

What we mean when we speak of the stylistic pluralism of contemporary design is clear if we compare a traditional corporate identity package with a conspicuously postmodern one. Although the Coca-Cola bottle has changed

Fig. 584 Armin Hofmann, *Giselle,* 1959.
Offset lithograph, 50¾ × 35⅝ in.
Courtesy Reinhold-Brown Gallery, New York.

Fred Wilson's Mining the Museum

Fred Wilson is a contemporary museum curator who has transformed the problem of exhibition design by exposing the cultural, political, and socioeconomic assumptions that underlie the modern museum space. Traditionally, museums have tried to create coherent, even homogeneous, spaces in which to view exhibitions. The "white room" effect is one such design principle—that is, the walls of the space are uniform and white so as not to detract from the work on the walls. Even when more elaborate design ideas come into play—for instance, when an architectural setting is recreated in order to reconstruct the original era or setting of the works on display—the principle of an intellectually coherent space, one which helps the viewer to understand and contextualize the work, predominates.

Wilson believes that this traditional curatorial stance has caused most museums to "bury" or ignore works that do not fit easily into the dominant "story" that the museum tells. In 1992, The Contemporary, a museum exhibiting in temporary spaces in Baltimore, Maryland, arranged for Wilson to install an exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society. Wilson saw it as an opportunity to reinterpret the Historical Society's collection and present a larger story about Maryland history than the museum was used to telling.

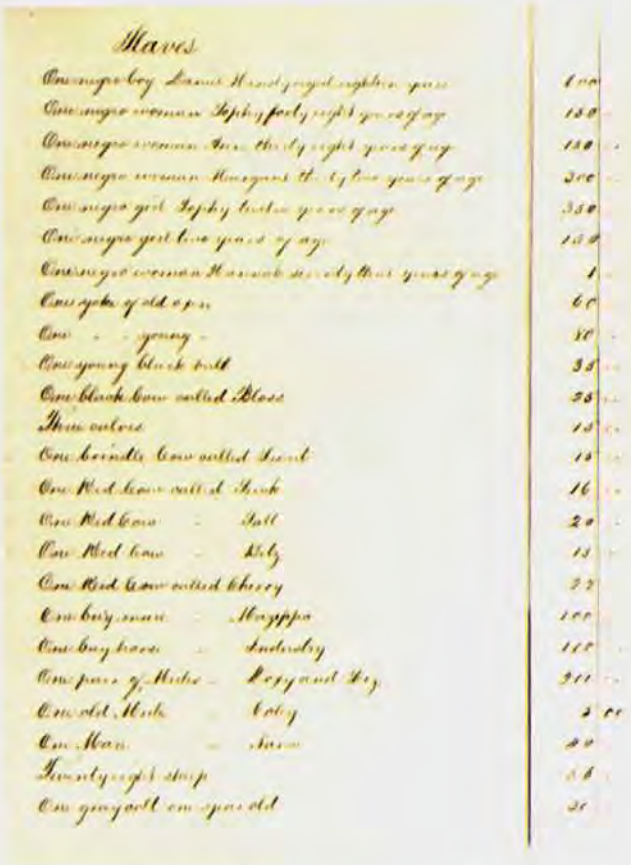

Fig. 585 Nicholas Carroll Estate Inventory, MS 2634, c. 1812.
Manuscripts Division, Maryland Historical Society Library.
Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland.

Wilson begins all of his projects with a research phase—in this case, into the history of Baltimore and the people who lived there. "When I go into a project," he says, "I'm not looking to bring something to it. I'm responding more than anything else. You can still get a very personal emotional response from a situation or an individual who lived a hundred years ago. It's connecting over time that I'm responding to." In the archives and collections of the museum, Wilson was able to discover a wealth of material that the museum had never exhibited, not least of all because it related to a part of Maryland history that embarrassed and even shamed many viewers—the reality of slavery. Wilson brought these materials to light by juxtaposing them with elements of the collection that viewers were used to seeing.

Behind a "punt gun" ostensibly used for hunting game birds on Chesapeake Bay, he placed reward notices for runaway slaves. A document discovered in the archives, an

Fig. 586 (left) and 587 (below)
Mining the Museum, 1922.
Installation details,
Fred Wilson, artist/curator.
Left: Whipping post and chairs for *Cabinetmaking 1820–1960*.
Below: Silver Vessels and Slave Shackles for *Metalwork*.
Photos: Jeff D. Goldman
© Contemporary Museum.

inventory of the estate of one Nicholas Carroll (Fig. 585), lists all his slaves and animals together with their estimated value. What jars the contemporary reader is the fact that least valuable of all, valued at a mere one dollar, is the "negro woman Hannah seventy-three years of age." Even the "old Mule called Coby" is worth five times as much. In the middle of a display of silver repoussé objects made by Maryland craftsmen in the early 1800s (Fig. 587), Wilson placed a set of iron slave shackles, underscoring the fact that Maryland's luxury economy was built on slavery. Similarly, in a display of Maryland cabinetmaking, he placed a whipping post (Fig. 586), which was used until 1938 in front of the Baltimore city jail, and which the museum had ignored for years, storing it with its collection of fine antique cabinets.

But Wilson was equally struck by what was missing from the museum's collection. While the museum possessed marble busts of Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Andrew Jackson, none of whom had any particular impact on Maryland history, it possessed no busts of three great black Marylanders, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and the astronomer and mathematician Benjamin Banneker. Thus, at the entrance to the museum, across from the three marble busts in the museum's collection, he placed three empty pedestals, each identified with the name of its "missing" subject.

"Objects," Wilson says, "speak to me." As an artist, curator, and exhibition designer, Wilson translates what these objects say to him for all of us to hear. "I am trying to root out . . . denial," he says. "Museums are afraid of what they will bring to the surface and how people will feel about issues that are long buried. They keep it buried, as if it doesn't exist, as though people aren't feeling these things anyway, instead of opening that sore and cleaning it out so it can heal."

Fig. 588 Raymond Loewy, Coca-Cola Contour bottle.
Coke, Coca-Cola, the Dynamic Ribbon device, and the design of the Coca-Cola Contour bottle are trademarks of The Coca-Cola Company. Used with permission.

over the course of time, the 1957 redesign of the bottle (Fig. 588) makes it slightly more streamlined and sleeker than earlier versions and changes the embossed lettering to white paint. The script logo itself has remained constant almost since the day Dr. John Pemberton first served the concoction on May 8, 1886, at Jacob's Pharmacy in downtown Atlanta, Georgia. Coke claims that today more than 90 percent of the world's men, women, and children easily recognize the bottle.

By contrast, the designers of Swatch watches, the Swiss husband and wife team Jean Robert and Käti Durrer, conceive of their design identities as kinetic, ever-changing variations on a basic theme (Figs. 589). In recent years, both the television and music industries have more and more turned from producing shows and recordings designed to appeal to the widest possible audience to a concentration on appealing to more narrowly defined, specialized audiences. Television learned this lesson with the series "St. Elsewhere," which had very low overall ratings, but which attracted large numbers of married, young, upper-middle-class professionals—yuppies—with enough disposable income to attract, in turn, major advertising accounts.

In light of this situation, it is no longer necessary to standardize a corporate identity. It may not even be desirable. Illustrated here are eight of the approximately three hundred watch designs produced by Robert and Durrer between 1983 and 1988, which were inspired by a variety of cultures— from Japanese to Native American—and styles. Each watch is designed to allow the wearer's unique individuality to assert itself. "In 1984," Robert and Durrer recall, "we saw a gentleman sitting in the back of his Rolls Royce. We couldn't help noticing a Swatch on his wrist. That showed us how great the breakthrough had been."

Fig. 589 Jean Robert and Käti Durrer, Swatch watches, 1983–1988.
Courtesy Swatch AG, Biel, Switzerland.

Robert and Durrer cater to an increasingly indiviualistic taste, which is precisely the subject of Andrea Zittel's work, a curious mixture of design and high art, mass manufacture and one-of-a-kind "originals." "When I drive down the street in my neighborhood," Zittel says,

> *every single person's yard is landscaped to represent some fantasy of where they live, whether it be an alpine fantasy or a tropical fantasy or a desert fantasy. And they're all these totally separate little universes or environments that are completely honed in. So I've been thinking about . . . how I could actually create a design for a feasible living environment that reflects. . . . capsule living, and how especially . . . it's more and more about creating your own bubble, your own capsule.*

Fig. 590 Andrea Zittel, *A-Z Management & Maintenance Unit: Model 003,* 1992.
Steel, wood, carpet, plastic, washbasin, hotplates, glass, mirror, 7 ft. 2 in. x 7 ft. 10 in. x 5 ft. 8 in.
Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

Zittel specializes in the design and construction of functional dwelling spaces for which she also creates furniture and accessories. In the early nineties, she produced self-contained life "management and maintenance units" (Fig. 590), more or less high-end versions of Krzysztof Wodicsko's *Homeless Vehicles* (see Figs. 86 and 87). These, in turn, inspired her to create three "prototype" travel trailers, with standardized exteriors, produced in fact by a recreational vehicle manufacturer, but with interiors designed to be customized by their owners. In driving her prototype to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art for exhibition in 1995, she noticed that trailers in RV parks were actually parked permanently, and that "the owners of these trailers actually found their freedom in the intimacy of the small and completely controllable universe that they constructed within their trailers." This realization inspired her A-Z Escape Vehicles (Fig. 591), ten identical, but wheel-less recreational vehicles that "can be used to escape to one's 'inner world.'" As each vehicle is purchased, the owners design their own fantasy worlds inside.

Fig. 591 Andrea Zittel, *A-Z Escape Vehicles,* 1996.
Steel, insulating material, wood, glass, each 5 ft. x 3 ft. 4 in. x 7 ft.
Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

FROM:
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by Henry M. Sayre