Bright New World

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ABSTRACT

After World War II, a distinctive new look emerged, known as 'Contemporary'. The 'Contemporary' style in Britain had its own very particular character. I will consider some of the factors that contributed to the establishment of the 'Contemporary' style in Britain : the influence of the fine arts, developments in American, Scandinavian and Italian design and the significance of the 'Festival of Britain' exhibition. I will look at the impact of war on domestic interior design and lifestyle and shall consider the growing importance of science and technology, as well as the role played by the growth of consumerism in an increasingly affluent society. The catalogue is based on the reconstruction of a British 'Contemporary' interior, c. 1957, and will feature furnishings typical of a fashionable room of this era. Despite some resistance from the British public and a tendency to cling to old familiar styles of interior, I will establish that 'Contemporary' style represented a new way of life and that, after World War II, there was no returning to the ideas and tastes of a pre-war world. Modern life was here to stay.

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1. INTRODUCTION

World War II was a period of destruction and deprivation and its ensuing years were marred by shortages of materials, labour and money. However, a new spirit of vigour and optimism prevailed. Art and design were approached with fresh enthusiasm and a distinctive new look emerged : the characteristic 1950s style, known as 'Contemporary'.

In Britain, art and design were seen as part of the national effort[1]. The government had established the Utility Scheme in 1941, a programme which stipulated which materials, colours and designs should be used in furniture manufacture. Based on the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement, Utility furniture was plain with clean, uncluttered lines. In the process of putting the past behind them, the British public rejected the austerity of the Utility Scheme and welcomed a new style, which offered a multitude of choices – in pattern, colour, texture and form. They were eager for change.

The 'Contemporary' style was not derived from any single style. It encompassed a variety of influences, ranging from the Modern movement of the 1930s and the fine arts, especially abstract painting and sculpture, to the traditions of the Arts and Crafts movement and the input of new scientific and technological advances. America, Scandinavia and Italy were all leaders in the establishment of the emerging style. Although Britain was hindered by the after-effects of the war and lacked manufacturer investment and the support of the press, a distinct

version of 'Contemporary' style was able to evolve. The government made a considerable contribution to the promotion of new standards of design.

The Council of Industrial Design (CoID) was set up in 1944 to play "a vital part after the War in stimulating the sale, at home and overseas, of a wide range of goods of which we can all be justly proud"[2]. In 1946 the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition took place at the Victoria & Albert Museum. Its purpose was to act as a showcase for British design and to encourage public interest. However, as a result of the constraints on raw materials and the general unavailability of items in the exhibition, the press complained that 'Britain Can't Have It'[3]. Despite a certain amount of criticism, the exhibition was a success and played an important role in the initial establishment of the 'Contemporary' style.

The 'Festival of Britain' was held in 1951 as a display of British accomplishment in the arts, architecture, design and sciences. Over 10,000 objects were picked by the CoID to exemplify a high standard of design and the Festival provided a forum for talented designers to display their innovative work. Although it was predominantly an appropriate milestone to symbolise the changing times, the Festival had an important impact on the standards of design in the subsequent decade and was particularly influential in domestic interior design. The public had been made aware of the new possibilities in furnishings and decor and intended to act on them.

In 1945 a Labour government had been elected and this change in political ideals was reflected by the new public housing initiative. The devastating bomb

damage wreaked by World War II created an enormous demand for new housing and schools. The revolutionary architectural design of the modern houses built in Hatfield, the Roehampton Estate and the radical schools set up in Hertfordshire contributed to public acceptance of the 'Contemporary' style[4]. A new style of domestic life accompanied architectural progression. Open plan interiors became popular and much attention was given to the issues of efficiency and economy in the home. The availability of interior design magazines helped to further educate the public and department stores such as Heal's made modern designs more readily accessible.

The 'Contemporary' style predominated throughout the 1950s. Designers such Ernest Race, Robin Day and Clive Latimer, changed the face of British post-war design. By the 1960s, 'Contemporary' had lost its original impact and new styles began to emerge as society left the remnants of a post-war world behind once and for all.

1.1 BRIGHT NEW WORLD – AN EXHIBITION

The exhibition is centred around the reconstruction of a middle income living room, c.1957. This living room is based on an authentic example featured in the 1956 Book of Good Housekeeping[5] (Fig. 1). It was part of a 'Contemporary' style house, built in 1951 by Philip Powell and Hidalgo Moya, the architects responsible for the 'Festival of Britain' Skylon. The house is long and narrow and the living room is 30 by 15 feet, in concurrence with the popularity of open planning, although unusual in that it uses no room dividers to break up the space. The objects in the exhibition catalogue are intended to reflect the room's

decorative trends : a mixture of fashionable designer objects, mass-produced furniture in the 'Contemporary' style and more traditional items. The construction of the exhibition would take place in a similar space, with white painted brick walls and cork flooring, to create a realistic atmosphere (see Floorplan). Although the exhibition catalogue is not an exact replica of the model living room, it incorporates several of the same items, as well as those of a similar style and period.

Although the 'Contemporary' style is intrinsically linked to the 1950s, this living room would have been a very progressive room for the times. Only a small proportion of the British population would have lived in such an unusual modern house decorated in the latest fashion. However, the intention of the exhibition is to illustrate a living room in the 'Contemporary' style, rather than an average late 1950s living room.

2. BRITISH CONTEMPORARY STYLE

The birth of the 'Contemporary' style in the late 1940s and early 1950s was unusual in that the aesthetic changes taking place in the design world did so internationally. This was facilitated by the influx of European designers into the USA, escaping from the chaos of the war and the occurrence of many international design exhibitions[6]. The 'Contemporary' style had evolved from the simplicity of form and lack of ornament prevalent in the designs of the Modern movement, but it incorporated features of the fine arts to create a style influenced by organic lifeforms and abstract pattern. Despite the internationality of the 'Contemporary' style, each nation developed its own distinct version. Although America, Scandinavia and Italy were the leaders in the new design movement, British 'Contemporary' style was to develop its own look, based on a variety of influences.

2.1 UTILITY SCHEME

The severity of 1930s Modernism was never fully accepted in Britain. The influence of the Victorian era, and its preponderance for overblown and eclectic decoration, still lingered on. The Arts and Crafts movement and the opinions of William Morris had helped to promote a simple style of craftsmanship which combined straightforward design with high quality materials and manufacturing techniques. However, it wasn't until the establishment of the Utility Scheme in 1941 that the British really became accustomed to simplicity in design.

As a result of the huge shortages in raw materials throughout the war, the government decided to exert a stronger control over the destiny of those that were available. The Board of Trade, directed by Hugh Dalton, took charge of the furniture industry with the aim of manufacturing, "furniture of sound construction in simple but agreeable design, for sale at reasonable prices and ensuring the maximum economy of raw materials and labour"[7]. Utility furniture was highly functional and lacked any kind of ornamentation, which would cause additional expense. Therefore, it was extremely plain and light, although well proportioned and constructed.

Utility furniture was revolutionary because it made modern furniture available to everyone. However, its reception by the public, the retailers and the furniture industry was generally negative. The furniture designers deplored the lack of creativity involved in the construction of Utility furniture, despite the 1948 'Freedom of Design' act, which allowed individual designs, as long as they used the specified amount of timber. The retailers found Utility furniture hard to sell and the general public complained that it made a room cold, uncomfortable and difficult to live in. Although some believed that the government intervention in design standards had permanently changed the public's taste, it is clear that many people returned to buying a traditional historicised style of furniture as soon as the Utility restrictions ended in 1951 (See Section 4). Utility furniture may not have been universally popular, but through familiarity, simplistic styles became more acceptable to the public. Utility was an important precursor to British 'Contemporary' design. The new style favoured simple, streamlined forms, but included a great deal of bright colour and exciting pattern. After the plainness of

the Utility Scheme, the public were accustomed to the uncluttered form and welcomed the return of colour and pattern with relief.

2.2 THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

The 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition of 1946 had demonstrated that British manufacturers were prepared to tolerate a selective process, if it meant their goods might be part of a large trade exhibition. It had also proved that there was considerable public interest in design. The success of 'Britain Can Make It' was a necessary precursor to the 'Festival of Britain', another large exhibition intended to commemorate the centenary of the 1851 Great Exhibition.

The 'Festival of Britain' consisted of an exhibition on the London South Bank, as well as numerous local events, and was a year long display that aimed to showcase British expertise in science, art and design. Gerald Barry, Director General of the Festival, described it as "a tonic to the nation" and this attitude was reinforced by the Festival symbol, a four-pointed star surmounted by the head of Britannia (Fig. 2). The Festival Star, designed by Abram Games, was chosen to represent the mood of the Festival and this feeling is summed up in a poem published as part of a 'Festival of Britain' anthology,

> " Her form is gaunt and steadfast,
> Her chin is lifted high,
> Optimism is her motto –
> And she will ne'er say die."[8]

The contribution made by the Festival to the establishment of a British 'Contemporary' style is subject to some debate. The purpose of the Festival was to encourage a new sense of energy and optimism in Britain. The ravages of the war were still only too evident in the architectural damage caused by the bombing and the lack of raw materials. This was a difficult time for designers and, in this sense, the Festival was an extremely important patron for talented designers like Robin Day and Ernest Race, as well as artists like Graham Sutherland and Ben Nicholson. All the objects displayed at the Festival had been chosen by the CoID. This Design Index of 10,000 objects contributed to the creation of a consistent style which was often referred to as the 'Festival' style [9].

Although the 'Festival' style caught the interest of the public, it was not particularly long-lived. More important was the relationship that the Festival established between disciplines, especially between the arts and the sciences. This is exemplified by the Festival Pattern Group which used crystallography as an inspiration for pattern design. Science was to become increasingly linked to design over the 1950s and the Festival contributed to this development. The Festival gave the public an idea of what might be possible in design, but it is by no means certain that it truly reflected the design of the time or represented a decisive moment in the formation of British aesthetic taste. However, it played an important role in influencing the media. Over the next decade, with the growing popularity of television, the media, hungry for new ideas and imagery, was to become increasingly important in the establishment of public opinions on design[10].

2.3 THE INFLUENCE OF THE FINE ARTS

The post-war desire for change brought about a completely new style of design in the decorative arts. The fine arts were extremely influential in forging this new look, affecting both three-dimensional form and surface pattern.

The predominant influence on the development of the characteristic 1950s organic form was sculpture, especially the pre-war sculptors. Constantin Brancusi's abstract and simplistic sculptures reduced natural forms to their most basic elements. They were particularly inspirational for 'Contemporary' glassmakers such as Tapio Wirkkala, although Powell and Moya's 'Festival of Britain' Skylon strongly resembled Brancusi's 'Bird in Space' of 1919[11]. Jean Arp's abstract organic forms reflected the organic line so representative of 1950s design and Henry Moore influenced the evolution of three-dimensional organic shapes present in 'Contemporary' ceramics, glass and furniture. Many sculptors also became directly involved with the decorative arts: Pablo Picasso with ceramics; Isamo Noguchi with furniture; and Eduardo Paolozzi with textiles.

The fine arts also played an important role in the development of 'Contemporary' patterns. In the early 1950s, the abstract paintings of Joan Miró and Paul Klee were to have a large impact on pattern. This was particularly evident in the sphere of textile design, especially in the work of Lucienne Day. Day's 'Calyx' fabric (Cat. 1) was designed for the 'Festival of Britain' and was displayed in one of Robin Day's room settings in the Homes and Gardens Pavilion. Lucienne Day had convinced Tom Worthington, the design director of Heal's, to print the

fabric, arguing that Heal's would not otherwise be featured at the Festival. 'Calyx' was clearly influenced by works like Miró's 1949 painting, 'Women and Birds in the Moonlight' (Fig. 3)[12]. Miró's use of shape and stark colour contrasts may be seen in 'Calyx', which was originally printed in lime-yellow, vermillion, black and white on an olive ground. In addition, Day had incorporated elements of the natural world into her design. The calyx consists of the outer leaves of a flower, which cover and protect it while in bud. On discussing 'Calyx', Day commented that she "wanted it to have a sense of growth, but not to be a floral pattern. It is based on plant life, although it is very abstracted"[13].

'Calyx' enjoyed a great deal of success, both aesthetically and commercially. It spawned many imitations, most notably Marion Mahler's cheaper version for David Whitehead Fabrics Ltd., a firm which made textiles in the modern 'Festival' style at reasonable prices which the general public could afford. These included fabrics like Terence Conran's abstract design, in which the influence of Miró, as well as Lucienne Day, is evident (Fig. 4). The British textile industry was particularly strong in the early 1950s and the trend for fine art inspired fabrics permeated the design world.

In the middle of the decade, pattern absorbed new inspiration from contemporary painters like the American abstract expressionists. The splashy abstract style of Jackson Pollock and Sam Francis was used in dress and furnishing fabrics, such as those produced by Danish textile company Unika Vaev, manufacturers of 'Doodledash' and 'Doodlepoint'[14]. As Britain had little exposure to the abstract expressionists, the trend for this type of pattern never really took off. Instead, the

two-dimensional 'Festival' style was superceded by a more painterly style of patterning. The Institute of Contemporary Art's 1953 exhibition 'Painting into Textiles' displayed textiles which had been designed by artists. John Piper's textile designs for Sanderson were executed in a similar style (Fig. 5). By the end of the decade, the fashion for luxurious and grandiose textiles had reached its peak[15].

Textiles was not the only medium to absorb ideas from the fine arts. The abstract 'Festival' style of patterning was also used prolifically in the decoration of ceramics, wallpaper and plastic laminates. Many commercial potteries adopted abstract patterns, finding them particularly appropriate for the decoration of their ceramics. The Poole Pottery combined organic shapes with bold 'Contemporary' patterns. Alfred Burgess Read's vase of 1953 exemplifies the use of linear patterning on a curvacious carafe-shaped body (Cat. 8). There was some overlap between the textile and ceramics industries. Terence Conran's 'Chequers' design was not only used as a furnishing fabric for David Whitehead Fabrics Ltd., but also for the Midwinter Pottery. However, the industrial potteries reflected only a portion of the ceramics market and the studio potteries represented another aspect of 'Contemporary' style.

The studio potteries made an extremely important contribution to the evolution of a 'Contemporary' ceramic style in Britain. The Rye Pottery, founded by John and Walter Cole in 1947, combined modern surface decoration with a traditional majolica body. Although the decoration owed more to scientific motifs than those of the fine arts, the abstract two-dimensional pattern style reflected the

popular style of the early 1950s. The individual studio potters were also very influential. Bernard Leach had been the keystone of studio pottery since the 1930s and his oriental-style ware remained popular throughout the 1950s. However, it was clear that a new school of studio pottery was emerging. In 1952, Leach organized the Dartington International Conference on pottery and textiles. The conference was criticised by some, although the work of two potters attracted attention. "Only the stoneware of Hans Coper and the porcelain of Lucy Rie remains outside the atmosphere of rural quietism. They alone make the point that the whole exhibition was intended to make. They show that the artist craftsman is not necessarily an anachronism in our time" [16].

Lucie Rie had emigrated to England from Vienna and her pottery is strongly reminiscent of the aesthetics of the Modern movement which had influenced her as a student. The forms of her pots are simple and pure, the clay is very thin and delicately crafted. Their surface is white, black or brown, decorated with a repetitive linear pattern which follows the contours of the clay. The lines are either inlaid with clay of a constrasting colour or created by *sgraffito*[17] to reveal the body beneath the glaze (Cat. 7). Rie was chiefly inspired by Neolithic pots bearing the remnants of their woven prototypes that she viewed at Avesbury in Wiltshire. Her work also reflects the contemporary art of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The most obvious comparison is the glass of Tapio Wirkkala. His 'Kantarelli' vases are also engraved with parallel lines following the form of the body (Fig. 6). Both Rie's pots and Wirkkala's glass contain echoes of the sculpture of Naum Gabo[18].

Another group of potters were greatly influenced by the ceramics of Picasso. Derogaratively named the 'Picassettes' by Bernard Leach, the group attempted to capture the effect of painting and sculpture in their pots. At this time, it was not unusual to see artists crossing over into the world of design. Bernard Schottlander used his talent as a sculptor to create a variety of exciting lights (Cat. 12) and Eduardo Paolozzi designed many textiles and wallpapers. Throughout the 1950s, the public was unusually tolerant of the developments in contemporary art. This may be attributed to the adoption of abstract patterns by the decorative arts. The public was exposed to the new images through familiar and mundane objects. The 'Homemaker' range of tableware was only available at Woolworths, a shop selling household goods at low prices. This range was decorated with a variety of 'Contemporary' furniture designs which illustrate the progressive popularity of modern furniture. The background was an abstract linear pattern (Fig. 7). In addition, abstract art could be easily adapted for surface decoration whereas the art of earlier periods would not have been appropriate[19]. The incorporation of the fine arts into 1950s decorative arts was essential in that it made a large contribution to the establishment of the vibrant 'Contemporary' style.

3. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE 1950S

3.1 NEW MATERIALS

During World War II considerable scientific and technological progress was made. The potential of the resulting materials and techniques was recognized by many designers and incorporated into the designs of the 1950s. Ernest Race's BA range of 1945 is a perfect example of how technological developments could be used to create furniture that was elegant and stylish, as well as practical. As a result of the shortages in more traditional funiture materials, Race's BA3 dining chair was constructed from cast *aluminium alloy* (Fig. 8). The seat was stuffed with rubberised hair and covered with ex-RAF lightweight cotton duck, dyed blue, terracotta or green[20]. A variety of materials have always been used in furniture construction and, during the 19th century, there had been a conscious effort to experiment with new materials. However, the developments of the past were nothing in comparison to the diversity of materials used in the 20th century[21].

3.1.1 Wood

Despite the influx of new materials into the furniture trade, wood continued to be the dominant material used in furniture construction. As part of the new approach to methods and materials, furniture makers began to experiment with *plywood.* Composed of wood *veneers* glued together with the grain at right angles, plywood is light and strong and can be manipulated like metal. Plywood

had been popular with the Modern movement in the 1930s and the first use of bent plywood has been attributed to Alvar Aalto[22]. Marcel Breuer also experimented with plywood. His 1935 Isokon Long chair (Fig. 9) was initially made in plywood, and subsequently in *laminated wood.* One of the advantages of this plywood chair was that it could be made and assembled in the workshop, whereas Breuer's earlier aluminium version had to undergo a more complex construction in a metal factory[23].

Another influential participant in the evolution of plywood furniture was Charles Eames. The importance of his and Eero Saarinen's award-winning plywood chair designs in the 1940 'Organic Design in Home Furnishings' competition at the Museum of Modern Art was acknowledged in the exhibition catalogue: "A significant innovation was that, in the case of chairs by Saarinen and Eames, a manufacturing method never previously applied to furniture was employed to make a light structural shell consisting of layers of plastic glue and wood veneer molded in 3D forms"[24]. Eames went on to found the Moulded Plywood Division of the Evans Products Company and continued to develop plywood technology during the war.

World War II furthered the advancement of the plywood industry. In Britain, the building of gliders, landing craft and the Mosquito plane had all involved plywood. Although British designers did not have access to the same technological knowledge or equipment as Charles Eames, some important pieces of plywood furniture were made. These included Robin Day's Hillestak chair which used plywood moulded in a single direction (Fig. 10). The chair had a

solid beech frame, walnut-veneered plywood seat and back, and a laminated wood spine. As other new materials were experimented with, the initial popularity of plywood began to decline. However, its useful qualities meant that it continued to play a significant role in furniture construction.

3.1.2 Metal

Although metal had been used in furniture in the 19th century, its true potential was not fully exploited until the 1920s and 30s, when the Modern movement embraced metal as an appropriate symbol of modernity. Marcel Breuer's Wassily chair (Fig. 11) and Mart Stam's S33 cantilever chair (Fig. 12) were both constructed from a tubular steel frame, an innovative notion which made use of the strength and flexibility of the metal. These chairs represented the machine aesthetic, the form and materials reflecting the qualities of machine production[25]. The metal furniture of the late 1940s and 50s was completely different in conception from these earlier versions. The main impetus behind later metal furniture was the shortage of wood during and after the war. Metal was a practical alternative and very suitable for mass production.

Aluminium had been used by Marcel Breuer in the 1930s. Although it possesses such favourable qualities as lightness, flexibility and resilience, it is much weaker than steel. Ernest Race designed his BA chair to use resmelted aluminium alloy from wartime aircraft scrap[26]. To compensate for its lack of strength, a tapering T section was used for the legs, so that the greatest support was just under the seat. An additional consideration was that the T section allowed simpler surface finishing.

Aluminium was also used with other substances to achieve an end result that combined lightness with strength. These *stressed-skin materials* had arisen out of experimentation in World War II. Race used a stressed-skin material known as *Holoplast,* a lightweight honey-comb cored plastic laminated with a mahogany veneer, which could be finished with an aluminium exterior[27]. It was used for table tops and cabinets and was heat and scratch resistant. Clive Latimer worked with Heal's to produce a range of furniture made from *Plymet*, an aluminium sheet veneered with ash or rosewood, which could be bent to create seats and backs bonded to a steel frame[28]. Plymet furniture was never manufactured for sale, although prototypes were displayed at the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition (Fig. 13).

Steel was also used in furniture construction. Its great strength meant that it could be used in the form of very thin rods or wire. Ernest Race made a considerable contribution to steel rod furniture. His Antelope chair (Fig. 14) was designed for the 'Festival of Britain' and the welding technique involved in its construction made it very light, an important feature of its function as a stacking chair. In America, Harry Bertoia's 1952 Diamond chair was also influential (Fig. 15).

3.1.3 Plastic

The new material that was to make the biggest impact on design was plastic. Plastic had its origins in the 19th century and was first used by the furniture trade in 1926. By the end of World War II, the technology of colour application had

improved. Whereas the earliest plastics had been dark or very pale, post-World War II plastics were brightly coloured, coinciding with the trend for colour and pattern in domestic interiors, a reaction against the drabness of the war years. The potential of plastics was quickly recognized. A large display of plastics and rubber was shown at the 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition and, in a 1956 publication on 'Contemporary' furniture, the author refers to plastics, commenting that, "Nothing quite so significant has made such an impact on the furniture trade for many years"[29].

The first application of plastics to furniture was as *laminates*. These could be used as brightly coloured table tops and drawer fronts, with the added advantage of heat and scratch resistance. A number of other important plastics arose after the war. These included polystyrene, polyurethane and glass fibre reinforced plastic (GRP) and were used to create some imaginative and innovative designs, especially in chairs. One of the earliest plastic chairs was designed by Charles Eames (Fig. 16). The seat of his DAR chair was made from moulded fibreglass, the silkiness and softness of which made it both attractive to look at and comfortable to sit on. Later in the decade, other designers began to exploit the unique qualities of plastic. Eero Saarinen's Tulip chair of 1957 had a fibreglass seat supported on a plastic-coated aluminium base to give the impression it was made entirely of plastic (Fig. 17). Estelle and Erwine Laverne used transparent perspex for their Daffodil chair of 1958 (Fig. 18).

Plastic was not restricted to furniture. *Melamine* was a tough, shiny plastic used for tableware, which became a popular alternative to ceramics. It was unbreakable, cheap and was produced in a range of bright colours (Fig. 19).

3.2 MASS PRODUCTION

The 1950s was the first decade in which modern furniture became widely available to the general public. New manufacturing techniques enabled the mass production of inexpensive good quality furniture. Erno Goldfinger stated in his 1951 book, 'British Furniture Today' that "the machine which has so utterly changed everyday life has also broken the spell of the 'styles' and, paradoxically enough, humanized furniture design"[30]. The concept of furniture as something for human use rather than purely for aesthetic appreciation was reflected in the attitudes of several furniture manufacturing companies. Hille was one of the few British companies to experiment with new materials, with the aim of providing an affordable, yet stylish product. Robin Day, as part of his work for Hille, designed numerous innovative items, which combined modern materials with fresh exciting styles. These include the Hillestak chair, the plywood chair commissioned for the 'Festival of Britain' and, most importantly, the Polypropylene chair of 1963 (Fig. 20). Polypropylene was discovered in 1954 and Robin Day's chair exploited its lightness, flexibility and inertness. Its moulded shell was cheap and comfortable and could be produced incredibly quickly[31].

Furniture was not the only sector in which mass production flourished. The textiles industry had been changed by the replacement of the old, expensive copper rollers with a mechanized screen printing device. Although Lucienne Day's 'Calyx' was a relatively expensive material, a cheaper imitation was made by Marion Mahler for David Whitehead Fabrics Ltd[32].

Mass production was applicable to all areas of domestic interiors. A commercially successful object had to be easy to mass produce as well as visually appealing. As the demands of the consumer market increased, technology began to take over from craftsmanship as the major source of furniture production.

3.3 SCIENCE AND DESIGN

During the 1950s, art and design became strongly affiliated to the sciences, reflecting the post-war feeling that the future was more important than the past. In their attempt to forget the past and forge a successful future, many considered science and technology as the means by which it could be achieved. The most influential disciplines were organic chemistry, microbiology, nuclear physics and space exploration[33]. As the most accessible of the sciences, biology had a strong influence on both pattern and form. The undulating, assymetrical organic forms seen in objects of all media, mimic those of the natural world. Biological motifs used as pattern are present on a variety of items, including Matisse's 'Polynésie' textiles and Jessie Tait's Primavera range of ceramics (Fig. 21).

A particularly successful alliance of science and design was executed by the Festival Pattern Group. Set up in 1949 as part of the 'Festival of Britain', the group used diagrams provided by Dr Helen Megaw of Cambridge University as inspiration for abstract patterns which would be used to adorn textiles, wallpaper, ceramics and other media. These crystal structures were considered very appropriate because, as the initiator of the project – Mark Hartland Thomas – remarked, they "had the discipline of exact repetitive symmetry ... they were essentially modern because the technique that constructed them was quite recent, and yet, like all successful decoration of the past, they derived from nature – although it was nature at a submicroscopic scale not previously revealed"[34]. The experiment resulted in some commercially successful designs such as Marianne Straub's 'Surrey' and 'Helmsley' textiles derived from the structures of afwillite and nylon (Fig. 22). A similar application of science to design was used by Tibor Reich in his patterning technique 'Fotexur', which used scientific photographs as the basis of patterns[35].

The 1950s was also a time of groundbreaking developments in the exploration of space. The Space Age began in 1957 when the satellite Sputnik I was launched by the Russians. Space was a new source of inspiration for designers. The first alleged sighting of a flying saucer in 1947 captured the public's imagination and, by the mid 1950s, the characteristic flying saucer shape was depicted in a diverse range of objects, from lamps (Fig. 23) to electric heaters (Fig. 24).

It was the field of nuclear science which had the most striking effect on 'Contemporary' design. Throughout the 1950s huge progress was made in

atomic physics. The molecular structure of the atom gave rise to the '*cocktail cherry*' style, prevalent in a great deal of fifties design, from chair legs to wallpaper patterns. The most notorious example was George Nelson's 'Ball Clock' (Cat. 10). Its coloured ball terminals on metal spokes imitated the models used to depict molecular structure and it became an icon of the Atomic Age. The atomic theme was also present at exhibitions, such as the Atomium at the Brussels Expo in 1958.

3.4 TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN IN THE HOME

As the inclusion of technologically complex items within the domestic environment became more common, attention began to be given to the way these objects looked, as well as to how efficiently they functioned. This is illustrated by an immensely important craze that took off in the 1950s : the television set. Although the first television viewing licences had been available since 1933, the television remained an expensive and exclusive piece of equipment until the 1950s. The event which provided an enormous boost to the television industry was the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953 which was watched by over 25,000,000 people[36]. Television had followed in the footsteps of radio, but it was to make a much greater impact on domestic life. Radio had started life as a complex piece of technical equipment for amateur enthusiasts, but as it gained in popularity, it became essential that the wireless be transformed into a non-threatening object that could be assimilated into a domestic interior. A similar principle applied to television as it became clear that it was to be a permanent

part of domestic life. As a testament to the immense popularity of both radio and TV, a 1956 survey revealed that over 1,000,000 radios and 14,000,000 television sets had been sold throughout the course of the year[37].

The earliest television sets were made to look like part of the furniture. As television was very soon to compete with the fireplace as the main focus of the sitting room, it is revealing that the television shown at the 1947 Ideal Home Exhibition is incorporated into a futuristic-looking fireplace (Fig. 25). The trend for disguise continued in the 1950s and veneered television cabinets in the '*Jacobethan*' style prevailed (Fig. 26). However, some designers preferred to make a statement. Robin Day's CS17 television for Pye was enclosed within a simple case and supported on steel rod legs with ball feet (Cat. 11). Robin Day commented in a Pye publicity leaflet that "No attempt has been made to disguise or elaborate these sets, but instead we have tried to express their real character – that of fine electronic instruments"[38]. Pye was the leading British manufacturer of TVs and radios, combining clean-lined designs with good technical quality, a complete contrast to the many over-elaborate versions on the market which relied on bright veneers, gilding and brash logos. By the 1960s, television design had changed and smaller, more minimal and streamlined designs were produced. The public had become fully accustomed to the presence of a television in their sitting rooms and it was acceptable for the television to look like what it was[39]. This familiarity is illustrated by a textile decorated with television screens and the television puppet, Muffin the Mule (Fig. 27).

Television would not only change domestic life, but would also affect the arrangement of living room furniture. Unlike the radio, a certain amount of proximity is necessary to view a television set, and this resulted in a more clustered seating arrangement, as well as the arrival of specialized furniture. Many firms sold cabinets which had special areas for a television, radio and record player and seating, like the Tele-viewing circle, was made specifically for television watching[40] (Fig. 28).

Another area in which technology was to influence domestic furnishings was heating. After World War II, central heating became more readily available and was adopted by many households. Consistent heat throughout the house was to transform the existing lifestyle. It had always been expensive and impractical to have fires burning in every room, so previously only a few rooms would have been heated and it was around these rooms that the social life of the house would revolve. Central heating not only complemented the open-plan style of architecture, but also brought into question the role of the traditional fireplace. The hearth had always been the focal point of the sitting room and a certain psychological attachment to the open fire was retained. However, because its main function was now aesthetic rather than practical, a new approach to fireplace design was taken[41]. In addition, the introduction of the Clean Air Act in 1956 restricted the burning of coal in many areas and this reinforced the new attitude to the fireplace. "One senses an awakening of interest; a feeling that the picture of the old cast-iron fire in its formal tiled surround is being taken out, dusted off and subjected to a fresh, livelier and more critical examination"[42].

Although in other countries, the fireplace was often made into a decorative statement, British fireplaces remained simple. Fires could be either a radiant or convecting heater and could burn gas, electricity or solid fuel. The Parkray was a convector fire that could burn smokeless fuel (Fig. 29) and was championed in 'Design' for its efficiency and aesthetic value. Rayburn produced a range of solid fuel heaters designed by David Ogle for Allied Ironfounders, which were given a Design Centre Award.

New central heating systems were also to affect floor coverings. As the heat made carpeting uneccessary, there was a fashion for more exciting flooring. Wood floors were popular, partly because effective sealants were now available to protect the floor. *Linoleum*, although not a new material, could now be cut into patterns. The Linoleum Manufacturers Association (THELMA) launched a marketing campaign that enabled linoleum to compete with the new synthetic floor materials : cork, rubber and plastic[43]. Plastic tiles made from thermoplastic PVC were produced in a bold range of colours and had a similar appearance to linoleum. Cork tiles resembled a wood floor, but were soft and quiet to walk on. All these new floor materials were resilient, cheap and easy to clean. They were also an interesting way to add colour or interest to a room. Fig. 1 shows a 1950s sitting room in which cork tiles have been combined with brightly coloured rugs and modern furniture to create a look that is typically 'Contemporary'.

4. 'CONTEMPORARY' LIFESTYLE

The attitude that existed after the war resulted in a renewal of enthusiasm for the future. The organization and decoration of the domestic home came under scrutiny. The yearning for change resulted in the acceptance of a more modern style of architecture, which dramatically altered the structure of the home, as well as the lifestyle of its inhabitants.

Open plan living was initially established by Le Corbusier in the 1930s. Revolutionary at the time, it involved the removal of fixed barriers between rooms, so that they could be combined and used for a number of purposes. By the 1950s, technical advances had reduced the need for interior load-bearing walls and the new 'Contemporary' style of architecture began to grow in popularity. Although 'Contemporary' architecture had been strongly influenced by the Modern movement, it incorporated a humanistic element absent from Le Corbusier's premise that a house should be a 'machine à habiter'. A particularly influential text was 'Tomorrow's House – A Complete Guide for the Home Builder', written in 1945 by George Nelson and Henry Wright. It discussed the construction of modern houses and contributed to the popularisation of modern architecture. 'Tomorrow's House' also commented on the importance of including a human element in architecture. "Individuality is possible only in a modern house because no other approach to building expresses life as it is today. And without expression there is no individuality"[44].

As a result of their large, well-lit rooms, open plan houses seemed more spacious than traditional homes. The relaxed atmosphere that open planning created was conducive to a carefree, less formal lifestyle. Members of the family were not segregated in separate areas of the house, but occupied a more integrated space. It was America that initiated the trend for open planning and many spectacular examples of 'Contemporary' architecture were built there during the 1950s. However, other countries quickly caught up, adapting the architectural principles to suit their own individual requirements.

Fig. 30 shows a mid-1950s living room, part of the house built by Philip Powell and Hidalgo Moya. The large room, 30 x 15 feet, combines living room with dining room. The dining table is at one end of the room, close to the kitchen, and the rest of the furniture is at the other end of the room, close to the fireplace and the floor-to-ceiling windows. This room exhibits several of the characteristics specific to open plan living. Its informality means that whoever was cooking could participate in the conversation taking place in the living room, via the large *terazzo* serving hatch. In addition, the sliding windows could be opened to allow communication between the interior and the garden.

Since the 1920s, it had become increasingly rare to employ servants as part of the domestic household. Instead, there was a demand for houses which would be easy for a single housewife to maintain. The popularity of open kitchens and living areas reflected these great social changes taking place. As well as the social benefits of not being totally isolated from the rest of the household, an

open plan kitchen made it much easier to bring and remove food to and from the dining table.

The concept of a 'labour-saving house' had been a pertinent issue since the 1920s and remained a fashionable concern throughout the 1950s. There was a large market for products that contributed to domestic efficiency. This attitude is summed up in a 1950s domestic manual. "No man in a factory would be expected to produce good work without proper tools, but the housewife often tries to do her work with totally inadequate equipment ... She must, therefore, make sure that her house is run easily by using care in choosing tools"[45].

At this time, appliances were made to imitate their industrial equivalents, in the hope that their robust and mechanical appearance would give them the impression of efficiency. However, this approach proved to be unpopular. By the end of the decade, more attention was given to the design of domestic appliances, in order that they might complement an interior, rather than serve as reminders of the factories in which they were made. Comparison of a 1948 Kenwood food mixer (Fig. 31) and a 1960 Kenwood mixer (Fig. 32) show how domestic appliance design was to change over a decade. The 1948 mixer is simply a smaller version of industrial food mixers, whereas the 1960 mixer has been redesigned to exhibit some of the stylistic trends of the time. The initiator of this kind of restyling was the German firm Braun, one of the first to incorporate aesthetic appeal into its products[46].

At the same time that design was becoming important in the manufacture of industrial products, there was also some experimentation with the application of new techniques and materials to interior design. Alison and Peter Smithson used the latest scientific developments to devise a 'House of the Future', which facilitated a modern lifestyle. Their ideas were shown at the 1956 Ideal Home Exhibition, a showcase for new architectural designs which were appropriate for modern living[47]. The search for an ideal modern home continued throughout the 1950s, giving rise to articles like the one featured in the Daily Express in 1959. The newspaper discussed the question, 'Is your house your master or your servant?' in response to the popular issue of labour-saving in the home.

Although there was an enthusiastic response to the new design ideals emerging in the early 1950s, a large portion of the British population returned to buying a much more traditional style of furniture once the Utility Scheme ended on 21 January 1953. Utility furniture had always been subjected to a great deal of criticism by the British public and the emerging 'Contemporary' style was too close to the pared-down Utility look for some. Instead, there was a demand for the fussy 'Jacobethan' style of furniture that had predominated before World War II.

The reasons for the rejection of a modern style of furniture relate to the concept of 'Britishness'. There had always been a very strong sense of history in Britain and this had affected the types of furniture people chose for their homes. The Victorians, in particular, emulated the styles of the past and, as a result, their homes were cluttered with furniture of all styles, overloaded with ornament and

detail. At a time when Britain's place in the world was unclear, it is not surprising that the post-World War II public should want to return to a style of furniture reminiscent of happier and more certain times. Adhering to the style of decoration which had been prevalent since the Victorian era confirmed their Britishness. This premise is referred to in an article in House & Garden Magazine that attempted to defend modern furniture design from its critics. "But slowly is the furniture of our own time gaining ground; for the English are reluctant to accept the new for fear of being unfaithful to their beloved past"[48].

Tastes in furniture and interior decoration were strongly linked to class. A contemporary writer stated that working class taste in the 1950s was similar "to the prosperous, nineteenth century middle-class style; the richness showing well and undisguisedly in an abundance of odds-and-ends in squiggles and carvings in bold patterns, a melange whose unifying principle is the sense of an elaborate and colourful sufficiency"[49]. The 1950s was a time of social reform and the government's intervention in design standards was intended to try and make the aesthetic tastes of the population more even. In the past, modern furniture had been expensive and difficult to obtain. Subsequently, it was a privilege of the rich. By the beginning of the 1950s, several furniture companies had begun to produce affordable, good quality furniture in the 'Contemporary' style.

However, it was not simply the issue of cost that affected the sales of modern furniture ; comfort was also important. The most common complaint about Utility furniture had been that it wasn't cosy or easy to live with. People thought it was too flimsy and yearned for something more substantial. Fig. 33 shows a

1954 Maples catalogue in which a 'Contemporary' suite is constrasted with a more traditional version. Whereas the 'Contemporary' furniture is elegant and restrained, the more old-fashioned furniture is solid and upholstered in a richer fabric. Many people preferred this solidity and this was commented on by the designer R. D. Russell, who thought that "it is not really Jacobean furniture that people want but furniture that is warm and cosy"[50]. In spite of this, public acceptance of the 'Contemporary' style grew throughout the decade. This was partly a result of its constant exposure in the expanding range of interior design magazines on the market.

During the 1950s, the effect of the consumer on product design became increasingly important. Whereas most of Europe was trying to recover from the after-effects of war, America remained prosperous. Not only did the USA possess the necessary raw materials, there was also a large market for products in the 'Contemporary'style. There was more choice than ever before. Artists like Richard Hamilton were concerned by the inundation of the market with modern goods. His 1956 work 'Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?' comments on the craze of mass consumption taking place in America (Fig. 34). Most of Europe was enthralled by the colourful lifestyle of the Americans and, in an attempt to achieve it, emulated American consumerism.

One outlet for consumerism was the interior design magazine. House & Garden, Homes & Gardens, and Home Beautiful were all aspirational magazines. Aimed at a female audience, these magazines instructed the reader on how to achieve the 'Contemporary' look in their own home. Although these magazines were

important in establishing the public's high standards of design, they were not concerned purely with the aesthetics of an object, but also with its quality and practicality. This preoccupation with the commercial viability of a product is evident in a quote from Interiors Magazine of 1948 which stated that "appearance, facility and economy of manufacture, and sales appeal" were the most important criteria[51]. Another essential component of the magazines was the advertisements. The support of these manufacturers, together with that of the press, contributed to the enormous popularity of modern design in America[52]. In Britain, in conjunction with the growing recognition that the consumer was an important entity, the Consumers' Association set up 'Shopper's Guide' and 'Which' in 1956. These publications were the first to offer the consumer some guidance regarding the myriad of products on offer.

Although Britain was slow to abandon its traditional furnishing styles, period furniture was becoming less important. A 1952 publication 'Design and Decoration in the Home' commented on this. "At one time many endeavoured to have all the furniture in a room of the same period, that is to say Queen Anne or Chippendale; if they were collectors of antiques, or uncompromisingly modern if of another persuasion. It is now generally allowed that well made and well proportioned furniture of whatever period or whatever country of origin can harmonize very well in a room, if not overcrowded and if the decoration is suitable"[53]. This was a view taken by many of the writers in the home furnishing magazines.

Although British designers were now designing in the 'Contemporary' style, they tended to adhere to the traditional piece of furniture. Only a small number of progressive companies used designers that were familiar with the developments in Europe and America. Shops like Heal's and Gordon Russell sold a variety of up-to-date designs, reflecting the newly emerging trends. In 1954, Heal's began an Annual New Designs Exhibition, which gave the public a chance to see their latest designs. Even low-cost general stores like Timothy Whites sold a combination of traditional and more 'Contemporary' style items (Fig. 35). Open plan homes had different requirements and there was a demand for new furniture types. Kandya was a firm which specialized in modern furniture types and it produced a number of room dividers (Fig. 36) as well as a large range of modular furniture. Robin Day also designed unit furniture, as can be seen in his low-cost room setting for the 'Festival of Britain' (Fig. 37).

'Contemporary', then, was not simply a style. It was closely linked to lifestyle. World War II had created a new world, with different needs and desires from the world that had previously existed. With America showing the way, Britain finally left behind the remnants of the Victoria era and adopted a new look and a new way of life, which eventually permeated every area of society.

5. CONCLUSION

The idealistic nature of the post-war period was translated into the design world. The Utility Scheme aimed to provide the British population with furniture that combined the efficient use of raw materials with good quality design. The government was determined to encourage the democratisation of design. Throughout the 1950s, Britain developed a 'Contemporary' look, based on the influence of American, Scandinavian and Italian design. This new style was consolidated by events like the 'Festival of Britain' and the talent of designers such as Robin and Lucienne Day, Ernest Race and Clive Latimer. Although the 'Contemporary' style was not universally popular, it was gradually adopted by the public, until its decline in the early 1960s.

Design was heavily influenced by science and technology over this period and the need for economic growth contributed to the increasing importance of industrial design. In the past, mass-produced goods were not designed by a professional. By the 1950s, it had become common practice and consumer industries were expanding. The USA was the land of mass-consumerism, although Britain soon followed in its footsteps. Consumerism was intrinsically linked to lifestyle. The 'Contemporary' style also facilitated this change in lifestyle. The adoption of open planning in domestic architecture was to have an important effect on the way the household worked.

The 'Contemporary' style could be characterized by several distinct elements and it was often copied. Features like the 'cocktail cherry' look and abstract

patterning were adopted for the decoration of many mundane objects. Although this encouraged designers to produce new designs, it meant that by the end of the decade, 'Contemporary' was losing its original purity and impact. By the 1960s, a new era was beginning. With the emergence of Pop culture, British 'Contemporary' began to disappear and Italy took centre stage in the design world throughout the 1960s. The consecration of Coventry cathedral in 1962 could be seen as an appropriate farewell to 'Contemporary'. Originally planned by Sir Basil Spence just after the 'Festival of Britain', the cathedral was full of 'Contemporary' style art of different media, executed by artists such as Hans Coper, Graham Sutherland and Jacob Epstein. Basil Spence summed up the overall effect of the cathedral. "I like to think that Coventry is a modern cathedral in the sense that it sets out to express the spirit of the age in which we live"[54].

Via the reconstruction of a late 1950s living room, this exhibition is intended to illustrate the elements that made up a 'Contemporary' room. The choice of objects reflects the major decorative trends, as well as the way of life of its inhabitants. In addition, it aims to recreate the atmosphere of optimism and renewal present after the end of World War II : the emergence of a bright new world.

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CATALOGUE 1

Furnishing Fabric *Calyx*
UK, 1951.
Designed by Lucienne Day (b.1917).
Made by Heal & Son Ltd.
Screen-printed linen.
26 in. (66 cm) repeat.

'Calyx' was designed for display in the Homes and Gardens Pavilion at the Festival of Britain in 1951. Tom Worthington, the design director at Heal's, agreed to print it so that Heal's textiles would be included in the Festival. 'Calyx' was initally printed in lime-yellow, vermillion, black and white on an olive ground. It was later produced in slate grey, rust, deep blue and yellow grounds[1].

'Calyx' was one of the first furnishing fabrics to incorporate aspects of modern art. Its abstract, interlocking leaf-like forms and stems were influenced by the paintings of Joan Miró and Paul Klee, as well as the natural world. It has also been suggested that Alexander Calder's mobiles were an inspiration. However, Day did not come across Calder's work until several years after 'Calyx' was produced. 'Calyx' was completely different to the rest of the furnishing fabrics on the market at the start of the 1950s. The after-effects of World War II meant that there was a shortage of materials and textile manufacturers were reluctant to take the risk of producing fabrics in a modern style.

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'Calyx' was commercially successful, both at home and abroad. It spawned many imitations, such as Marion Mahler's cheap version for David Whitehead Fabrics Ltd. As a result of 'Calyx's' success, fabrics in the new 'Contemporary' style grew in popularity and Day went on to produce a number of other designs for Heals.

'Calyx' was awarded a Gold Medal at the Milan Triennale in 1951 and received the International Design Award of the American Institute of Decorators, 1952.

Exhibited
Homes and Gardens Pavilion, Festival of Britain.
Milan Triennale, 1951.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Literature
Fine Arts Society, Austerity to Affluence, London, 1997.
Harris, J, Lucienne Day : a career in design, Manchester, 1993.
Jackson, L, The New Look. Design in the Fifties, Manchester, 1991.
Jackson, L, Robin & Lucienne Day. Pioneers of Contemporary Design, London, 2001.

CATALOGUE 2

Lounge Chair and Ottoman
Model Nos. 670 and 671.
USA, 1956-7.
Designed by Charles (1907-1978) and Ray Eames.
Made by Herman Miller Inc.
Moulded plywood frame with rosewood veneer, swivelling cast aluminium base, leather-covered latex foam and down filled cushions.
Chair : 32 ¼ in. (82 cm) high, 33 ¼ in. (84.5 cm) wide, 34 ½ in. (87.5 cm) deep.
Ottoman : 17 in. (44 cm) high, 25 ½ in. (65 cm) wide, 21 in. (53 cm) deep.

The lounge chair and ottoman are one of the Eames' most famous designs. It was their first luxury piece of furniture, intended as a birthday present for the film director, Billy Wilder. The luxury nature of the chair is reflected in Eames' use of rosewood veneer and buttoned leather upholstery. Although fabric and naughahyde upholstery were also available in 1956, these were abandoned by 1962. Eames was equally concerned with the chair's function and with its appearance. The down-filled cushions, large proportions and swivelling base ensured that it was extremely comfortable to sit on.

The style of the chair seems somewhat inconsistent with the 'Contemporary' look, as well as Eames' other chair designs. This is a result of its intended image : a symbol of wealth, luxury and power. It was sold at $634 in 1956. However, the components of the chair reflect Eames' technical expertise in furniture construction (Fig. 38). It could be put together by one person with a screwdriver and the base and back supports are held together by neoprene shock mounts, which give the chair extra strength and flexibility.

The Eames lounge chair has remained a classic design and, although it was originally intended to have a short production run, it is still being manufactured today.

Awarded a Gold Medal at the XII Milan Triennale, 1960.

Exhibited
Milan Triennale, 1960.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.
Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Literature
Baker, F & K, Twentieth Century Furniture, London, 2000.
Brawne, M, 'The Wit of Technology', Architectural Design, Sep. 1966.
Fiell, P & C, Modern Furniture Classics since 1945, London, 1991.
Fiell, P & C, Modern Chairs, Köln, 1993.
Pina, L, Fifties Furniture with Values, Atlgen, 1996.
Whitechapel Art Gallery, Modern Chairs : 1918-1970, London, 1970.

CATALOGUE 3

Settee and Armchair
Model R57.
UK, 1956.
Designed by Ernest Race (1913-1964).
Made by Race Furniture Ltd.
Tubular steel frame, plywood covered in leather and vinyl, removeable cushions covered in woollen fabric, beech legs, Armstrong Glide feet.
Settee : 24 in. (61 cm) high, 74 ½ in. (189 cm) wide, 29 in. (73.5 cm) deep.
Armchair : 24 in. (61 cm) high, 25 in. (63.5 cm) wide, 29 in. (73.5 cm) deep.

The R57 range of furniture was originally designed for use on ocean liners. The furniture aboard a liner was subjected to a considerable amount of wear and tear, so that they required seating furniture with a strong frame and removable covers that could be easily cleaned. Race responded to these demands with a range of single, two and three seater chairs, strengthened by a tubular steel frame. The arms were covered in hide, which was not only resistant to wear, but also easy to clean. The cushions had removable zip covers. Race had managed to combine the requirements of his contractors with an elegant modern design.

The R57 range is typical of Race's furniture designs. Its slender legs and simple form reflect the lightness of the 'Contemporary' look. Race's imaginative use of modern materials like plywood, Pirelli webbing and latex foam emphasize his position as one of the most innovative furniture designers of the 1940s and 1950s.

The R57 range was also sold for domestic use and was displayed for the first time at the CoID's 'Furniture Exhibition' at Earls Court in January 1957.

Literature

Conway, H, Ernest Race, London, 1982.
Ernest Race Ltd. Catalogue, 1957.
Farr, M. ed., 'Selected furniture of the CoID's stand at the forthcoming Furniture Exhibition', Design, no.97, 1957, pp. 39-42.
Fine Arts Society, Austerity to Affluence, London, 1997.

CATALOGUE 4

Chaise longue
UK, 1954.
Designed by Marcel Breuer (1902-1981).
Made by Heal & Son Ltd.
Plywood, sycamore, upholstery.
32 in. (81.4 cm) high, 44 ¾ in. (114 cm) long, 18 in. (45.7 cm) wide.

This chaise longue was originally designed in 1938, for sale at Heal's. It was a variation on Breuer's plywood 'Long' chair, designed for Isokon in 1936. The 'Long' chair was inspired by Le Corbusier's tubular steel chaise longue and Alvar Aalto's bent plywood armchair[1]. Breuer also made an aluminium reclining chair prior to his wooden version.

The later chaise longue is much bulkier than the Isokon 'Long' chair, with thicker wood panels. Cut out sections of plywood have been used, rather than continuous bent strips. It was commissioned by Heal's, as part of their exhibition 'Contemporary furniture by 7 Architects', in 1938.

The chaise longue was sold by Heal 's throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the later version proving to be more commercially successful. Its chunkiness and stuffed upholstery reflect the British preference for solid, comfortable furniture. Although originally designed in the 1930s, the chair possesses aspects of the 'Contemporary' look. It has an undulating organic shape and combines pale wood with bright upholstery. In addition, it is not as stark as the 'Long' chair, which adheres more closely to the ideals of the Modern movement. Breuer built

[1] See Whitechapel Art Gallery, Modern Chairs 1918-1970, London, 1970, p. 10 & 13.

on the principles of Modernism to create a chair that was more commercially viable.

Literature

Heal's Mansard Gallery Exhibition Catalogue, Contemporary Furniture by 7 Architects, London, 1938.
Leslie, F, Designs for 20th-Century Interiors, London, 2000.
Wilk, C, Marcel Breuer. Furniture and Interiors, London, 1981.

CATALOGUE 5

Dining Table and Chairs
UK, 1956.
Designed by Nigel V Walters.
Made by Heal & Son Ltd.
Table with teak veneered top and beech legs. Chairs with beech frames, upholstered seat and back.
29 ½ in. (75 cm) high.

Nigel Walters was an important British designer of the 1950s. Head of the interior design department at the Central School of Arts and Craft, he also designed a considerable amount of furniture for Heal's throughout the 1950s.

Walter's dining chairs and table reflect the British furniture trends of the middle of the decade. More restrained than earlier designs, they make use of the decorative qualities of the grain of the wood. Not only does this style reflect the maxims of the Arts and Crafts movement, it also shows the influence of Scandinavian furniture designs. Comparison of Walter's dining chairs with a chair designed by the Danish Carl Hansen (Fig. 39), there are evident similarities, in that both have a simple form, slim tapering legs and are constructed from blond woods. Teak and beech were both extremely popular woods for furniture construction in Britain at this time.

Literature
Heal & Son catalogue, 'Dining Room Furniture', 1956.
Holme, R & Frost, K. eds., The Studio Yearbook of Decorative Art, London & New York, 1954-5.

CATALOGUE 6

Sideboard
UK, 1953-53.
Designed by Peter Hayward.
Made for W. G. Evans & Sons Ltd.
Rosewood veneer, birch laminate, mahogany, glass, brass.
34 in. (86.5 cm) high, 65 ½ in. (164 cm) wide, 21 in. (53.5 cm) deep.

The routed decoration on the sideboard cuts through the rosewood veneer to reveal the birch laminate underneath. This technique was first used by David Booth and Judith Ledeboer, in a sideboard designed for Gordon Russell in 1950[1]. Although the Gordon Russell sideboard was routed in a helical pattern, rather than a star, the techniques are identical.

The star motif on the sideboard is reminiscent of the 'Festival of Britain' star, a symbol of the early 'Contemporary' style. Other 'Contemporary' features are the slim, tapering legs and low height. Although this type of highly grained sideboard was popular in the 1950s, a great deal of unit furniture was also being produced and was considered to be more flexible and therefore, more appropriate for a modern interior.

Literature
Fine Arts Society, Austerity to Affluence, London, 1997.
Holme, R & Frost, K. eds., The Studio Yearbook of Decorative Art, London & New York, 1956-7.
Lake, F. ed., Daily Mail Ideal Home Book, London, 1956.

[1] Fine Arts Society, Austerity to Affluence, London, 1997, p.14.

CATALOGUE 7

Bowl
UK, 1955.
Made by Lucy Rie (1902-1995).
Porcelain, sgraffito decoration through brown glaze.
Marks : 'LR' in monogram, applied.
10 in. (25.5 cm) diameter.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London, Circ. 336-1955.

Its thinly-potted body and cross-hatched scraffito decoration make this bowl a typical representative of Lucy Rie's work from the 1950s. Although Rie produced tableware, as well as individual pots, both were thrown on a Continental kick wheel, which eliminated throwing rings from the body. Individual pots, like this one, were made in stoneware or porcelain and were made unique by Rie's method of glazing. Manganese dioxide was mixed with gum arabic and brushed onto the body. On firing at a high temperature, the glaze would be transformed to a rich dark brown vitreous slip[1]. The technique of raw glazing involved only one firing and allowed the incorporation of sgraffito or incised decoration. In addition, small particles of clay would be picked up from the surface while brushing glaze onto the body. These resulted in an interesting surface texture.

Rie's work showed many similarities to her partner, Hans Coper, and their pots made a huge impact on the British studio pottery of the 1950s. The combination of linear surface decoration with a delicate body reflected the 'Contemporary' style predominant in the 1950s. Linear patterning could be seen on objects of all

[1] Coatts, M & Wood, N, Lucy Rie. A Crafts Council Exhibition, London, 1992.

media. Rie's pots are particularly comparable to Tapio Wirkkala's 'Kantarelli' vases and Naum Gabo's sculpture.

Exhibited
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Literature
Houston, J. ed., Lucie Rie : a survey of her life and work, London, 1981.
Watson, O, British Studio Pottery. The V&A Museum Collection, London, 1990.

CATALOGUE 8

Vase
UK, 1953.
Designed by Alfred Burgess Read (1899-1973).
Made by Poole Pottery Ltd.
Earthenware with painted decoration.
Marks : Poole Pottery stamp on base.
Shape no. 698, pattern no. PKC, Contemporary range.
15 ¼ in. (39 cm) high.

The Contemporary range was the Poole Pottery's attempt to create their own individual style. Alfred Burgess Read worked for Poole between 1952 and 1958 and was the instigator behind the new range. He had abandoned Poole's old fashioned floral styles and produced a variety of handpainted wares, glazed in two contrasting colours and decorated with abstract linear two-dimensional patterns.

The vase is typical of the Contemporary range. It exhibits a two colour combination of lime and charcoal, overlaid with white cross-hatching, reminiscent of Lucie Rie's sgraffito decoration. The decoration is in keeping with the style of 'Contemporary' ceramics. Read also experimented with shape and was strongly influenced by the organic shapes prevalent in Swedish ceramics, especially the 'waisted' vase shape. However, this vase is closer in form to the gourd-shapes used by Poole since the 1930s.

Literature
Clark, J & Dennis, R, Poole Pottery. Poole in the 1950s, London, 1997.
Coatts, M. ed., Lucie Rie and Hans Coper – Potters in Parallel, London, 1997.
Fine Arts Society, Austerity to Affluence, London, 1997.
Jackson, L, The New Look. Design in the Fifties, Manchester, 1991.

CATALOGUE 9

'Arabesque'
UK, 1953.
Painted by Ceri Richards.
Oil on canvas.
Signed and dated lower righthand corner.
29 ¾ in. (75.6 cm) high, 25 in. (63.5 cm) wide.

Although Richards' work is eclectic, 'Arabesque' exhibits several characteristics prevalent in many of his paintings. Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, Richards produced a number of paintings of pianists. Although 'Arabesque' features a piano, there is no player. However, the piano is in a prominent position on the canvas, reflecting Richards' great love of music and its importance to him.

'Arabesque' demonstrates Richards' strong draughtsmanship, showing similarities to the painting style of Matisse. The dramatic use of colour is in keeping with the 'Contemporary' style. The bright green, red and orange foreground contrasts with the flat, black background. Richards also uses a sgraffito technique, scraping through the paint to reveal the white ground beneath.

Although Richards is not a typical 'Contemporary' painter, 'Arabesque' would be easily incorporated into a 'Contemporary' interior. As well as the bright colours and undulating lines, the painting is extremely individual, in concurrence with the idea that a 'Contemporary' interior should express the personality of its inhabitants.

CATALOGUE 10

Ball Clock
Model 4755.
USA, 1948.
Designed by George Nelson (1908-1986).
Made by Howard Miller Clock Company.
Grey painted birch balls and face, steel spokes, black hands.
13 in. (33 cm) diameter.

The George Nelson 'Ball Clock' is a design icon of the 1950s. It was also known as the 'Atomic Clock' and the 'Molecular Clock', because its ball terminals on thin spokes are reminiscent of the molecular structure of the atom. This 'cocktail cherry' style was a characteristic 1950s decorative motif, used frequently in textiles, wallpaper and furniture. The 'Ball Clock' reflects the mobiles of Alexander Calder from the 1930s and 1940s, both in its architectural form and its use of colour, movement and contrasting materials.

The 'Ball Clock' was revolutionary at the time of its design. In answer to the question 'What is a clock ?', Nelson had drawn a diagram of 6 lines intersecting each other at midpoint. He was subsequently inspired to create a clock design which kept as close to these abstract designs as possible[1]. The 'Ball Clock' remained popular throughout the 1950s.

Literature
Dormer, P, Design since 1945, London, 1993.
Hillier, B, Austerity/Binge, London, 1975.
Jackson, L, The New Look. Design in the Fifties, Manchester, 1991.
Pina, L, Fifties Furniture with Values, Atglen PA, 1996.

[1] http://clockworks.cooper.edu/clocks/ball.html

CATALOGUE 11

Television
Model CS17.
UK, 1957.
Designed by Robin Day (b.1915), technical design by J. E. Cope.
Made by Pye Ltd.
French walnut-veneered cabinet, black plastic control panel, black stove-enamelled tubular steel stand with rubber feet.
21 in. (53 cm) high, 18 ½ in. (47 cm) wide, 2 ¼ in. (54 cm) deep.

The CS17 television set was one of two versions produced by Robin Day for Pye in 1957. Whereas the CS17 had a steel stand, the CW17 consisted solely of the wooden console. The simplicity of the television's case and steel legs reflect Day's restrained approach to furniture design. The majority of other television sets produced in the 1950s were designed in the fussy, overornamental style known as 'Jacobethan'. The CS17 was unusual because it complemented the 'Contemporary' interior. Its thin metal legs and plain wooden case were characteristic 'Contemporary' stylistic attributes.

Although Day executed several television and radio designs for Pye, his modern style of design was not always encouraged. Pye was often concerned that the ultra-modern designs would not sell. However, the CS17 was commercially successful, as well as critically acclaimed. It won a Design Centre Award in 1957.

Literature
Jackson, L, Robin and Lucienne Day. Pioneers of Contemporary Design, London, 2001.
MacCarthy, F, British Design since 1880. A visual history, London, 1982.
Stafford, J, 'A Design Policy needed for Radio and TV Cabinets', Design, February 1957, No. 98, p.17-23.

CATALOGUE 12

Wall lamp
UK, 1956.
Designed by Bernard Schottlander (1924-99).
Painted steel, aluminium, plastic.
46 in. (117.1 cm) wide.

Although Schottlander was primarily a sculptor, he designed a variety of lights. This wall lamp echoes the characteristics of his sculpture. Its clean lines, simple geometric form and strong colours can also be seen in his 3B series of sculptures in Milton Keynes[1]. Fixing the lamp to the wall emphasizes its sculptural qualities. The extended arms may be manipulated into a required position (Fig. 30). When displayed against a white wall, the black and red shades create a striking contrast, a feature that Schottlander aimed to achieve in many of his sculptures. In addition, the use of red and black is in keeping with the colour scheme of a 'Contemporary' interior. Schottlander's sculptures were mainly constructed from painted steel, a characteristic emulated in his lamp design.

[1] http://www.mkweb.co.uk/Art

CATALOGUE 13

Lamp
UK, 1956.
Designed by John (1925-1992) and Sylvia Reid.
Made by Rotaflex Lighting Ltd.
Painted steel sheet, brass fittings.
59 ½ in. (151 cm) high.

John and Sylvia Reid were both architects who designed a number of imaginative lamps for the fashionable British company, Rotaflex. This lamp exemplifies the typical qualities of their designs. It is elegant and understated, with a slender stand and pedestal base. The perforated shade provides a soft, downward-cast light, appropriate for the lamp's function as a floor lamp. It would be placed in a corner to add extra atmosphere or used as a less harsh alternative to the overhead lighting.

Rotaflex manufactured a large range of 'Contemporary' style lighting throughout the 1950s, with John and Sylvia Reid as their main designers. This lamp would have been easily incorporated into a 'Contemporary' interior. Its slim metal stand, simple drum-shaped shade and pedestal base reflect 'Contemporary' furniture trends.

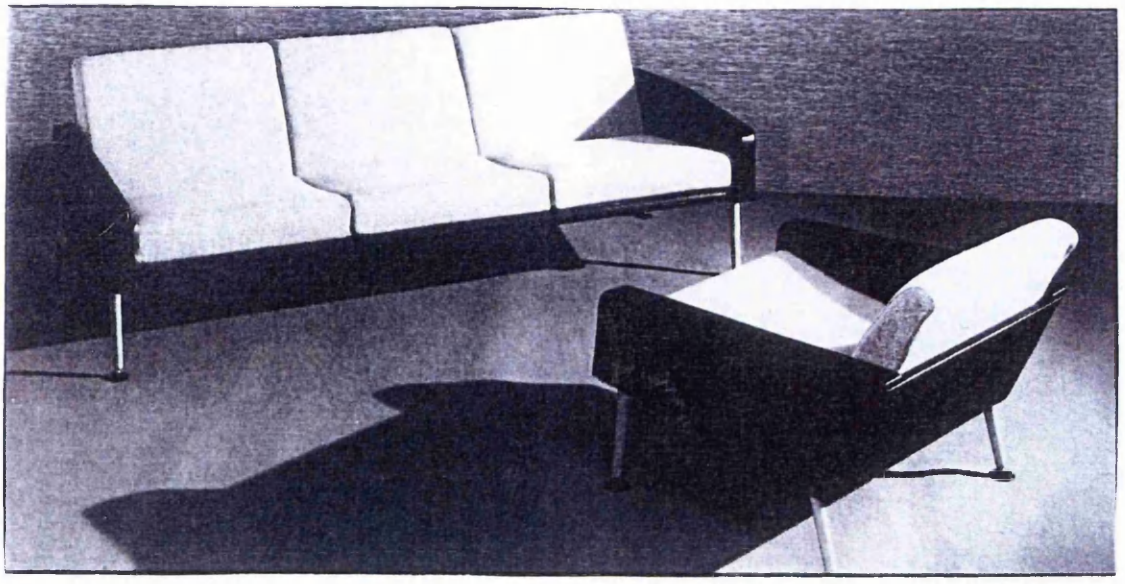
Exhibited
Oldham Art Gallery, 'David Whitehead Ltd. Artist Designed Textiles 1952-69', 1993.

Literature
Fine Arts Society, Austerity to Affluence, London, 1997.

Cat. 1 Furnishing fabric 'Calyx', Lucienne Day, 1951.
Jackson, L, Robin and Lucienne Day. Pioneers of Contemporary Design, London, 2001[1].

[1] Reference denotes source of illustration.

Cat. 2 Lounge chair and ottoman, Charles & Ray Eames, 1956.
Fiell, C & P, Modern Chairs, Köln, 1993.



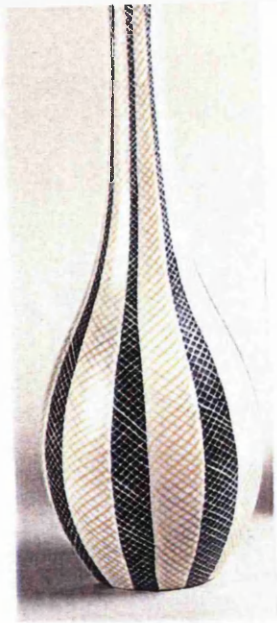
Cat. 3 Settee and armchair, Ernest Race, 1956.
Conway, H, Ernest Race, London, 1982.

Cat. 4 Chaise longue, Marcel Breuer, 1954.

Cat. 5 Table and chairs, Nigel Walters, 1956.
Holme, R & Frost, K. eds., The Studio Yearbook of Decorative Art, London, 1954.

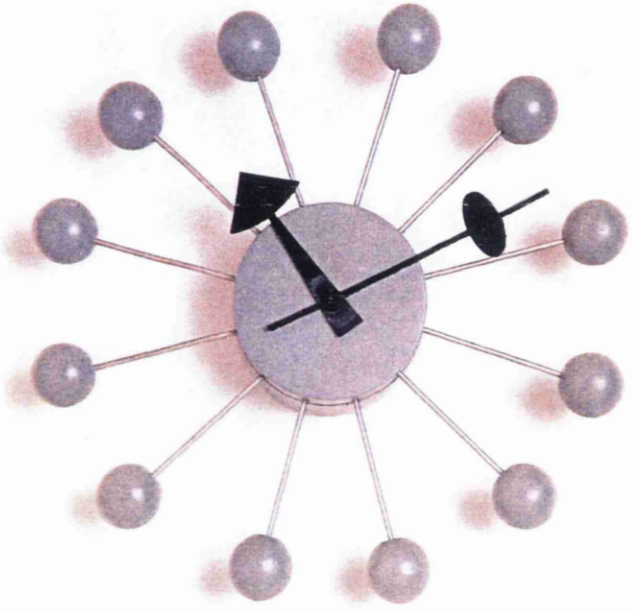
Cat. 6 Sideboard, Peter Hayward, 1953-4.
Fine Arts Society, Austerity to Affluence, London, 1997.

Cat. 7 Bowl, Lucie Rie, 1955.
Houston, J. ed., Lucie Rie: a survey of her life and work, London, 1981.

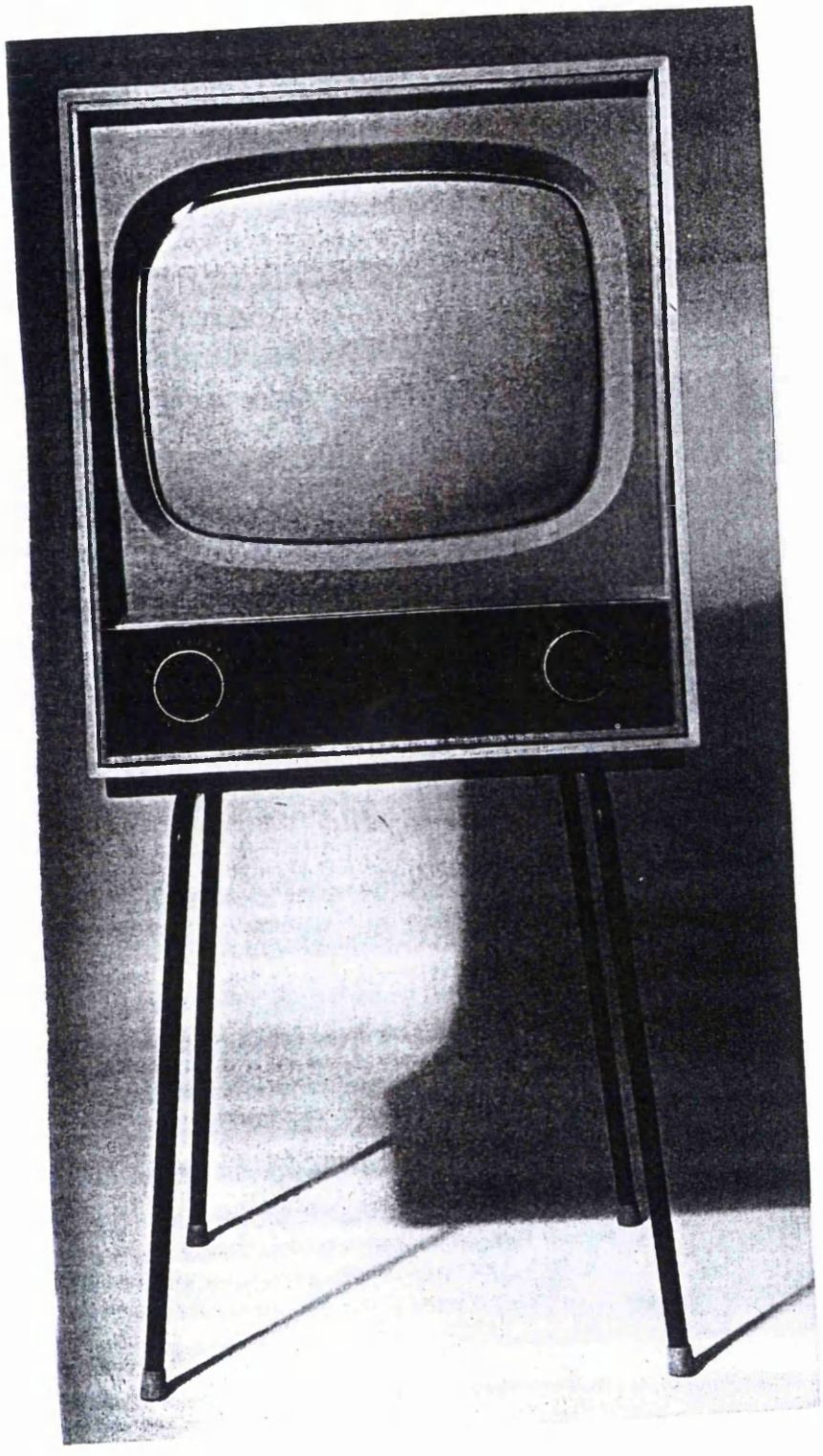


Cat. 8 Vase, Alfred Burgess Read, 1953.
Fine Arts Society, Austerity to Affluence, London, 1997.

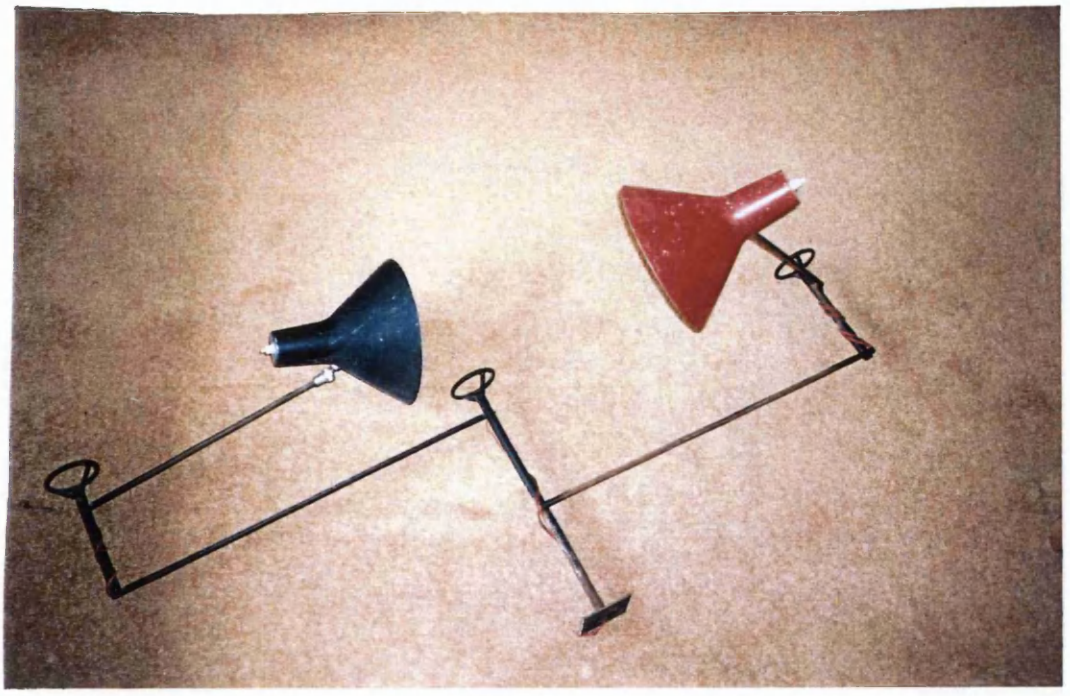
Cat. 9 'Arabesque', Ceri Richards, 1953.



Cat. 10 'Ball Clock', George Nelson, 1948.
Jackson, L, The New Look. Design in the Fifties, Manchester, 1991.



Cat. 11 Television, Robin Day, 1957.
Stafford, J, 'A Design Policy needed for Radio and TV Cabinets', Design, no. 98, 1957, pp. 17-23.



Cat. 12 Lamp, Bernard Schottlander, 1954.

Cat. 13 Lamp, John & Sylvia Reid, 1956.
Fine Arts Society, Austerity to Affluence, London, 1997.

Fig. 1 'Contemporary' living room, c.1956.

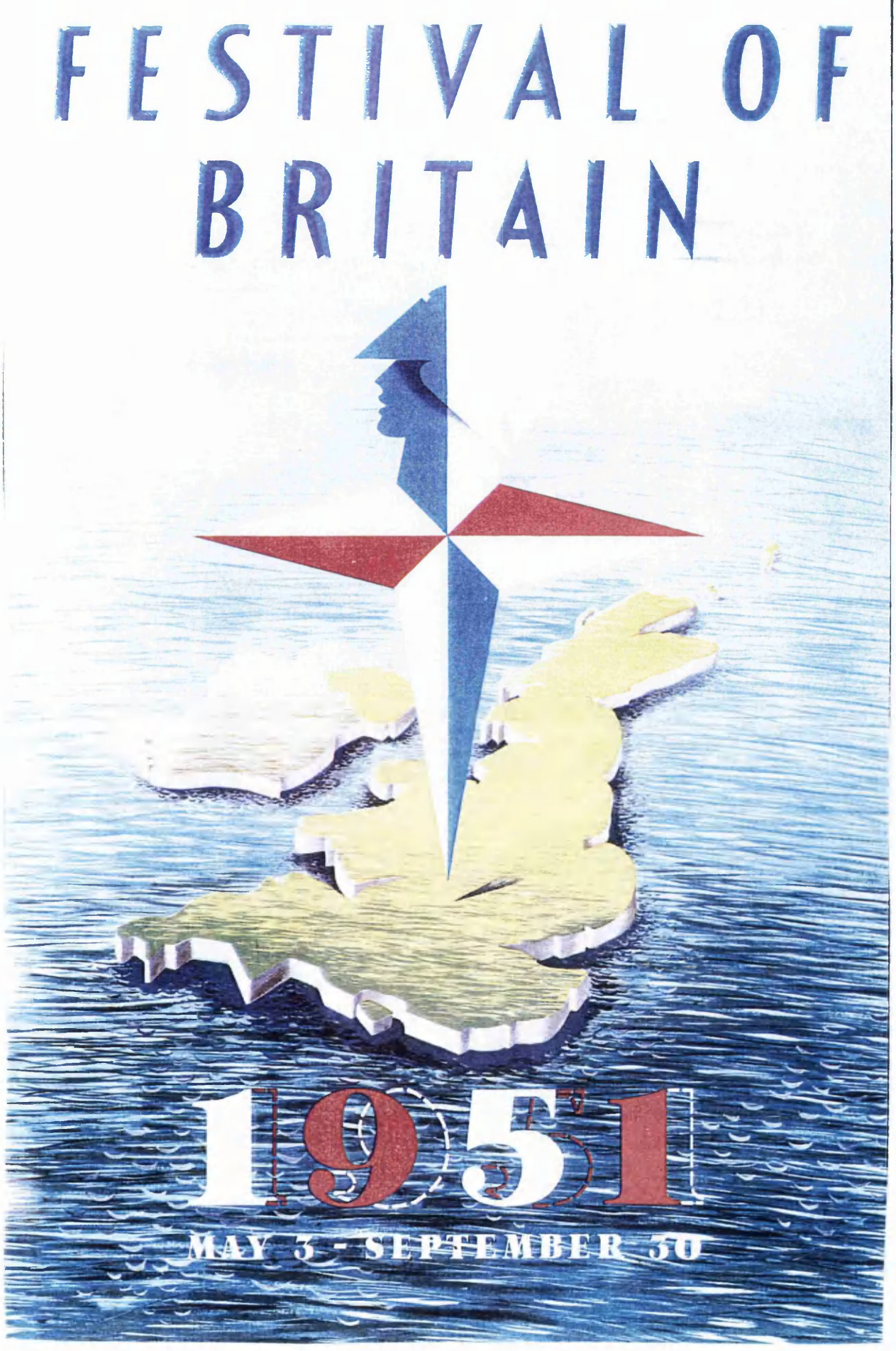


Fig. 2 Poster advertising 'Festival of Britain', 1951.

Fig. 3 'Women and Birds in the Moonlight', Joan Miró, 1949.

Fig. 4 Abstract textile, 1952.

Fig. 5 'Chiesa de la Salute', 1959.

Fig. 6 'Kantarelli' glass vases, 1947.

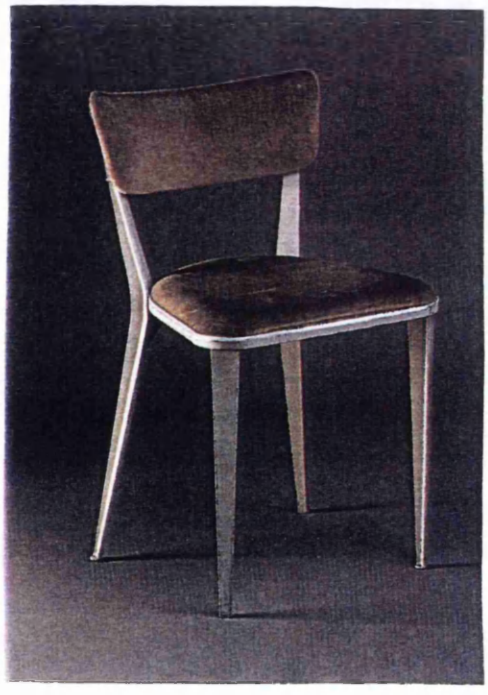


Fig. 7 'Homemaker' plate, 1955.

Fig. 8 BA3 chair, 1945.

Fig. 9 Isokon chaise-longue, 1935.

Fig. 10 Hillestak chairs, 1950.

Fig. 11 Wassily chair, 1925.

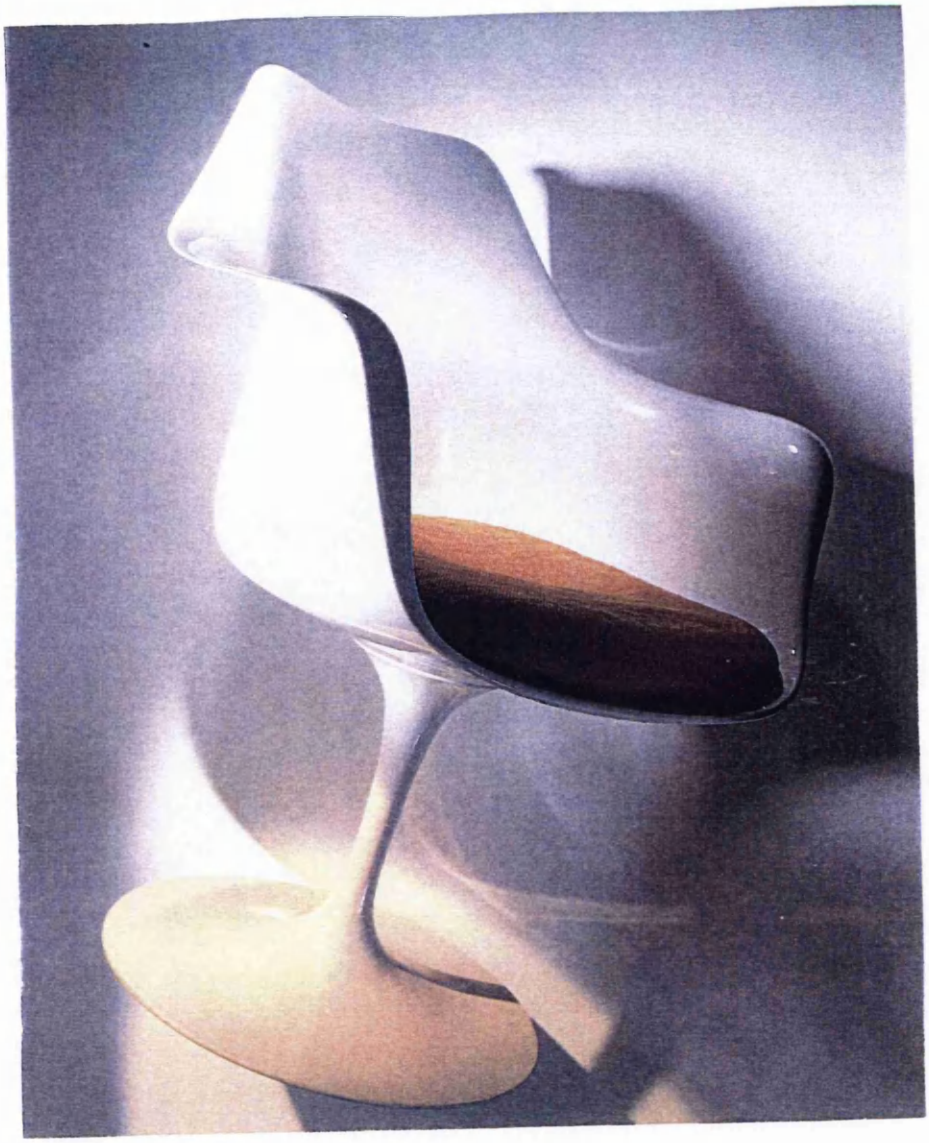
Fig. 12 Sidechair S33, 1926.

Fig. 13 Plymet cabinet, 1945-6.

Fig. 14 Antelope stacking armchair, 1949-50.

Fig. 15 Diamond chair, 1952.

Fig. 16 DAR chair, 1950-53.



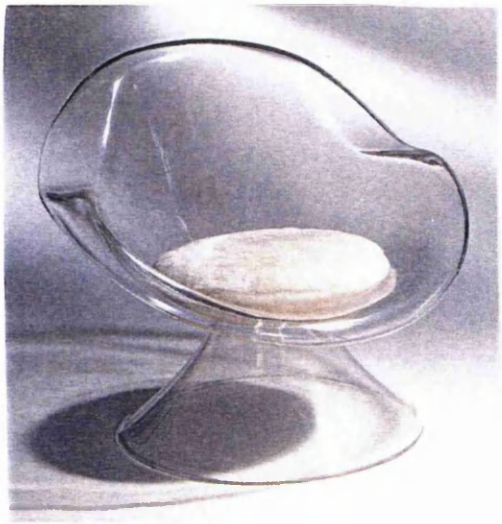


Fig. 17 Tulip chair, 1957.

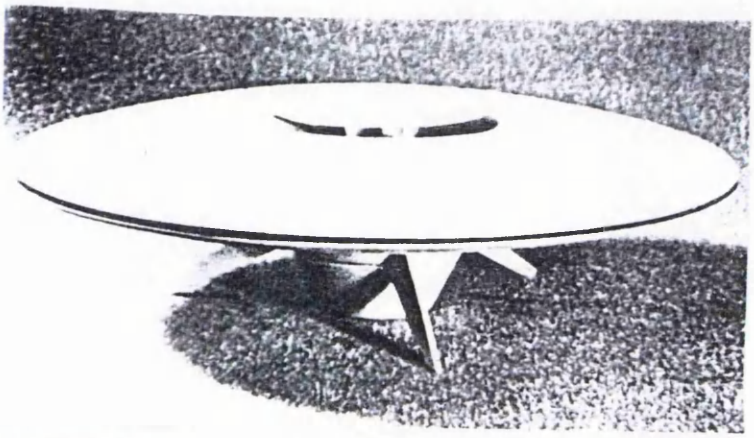
Fig. 18 Daffodil chair, 1958.

Fig. 19 Fiesta stacking cups and saucers, 1958.

Fig. 20 Polypropylene chair, 1962-3.

Fig. 21 Primavera range, 1954.

Fig. 22 Surrey textile, 1951.



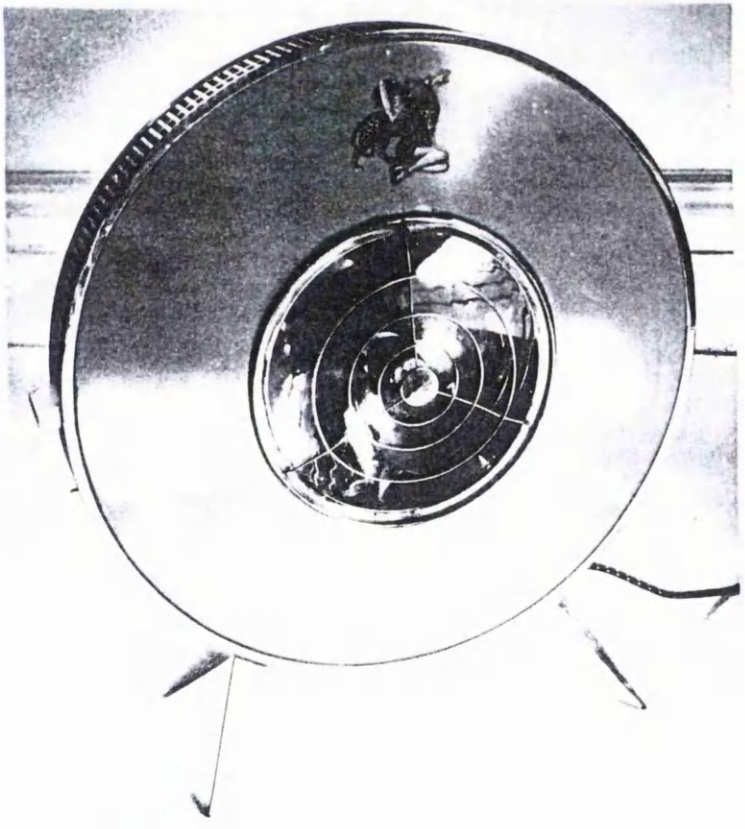
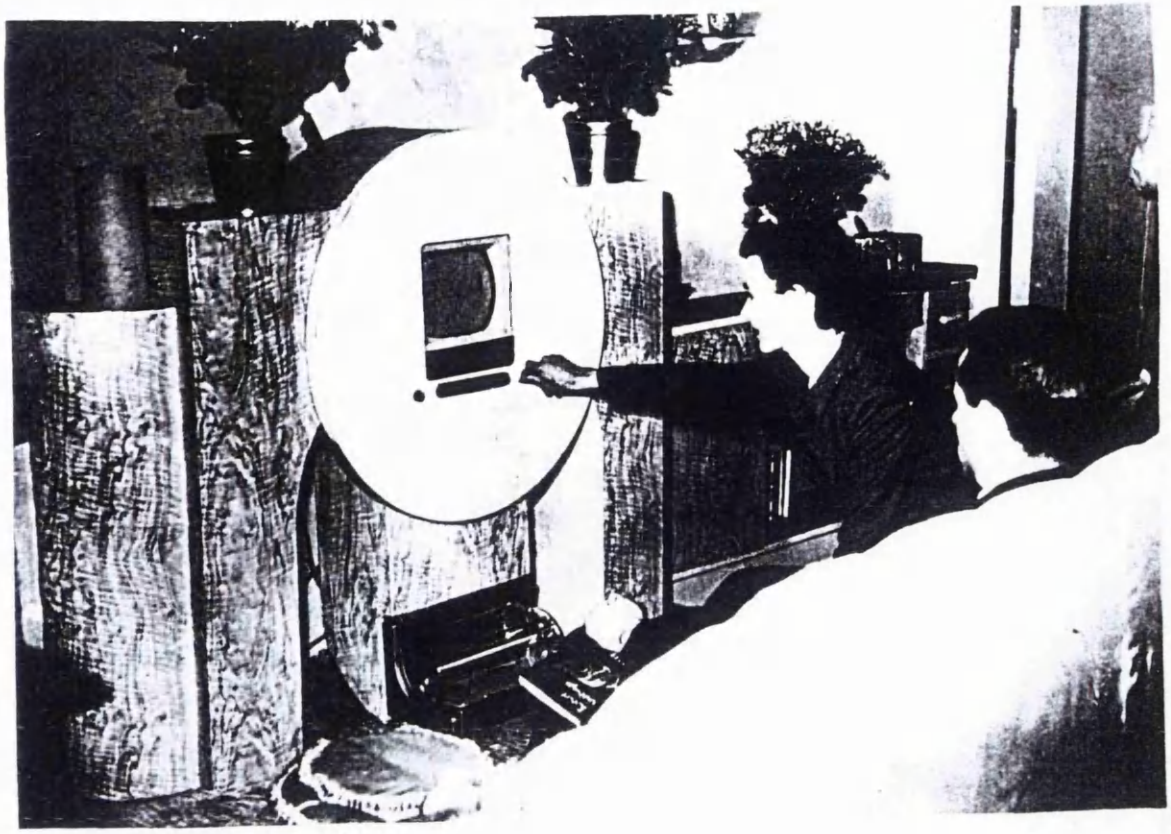


Fig. 23 Europa pendant light, 1957.

Fig. 24 'Flying Saucer' electric heaters, 1950s.



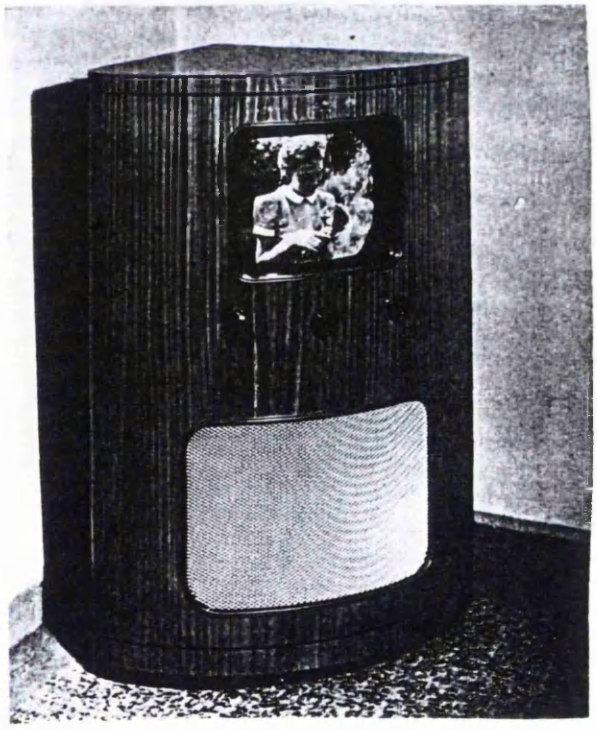


Fig. 25 Television at Ideal Home Exhibition, 1947.

Fig. 26 'Ambassador' television, 1952.

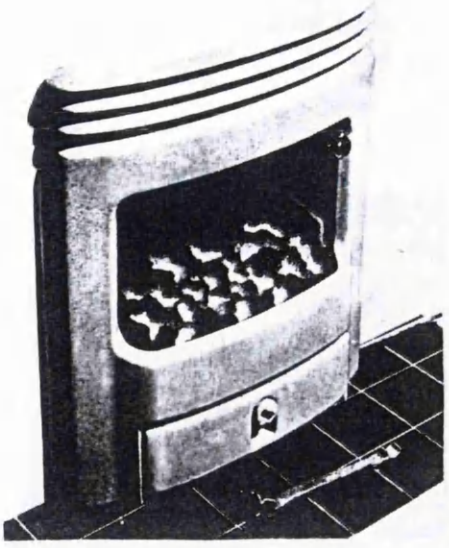


Fig. 27 Children's textile, 1950s

Fig. 28 Tele-circle unit, 1954.

Fig. 29 Parkray No.3 fire, 1956.

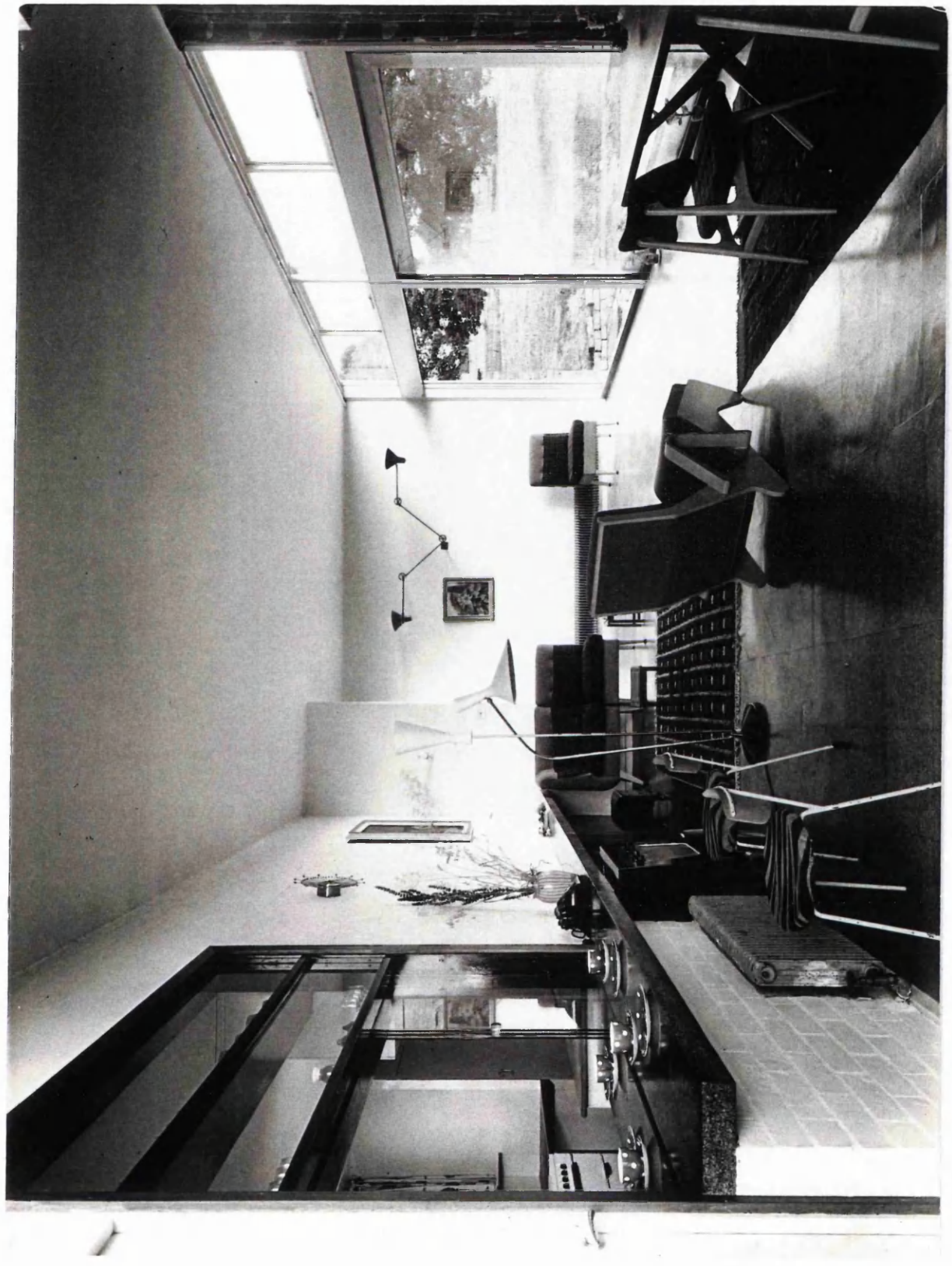


Fig. 30 Living room at Milk Wood, Oxshott, Surrey, c.1955.

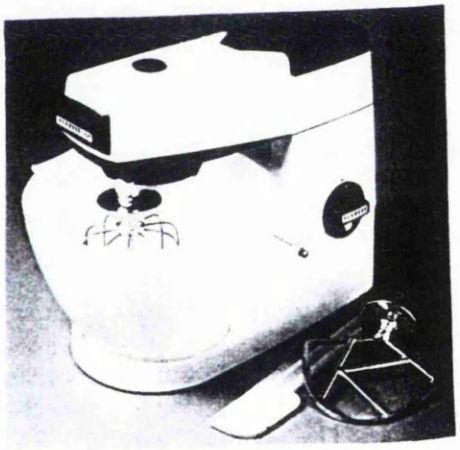
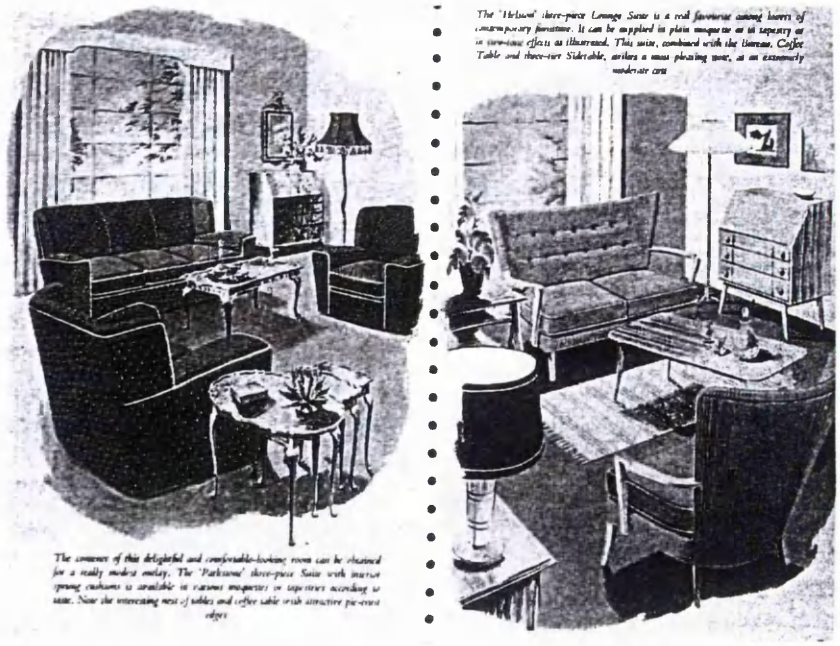


Fig. 31 Kenwood food mixer A700, 1948.

Fig. 32 Kenwood food mixer A701, 1960.



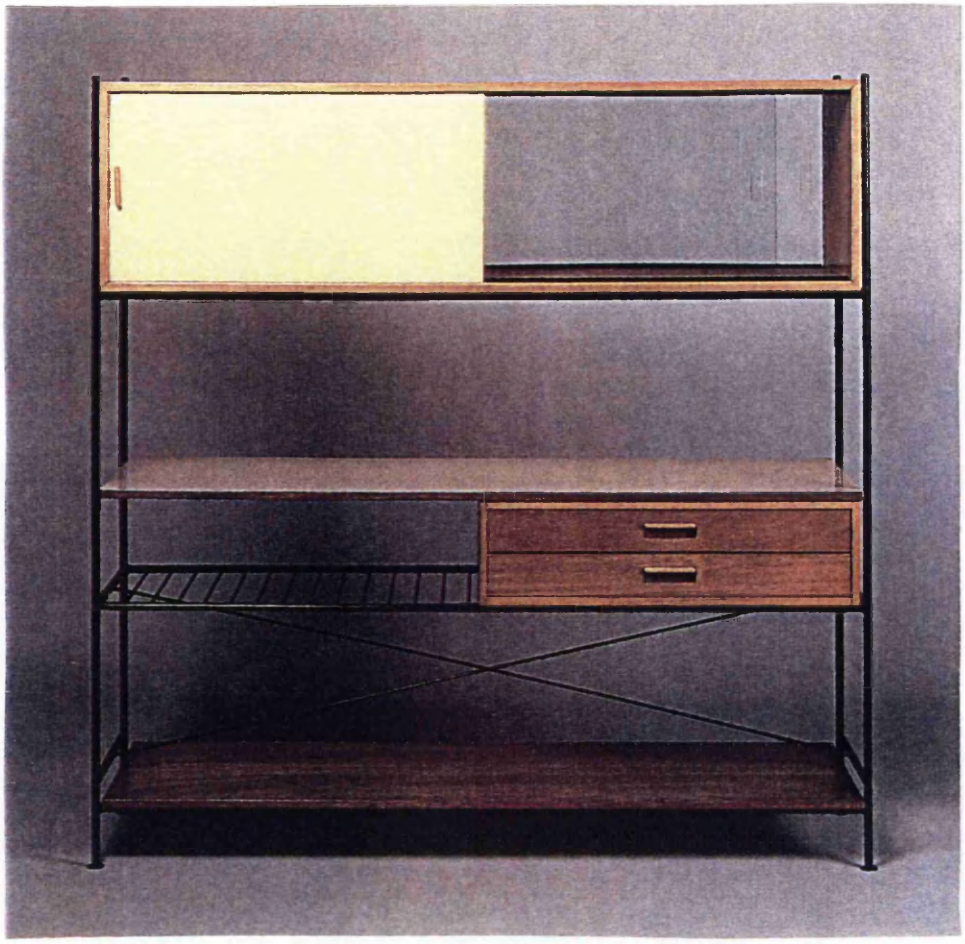
The contents of this delightful and comfortable-looking room can be obtained for a really modest outlay. The 'Parkwood' three-piece Suite with interior sprung cushions is available in various mouquettes or tapestries according to taste. Note the interesting nest of tables and coffee table with attractive pie-crust edges

The 'Helmet' three-piece Lounge Suite is a real favourite among lovers of contemporary furniture. It can be supplied in plain mouquette or in tapestry or in two-tone effects as illustrated. This suite, combined with the Lounge Coffee Table and three-tier Sidetable, strikes a most pleasing note, at an extremely moderate cost

Fig. 33 Maples Catalogue, 1954.

Fig. 34 'Just What Is It Today That Make's Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?', Richard Hamilton, 1956.

Fig. 35 Timothy Whites Catalogue, 1950s.



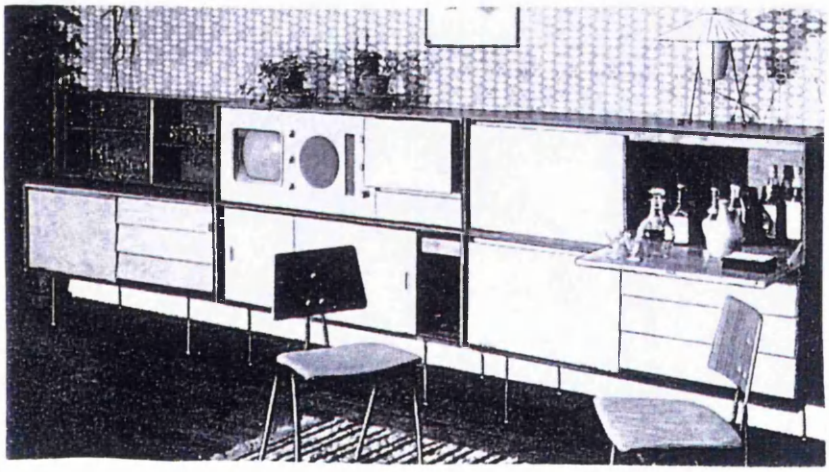
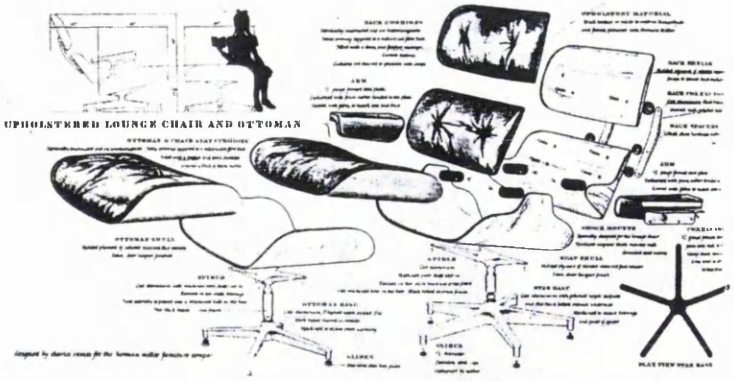


Fig. 36 Room divider, 1955.

Fig. 37 Modular storage unit, 1951.



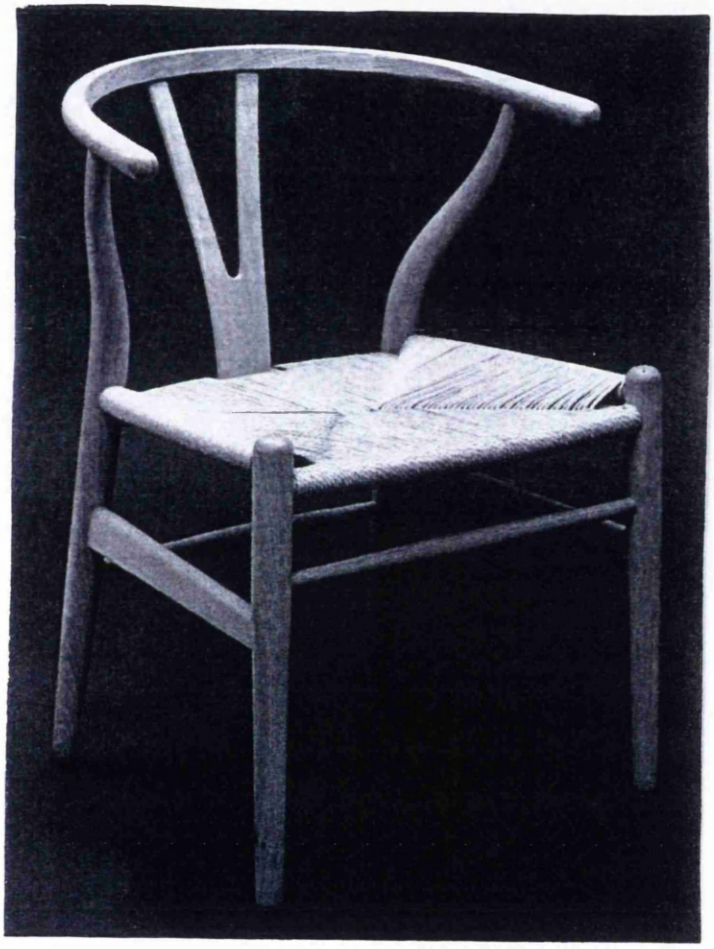
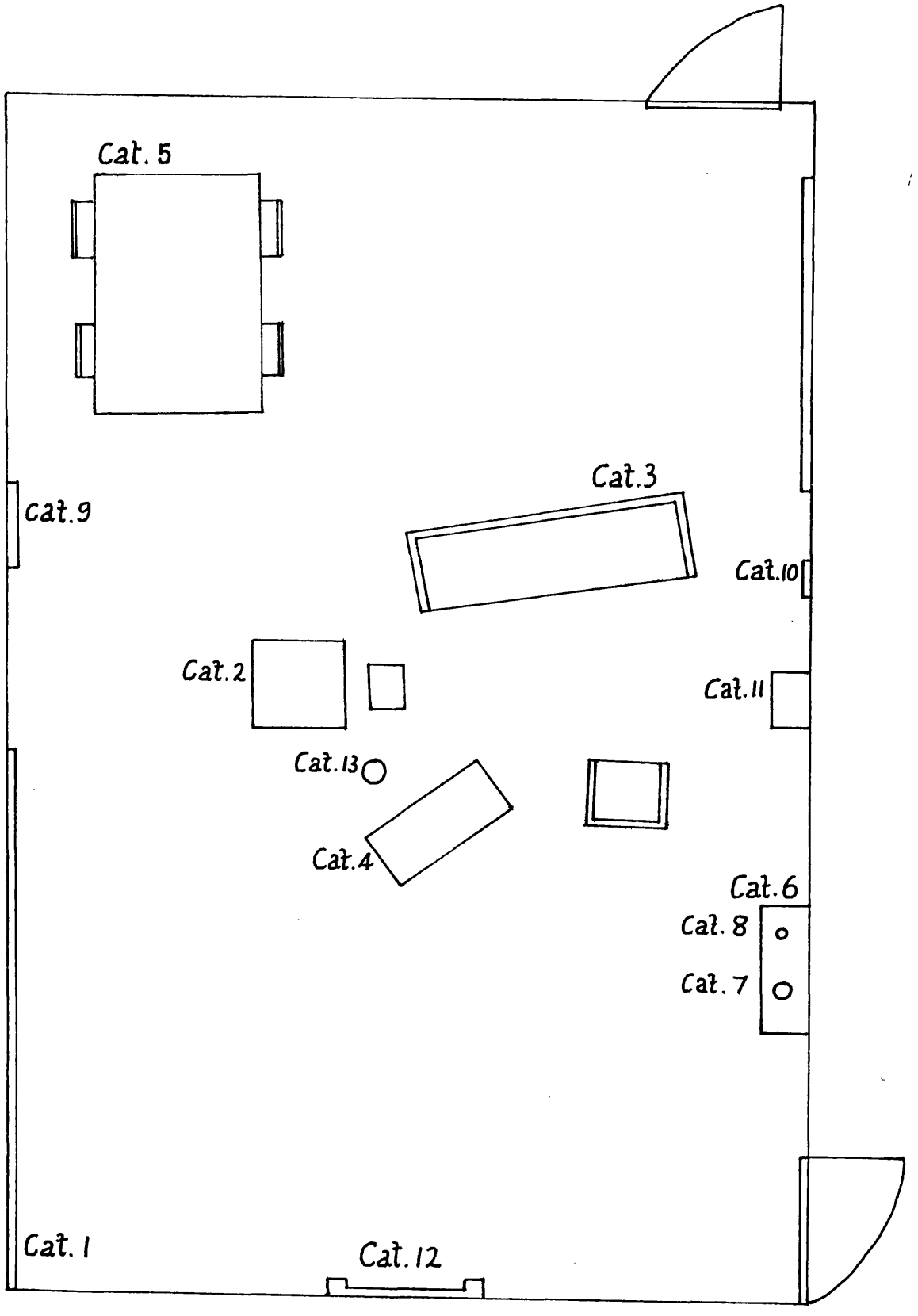


Fig. 38 Components of Charles Eames lounge chair and ottoman, 1957.

Fig. 39 Chair, 1950.

FLOORPLAN


Cat. 5
Cat.9
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Cat. 8
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Cat. 1
Cat. 12

GLOSSARY

Aluminium alloy	The form in which aluminium is used in the construction of furniture, consisting of a mixture of pure aluminium and other materials, resulting in a silvery-white metal resistant to corrosion.
Cocktail cherry	Term used to describe objects which imitate the form of molecular models, consisting of balls attached by thin metal spokes. Commonly seen on the chair legs of 1950s furniture.
Holoplast	A laminated heat and scratch resistant plastic veneered with mahogany and edged with aluminium.
Jacobethan	A derogarative term used to describe objects which combine decorative motifs from the Jacobean and Elizabethan periods.
Laminated wood	A wooden board consisting of two or more layers glued together with the grains running in the same direction.
Linoleum	A floor covering made from a mixture of pulverised cork and linseed oil.
Melamine	A plastic made from melamine formaldehyde, a thermoset produced by reacting melamine with formaldehyde. The resulting plastic is tough, shiny and can be dyed with bright colours.
Plastic laminate	A thin overlaying plastic layer.
Plymet	Plywood with an aluminium core and ash or rosewood veneer bonded to a structural frame of steel.
Plywood	A strong thin wooden board consisting of two or more layers glued together with the direction of the grain alternating.
Sgraffito	Scraping a fine line through a layer of surface material to reveal the ground beneath.
Terrazzo	Marble chips set into a layer of mortar, polished to produce a shiny surface.
Veneer	A thin layer of surface material.

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