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Modern Industrial Design in America

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Syllabus

Industrial design was a consequential creative art in North America. With the steep rise of manufacturing in the mechanical sector and the electronic industry, a watershed of new products flooded the market for domestic living, the workplace and the reformed public realm. The United States took a leading role in fashioning a highly technological world accessible to the masses under the unstoppable impulse of industrial capitalism. This course will cover the contribution of American masters in fashioning the 20th century world, from coffee pots to train cars.

Lesson 1. AMERICAN DESIGN: RAYMOND LOEWY, HENRY DREYFUSS, NORMAN BEL GEDDES, and WALTER DORWIN TEAGUE.
All aspects of daily living underwent profound transformations at an extraordinary speed. The formgivers of modern living carried an American signature. Loewy, Dreyfuss, Bel Geddes and Dorwin Teague set the stage for the complete overhaul of the arsenal of objects determining the American century. This first talk will survey the torrential and imaginative production of these four consequential personalities.

Lesson 2. THE CRANBROOK CASE and THE DETROIT SCENE: ELIEL SAARINEN, EERO SAARINEN, CHARLES EAMES, NIELS DIFFRIENT, and HARLEY EARL
The founding of the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1932 greatly shaped modern design in the United States. Under the leadership of Finnish American architect Eliel Saarinen, a new teaching method determined the creative output of legendary designers such as his son Eero, Charles Eames, and Niels Diffrient among others. Detroit at the time was the center of the automotive industry which found its golden age in the postwar period with the arrival from Los Angeles of car designer Harley Early, who invented the styling of cars. This second lecture deals with this extraordinary cast of characters, their interrelatedness, and their works.

Lesson 3. FIVE BIG PERSONALITIES: GEORGE NELSON, GEORGE NAKASHIMA, ELIOT NOYES, RUSSEL WRIGHT, and WARREN PLATNER
Modern design had taken hold in the USA by the end of World War II. A society eager to turn page in peacetime found in the recasting of the everyday objects of living and working a new identity. Both in the residential market and in the corporate sector, industrial designers and architects took the lead in shaping the tools of the jet age. The five very different personalities were at the center of this design revolution and are the subject of the third delivery.

Lesson 4. CALIFORNIA DESIGN: VAN KEPPEL-GREEN, RUDOLPH SCHINDLER, RICHARD NEUTRA, and EDITH HEATH.

With the rise of architectural photography and its appearance in shelter magazines, modern furniture and pieces of industrial designs were props for the staging of iconic images of post-war living. The Chaise Lounge of Van Keppel-Green appeared in two of the most known images of Julius Shulman: The Kaufmann House in Palm Springs by Richard Neutra and the Case Study House #22 in West Hollywood by Pierre Koenig. Even earlier, both Schindler and Neutra designed furniture and fixtures for their revolutionary spaces. In the Bay Area, the studio potter Edith Heath was designing her most enduring products. This fourth lecture tackles the contribution to industrial design of Californians.