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## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Date Oct. 2, 1942

To: Mr. Barr

Re: Organic Design

From: A. M. Carson

Dear Alfred:

You asked me for some notes on the results of Organic Design, so here they are. Perhaps when Eliot is here next week for the Poster Jury, he will be able to recall more definitely the minutes of the unofficial meeting in the smoky atmosphere prevailing after the opening of the exhibition.

### SAARINEN & EAMES CHAIRS

Because the three-way molded plywood chairs proved unsatisfactory from both a cost and practical standpoint, Saarinen and Eames submitted sketches to the manufacturer for a two-way molded chair. Unfortunately this design also used rubber padding. This was not accepted by the manufacturer and they have now developed a chair reminiscent of the original chair, but in no way as refined in design. The back is two-way molded plywood, but the back and seat are separate parts and not well put together. The cost is about half that of the original chair. It now comes in two versions, one with an exposed plywood back (at still less cost) and one upholstered all over.

In the September issue of the trade magazine UPHOLSTERY, an article on the effect of the war on upholstered furniture states:

"Perhaps now more than at any time since the first piece of upholstered furniture was designed and built, designers can come into their own. New materials are here to be used, new living conditions demand vast changes in line and proportions; lack of supplies for easy comfort ask the designers to roll up their sleeves and dig in on a job demanding hard work and ingenuity and imagination on fire with the desire to seek out and find a way of building upholstered furniture without relying on the past...."

Recalling the recent show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York of organic design in home furnishings, manufacturers must surely have gained tremendous inspiration at that time, or by remembering it now, for surely the chairs shown then were furniture of the future."

This article was illustrated with a photograph of Saarinen's high back arm chair. The trade has not forgotten the exhibition, a year later.

### Casework

All of the designs for casework in Organic Design were worked out on a module, the Saarinen designs carrying this the furthest. Whether it is as a result of this exhibition or not, there would seem to be much more unit furniture on the market this year than last. Some of the manufacturers had used a limited number of unit designs previously, but they have been more fully developed in this last year. Vertical as well as horizontal flexibility in the arrangement of the units has been in evidence and the use of the bench-base has been repeated. It is possible that the frequent moving of families due to the war, has also influenced the demand for flexible furniture.

Alice

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# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

**Date** Sept. 28, 1942

**To:** Mr. Barr

**Re:** Edgar Kaufmann's

**From:** A. M. Carson

Lecture Course and

Eliot's Lectures

Outline of Edgar's lectures:

ESSENTIALS OF MODERN DESIGN: STRENGTH & UNITY  
EFFICIENCY & GRACE  
ECONOMY & HARMONY

BACKGROUND:

- A. Fine Arts  
Painting and sculpture from 1880 to abstract art
- B. Technical Arts
  - 1. 19th century Engineers
  - 2. The Architect innovators
- C. Pioneers: Morris to Gropius

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN IN ACTION

- A. Bauhaus
- B. Commercial Design: Analysis of Museum Collection  
of Useful Objects by Alice M. Carson \*
- C. Mass Production

\* I had forgotten about this when I said I had not given any lectures

\* \* \* \* \*

Eliot's lectures followed the text of his notes in ORGANIC DESIGN almost to the letter. He used slides covering the same illustrations as in the book.

His lectures were at the WORCESTER ART MUSEUM, in connection with the Advertising Club of Worcester (one of a series of lectures)- in January, 1942; the lecture for the Baltimore Museum of Art was given on April 24, 1942 in connection with the opening of the circulating exhibition of Organic Design and on May 21st was repeated in Baltimore for the American Institute of Decorators.

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## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Date September 24, 1942

To: Mr. Barr

Re: E. Noyes - information  
about Packaging jury

From: Miss Carson

It was the AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION JURY for the Packing Awards<sup>69</sup>  
"Wolf Trophy" given to the Post-Tens Package (General Foods Corp.)  
10 honorable mentions  
held on March 11th. 1942

(see also memo from Mr. Noyes - March 17th)

Attached

of the 177 packages. Each package was to be given a score on the basis of 1000 points for perfection. Packages were to be judged for ten factors, which were weighted for relative importance. I enclose one of the sheets from these books. Apparently they thought I would balk at the values given for considerations of utility over those of beauty, for Mr. Dodd and Mr. Howlett each took me aside and explained that about twenty very wise and experienced men had worked these values out this way.

In operation this system was inefficient, incomplete, and made for superficial judging. Most of the jurors simply squinted at a package, hefted it, and wrote down an arbitrary score of 438. Occasionally they filled in opposite the weighted factors indicated, but often, not knowing how "economical in construction" the package was, left that space blank, thus penalizing the package for their own ignorance. A basic fault with the system was that only the package which had something positive in the ten factors noted could get a top score. For example, there were packages of cellophane, without lettering, which were excellent because the product showed and lettering was not needed. These officially received goose eggs for "use of color" and "good use of lettering", when the rules were followed carefully. (I pointed this out to Mr. Howlett, who shrugged his shoulders.) Actually there wasn't time to go over each package for each factor. In any case it was a waste of time to do it this way, because at least 150 of the 177 were mediocre jobs and could have been eliminated at first. It would then have been much more interesting to take the final 27 or so, discuss the merits of each against the others, find out from different jurors about special technical points, and in this

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*Noyes*

## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Date March 17, 1942

MR. ABBOTT  
 MR. WHEELER  
 To:  MR. BARR

package. I haven't any idea yet which package won the  
 Re: Jury Meeting for the  
Irwin D. Wolf Packaging Award

From: Mr. Noyes  
 on the handling of this award. We are interested in the art of packaging, and we wish to stimulate progressive design in this field. We cannot afford to be satisfied here, any more than we can be made to say that last year's Plymouth was a brilliant design. Last Wednesday I took part in the jury meeting for the Irwin D. Wolf Packaging Award. This was conducted as in former years by the American Management Association and handled largely by Mr. Howlett under the eye of Mr. Alvin Dodd, president of the AMA. The packages under consideration had been collected by a group of sixteen spotters in sixteen parts of the country. Each spotter had been asked to send in ten or a dozen outstanding packages which he had observed in his district during the year. The names of these spotters were not published, so presumably there was no chance for a manufacturer to put any pressure on them. (This has happened in other years.) In all cases, I believe, the spotters were men whose work gave them the opportunity to know what was being produced in packaging, although they were not in the field themselves.

The field is extremely interesting, however, and I think it may be more worth. There were five jurors. At least two of them were from companies whose packages had made the finals and were being judged. The system of judging was carefully worked out in advance. Each juror was given a book with a page for each of the 177 packages. Each package was to be given a score on the basis of 1000 points for perfection. Packages were to be judged for ten factors, which were weighted for relative importance. I enclose one of the sheets from these books. Apparently they thought I would balk at the values given for considerations of utility over those of beauty, for Mr. Dodd and Mr. Howlett each took me aside and explained that about twenty very wise and experienced men had worked these values out this way.

In operation this system was inefficient, incomplete, and made for superficial judging. Most of the jurors simply squinted at a package, hefted it, and wrote down an arbitrary score of 438. Occasionally they filled in opposite the weighted factors indicated, but often, not knowing how "economical in construction" the package was, left that space blank, thus penalizing the package for their own ignorance. A basic fault with the system was that only the package which had something positive in the ten factors noted could get a top score. For example, there were packages of cellophane, without lettering, which were excellent because the product showed and lettering was not needed. These officially received goose eggs for "use of color" and "good use of lettering", when the rules were followed carefully. (I pointed this out to Mr. Howlett, who shrugged his shoulders.) Actually there wasn't time to go over each package for each factor. In any case it was a waste of time to do it this way, because at least 150 of the 177 were mediocre jobs and could have been eliminated at first. It would then have been much more interesting to take the final 27 or so, discuss the merits of each against the others, find out from different jurors about special technical points, and in this

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November 12, 1942

way decide on the best package. I haven't any idea yet which package won the prize (the only prize, incidentally).

If we take on the handling of this award next year, it will be because we are interested in the art of packaging, and we wish to stimulate progressive design in this field. We cannot afford to be awed by success stories here, any more than we can be made to say that last year's Plymouth was a brilliant design achievement because a million of them were sold. With all due regard for considerations of utility, we must change the emphasis so that we can stress design more than they do now. I think that we must make this clear before we take it on at all. Then, if this is settled, we must arrange for a much wider selection of packages to be judged. I feel sure that lots of good ones were simply not seen by the spotters this year. We must make the competition wide open, with adequate published announcements. We must select the jury, and handle all the details of the judging. If we are asked in as design experts, we must handle it as design experts and not simply lend our prestige and the use of the hall while they do the same job they are doing without us. This means that the AMA would have very little to do with it except as they helped us with details. They won't like this, and probably won't want to let us take over.

The field is extremely interesting, however, and I think it may be more worthwhile to explore the possibility of holding a packaging show on our own. This might be something very different from the competition, so that we could enlist the help of the magazine, Modern Packaging, the AMA, and the packaging field in general, in order to introduce packaging as design to the public. The shortage of materials and the need for new and economical solutions may make this year particularly interesting for packaging, and we could perhaps tie it in with the government to help dramatize the campaign against waste.

3. Consumer Convenience	150	_____	per this
4. Production Economy	100	_____	packages
5. Beauty of Design	80	_____	
6. Merchandising Ingenuity	80	_____	
7. Use of Color	75	_____	
8. Illustrative Ingenuity	70	_____	
9. Use of Materials	70	_____	
10. Use of Typography or Lettering	65	_____	
TOTAL	1000		

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PACKAGE FACTOR WEIGHTS

PACKAGE NO. 98

<u>FACTOR</u>	<u>POINTS</u>	<u>JUROR'S SCORE</u>	
1. Buying Information	165	.....	
2. Display Visibility	160	.....	Total score
3. Consumer Convenience	130	.....	for this
4. Production Economy	100	.....	package:
5. Beauty of Design	85	.....	
6. Merchandising Ingenuity	80	.....	
7. Use of Color	75	.....	
8. Construction Ingenuity	70	.....	
9. Use of Materials	70	.....	
10. Use of Typography or Lettering	65	.....	
TOTAL	1000		

you might like to see the enclosed letter.

Harr

Re: Letter from Mr. Kaufman to  
Miss Carson

Date September 11, 1942

JM OF MODERN ART

... After all, this  
our present duties:  
in the Museum, (a task  
as sponsors of new designs  
platitudeous I know,  
I feel the need  
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# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

**Date** September 11, 1942

**To:** Mr. Abbott, Mr. Barr

**Re:** Letter from Mr. Kaufman to

**From:** Mr. Kaufman

Miss Carson

Miss Carson and I thought you might like to see the enclosed letter.

badly needed to clarify future progress.

Beyond this we have necessarily to continue our present duties: keeping up the appearance of furniture and other objects in the Museum, (a task which I feel is really pretty important); and acting as sponsors of new designs in the market.

Everything up to this point has been rather platitudinous I know, and it is this in particular that you wanted me to jot down.— I feel the need of a clear cut policy along these lines; first, we should sponsor new, well-designed articles whenever they appear, always without charge, and in any way possible. I am thoroughly in favor of the Museum's name being used in connection with such articles as we single out for our permanent collection or for exhibition. I know that up to now we have made some discrimination between the Museum's name being used in publicity and its being used in advertising. Frankly, I don't



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September 10, 1942

Dear Alice,

You have asked me to put down thoughts about the department before I go away.

I think our most important work lies as you have yourself suggested in activities that will bear fruit in the post-war period. Of these the most important are retrospective analytic collections of industrial design which could be either assembled as exhibits or published; and, of course, forecasts of industrial design which should be more effective as shows than as books.

We have talked of a big automobile show which would combine the retrospective and prospective view. This would surely be as influential an exhibit as any we could do. We've also talked of a series of small albums of the best industrial design between the wars -- a collation of the work in our field badly needed to clarify future progress.

Beyond this we have necessarily to continue our present duties: keeping up the appearance of furniture and other objects in the Museum, (a task which I feel is really pretty important); and acting as sponsors of new designs in the market.

Everything up to this point has been rather platitudinous I know, and it is this in particular that you wanted me to jot down. -- I feel the need of a clear cut policy along these lines, first, we should sponsor new, well-designed articles whenever they appear, always without charge, and in any way possible. I am thoroughly in favor of the Museum's name being used in connection with such articles as we single out for our permanent collection or for exhibition. I know that up to now we have made some discrimination between the Museum's name being used in publicity and its being used in advertising. Frankly, I don't

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see any reason why we shouldn't allow people to use our name in their advertising about a specific item as long as that item has our deliberate support.

In helping manufacturers and designers join forces, I think that we should always charge a fee, even if a modest one. I think that we should where possible watch over the development of the product and should then be extremely cautious of allowing our name to be used in connection with the final result. Of course, if we have been able to make a good arrangement, the article may well turn out to be so satisfactory that we would choose to single it out even had we had no earlier interest in it. At that point I think we should revert to the first part of the policy as above.

We have two rather dangerous temptations -- first, to dissipate our time and energy in war work not directly constructive in the field of industrial design; second, to have recourse to "applied painting." While the use of good painters as designers proved successful in the rug show, it would be a shame if similar efforts were to become a big portion of our activity. After all, this represents mere trimming on large and more important work.

If there is something that the Industrial Design Department can do to help the war, it is quite clear that we should do it as well and as promptly as possible, and my only hesitation in such matters is lest we make the mistake of considering such efforts part of our regular program. It would be better in the long run, I am sure, to admit that we had to abandon temporarily our real activities in order to do war work than it would be to kid ourselves that by doing certain kinds of war work we were building up the department or helping industrial design in this country.

As you know, I feel that we should do everything possible to abet the program which promises so well in Washington -- I mean d'Harnoncourt's Inter-American Handcraft Project. I still feel that it would be of great value to

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have a preliminary show and one after a period of time in order to show the exact direction which such an effort had taken.

If we can begin to really accomplish most of the things outlined above, it would, of course, be an enormous achievement and I don't in the least envy your having to determine which of them is most possible and most profitable during the immediate future.