

NEWS FROM GOOD DESIGN

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART • THE MERCHANDISE MART

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JUNE GOOD DESIGN SELECTIONS REFLECT PROGRESSIVE INTERESTS

Progressive designs for home furnishings recently launched on the market are being shown in the new Good Design exhibition that opened on Wednesday, June 24, on the 11th floor of The Merchandise Mart, Chicago, under the joint sponsorship of The Mart and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Museum's Selection Committee, of which Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., Director of Good Design, is permanent chairman, chose approximately 200 items which were added to those selected in January and were installed in the dramatic settings created for Good Design by Alexander Girard, well-known modern architect and designer. These items were chosen from 8,000 entries submitted; in the exhibition they replace items selected last June.

Mr. Wallace O. Ollman, General Manager of The Mart, presided at a special press breakfast on Wednesday, June 24, at 9 a.m. in the Merchants and Manufacturers Club on the 2nd floor of The Mart and thus officially opened the new exhibition during the first week of the market. The speaker on this occasion, introduced by Mr. Kaufmann, was Francis Brennan, Art Adviser to the Editor-in-Chief of Time, Inc. Mr. Brennan showed slides of the new Time and Life Building in London where many of England's best designers collaborated on one of the more ambitious design commissions of recent years. Members of the press, designers and other breakfast guests were then invited to view the Good Design exhibition on the 11th floor. From 2 to 5 p.m., open house was held for manufacturers, distributors and other interested market guests.

Selection Committee:

Mr. Kaufmann, chairman of the Committee, was joined in reviewing the June market merchandise by Florence Knoll, New York architect-designer of note, and Harry Jackson, executive vice-president of the Jackson Furniture Co., Oakland, California.

Selections from both the January and June exhibitions at The Mart will form an exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in New York to open on September 23, 1953.

General Trends:

The mood of conservative design manifested in the January exhibition is replaced this season by a strong and progressive interest in today's forms, technologies and materials. This new direction is particularly evident in the furniture and the fabrics added to the exhibition. In these fields it seems that designers are working on a continuation and development of certain classic themes in modern design. They have made improvements, have re-worked these ideas to meet changes of taste, production and distribution as manifested today, with the full benefit of past experience.

Enterprising designers seem to veer more and more away from a nostalgic interest in the past towards a convinced affirmation of the values of the present. In many ways this forward outlook has led designers, it seems, towards crisp and formal expressions, away somewhat from the "homespun" textures, soft forms and blended colors that recently have marked modern design.

In line with this increased manifestation of formality one may cite the following trend: reduced emphasis on medium tones, whether in woods or in textiles. Both have a tendency instead towards definite dark or light extremes. Muted and blended colors are increasingly replaced on one hand by bright prismatic hues or on the other by unbleached and natural coloration. Shiny metals are more evident now, replacing matte finishes.

In all these developments and changes the direction would appear to be away from softness towards an effect of precision. As in all resumé's of new market trends, it should be made clear here that these new directions need not be thought of as replacing the more familiar type of progressive design, but should, rather, be welcomed as one more evidence of the diversity and richness now apparent in the modern design available today.

Furniture:

More really striking furniture designs have appeared in these new selections than for some time past. Some admirable new groups of furniture have been selected for the exhibition, among them the pieces designed by Harry Bertola, by Charles Eames and by the designer team of Katavolos, Littell and Kelly. These are representative of the best modern design trends in the market. They all tend to place emphasis on technology used as a basis both for creative expression and for practicality. Moreover, this has led to a tendency towards lowered retail price and increased visual interest.

For the moment, at least, effort would seem to have been concentrated in that area of modern design directly concerned with the realities of daily life here and now. The strong interest in Scandinavia and Japan that recently marked modern design has apparently been assimilated and has made a way for these new indications of the future.

Notable for their exceptional comfort and reasonable price are two chairs and an ottoman from Sweden, designed by Folke Ohlsson. Although these continue the Scandinavian emphasis on molded wood shapes, they present this feature in a pleasantly restrained manner. The seats of these pieces are kept low to the floor as in much modern furniture keyed to the general prevalence of low ceilings.

As a counterbalance to the formality of the furniture mentioned above, it is agreeable to find several new terrace pieces of considerable comfort and sensible, unpretentious design.

Fabrics:

The woven textiles in the exhibition seem to carry on tendencies already evident in earlier markets: they show small-scale, clearly defined patterns produced by contrasting fibres with no particular emphasis on boldness either in texture or through other devices. Some tendency is apparent in the direction of smooth and shiny fibres, both synthetic and natural - a logical complement to the increased formality noted in furniture.

In printed textiles there is an interesting assortment of monochrome patterns, generally neat and modestly scaled, contrasting strongly with the splurging patterns and blatant colors once thought necessary in modern print design. These monochromes seem to concentrate on the use of black and dark gray on white and natural. Though many designers are working in this monochromatic direction, the Selection Committee also found a striking group of prints with bright, clear colors, though even here the patterns are fairly modest in scale. A noteworthy example is an extraordinarily bold and brilliant print by one of Sweden's leading architects, Sven Markelius, characterized by the unusual number of screens employed and the big unit of repeat. This print will later be available in other color combinations similar to the one shown, each using many related hues.

The tendency to print designs on very sheer fabrics seems to continue, and the clear, bright tones that mark certain prints are also found in unprinted, solid-color sheers.

Lamps:

Whereas no lamps were selected by the January Good Design Committee, several were picked for the June show. As a group these were marked by simple geometric shapes. White or off-white materials and finishes tend to give these designs a subdued appearance against the white plaster and natural materials predominating in modern interiors, as can be seen in the lamps from Ledlin Lighting and Habitat

Associates (Paul Mayen, designer). None of the lamps selected attempts in any way to be of special interest as a construction or piece of sculpture, thus differing from many conventional and modern lamp designs usually seen. Table lamps and ceiling and wall fixtures are included; there are no floor lamps in the exhibition.

Decorative Accessories:

In contrast to the restrained shapes and structures of the lamps, a number of decorative accessories added to the show are marked by shiny metal surfaces and intriguing shapes. Brass and aluminum both appear in highly polished finishes. These pieces will harmonize well with the shiny metal that is characteristic of the furniture. A few accessories in matte finish black iron are included, notably an inexpensive and amazingly versatile candle holder - designed by Gross and Esther Wood - which, used in groups, can be combined with almost unlimited variety of effect. Although fewer accessories made of glass were added this season, there are three heavy Swedish crystal vases from Strombergshyttan that are outstanding.

In ceramics, a small group is characterized by striking surface decorations in monochrome echoing the trend noted in fabrics. These include two plates by Jane Dickerman, a bowl by Glidden Parker and Fong Chow and a candlestick by Stig Lindberg.

Some unusual candles were added to the show: red and white candles from Japan with graceful shapes, and two neat dripless candles to be used either with or without stands, designed by Helen Pope. One of these is low, round and tapered towards the bottom something like a vigil light; the other, also low and 14" in diameter, is a black doughnut shape, with multiple wicks rising from it.

In view of the dimishing interest in informal, cottagey effects, it is not surprising to find that fewer acceptable designs were presented in wood and in basketry - an area that was heavily represented in the last show.

Tableware:

There is more variety in the tableware selected this season than has been noticeable for some time past. Several place mats with agreeable colors and textures are among these designs. Two new sets of stainless steel flatware are included, one produced in the U.S., the other manufactured abroad from the design of Sam Bordelon of Chicago.

For the first time a Good Design Committee selected several designs for decorated dinnerware, choosing from Raymond Loewy's designs, executed in Germany, some bold hollow-ware shapes lightly decorated with flowers in sweet, clear colors, and some plates, platters and cups with gold and silver spirals called "Coins." Russel Wright's decorated "White Clover" pattern also was selected in casseroles, platters, a pot and a pitcher. The group brings to modern design for mass production the ancient device of cutting through a thin slip of colored clay to reveal another color of clay in the body beneath. Since the resulting pattern is protected by an overall transparent glaze, this kind of ornamentation is as permanent as it is integral to the materials and methods of pottery. This is used not only in Wright's incised decorations but is frequently found in others of the newer colored decorations that are now being applied under a transparent glaze rather than on the surface, a procedure that has proved more desirable with the increased use of detergent cleaners and mechanical washing.

Two groups of table glasses are included: an inexpensive series of tumblers from Duncan Miller Glass and a stemware series in quite dark and elegant crystal by Copier for Leerdam.

Kitchenwares, Appliances, etc.:

A few amusing and agreeable kitchen gadgets are found in the show, such as a set of flexible plastic mixing bowls with spouts and sensible handles, and a versatile small spiral of chromium plated wire called "Kitchen Gem." A household

drill, with hollow handle to hold numerous attachments, is crisply designed in red and gray plastic. A bright green Koroseal garden hose has small perforations along its length, making the hose itself into a spray.

Among the electrical appliances, the smallest is an RCA portable radio in gray plastic. A small washing machine on casters was designed by Henry Dreyfuss for Hoover; it will hold 6 pounds of wash. A large laundry machine and companion dryer comes from Norge. The Committee was particularly impressed by the absence of unnecessary pretentiousness in these four examples and by the coherence of the design throughout each example chosen.

Floor Coverings:

The Committee regretted the absence of floor coverings, though of course this is a field of production in which there is no particular reason to expect fresh ideas every six months, for floor coverings quite properly tend towards a modest though very important role of background to other elements of design in an interior. A number of floor coverings remain in the show from the January selections; and one handsome new handwoven strip by Marianne Strengell was added this season.