

MODERN INTERIORS

By Alison Flanders, UHF Public Outreach Director

Shag carpet, check. Clear chairs hanging from the ceiling, check. If this starts your checklist for your living room today, then you're part of the new revolution that is bringing back the bold, brash, colorful and geometric interiors of mid-century modern interior design that were anything but bland.

The evolution to modern interiors began with the pioneers of the modern movement of architecture: Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Frank Lloyd Wright. While all men were architects by trade, they were very much active in the designing of furniture for their interior spaces. They built dramatic interior spaces to reflect the structural flow of their buildings.

To the masses, modern furniture started out being quite simple in design and was distributed mainly for office spaces or institutional use. The furniture available to commercial, and more importantly, residential projects barely existed. It wasn't until the late 30's that a German immigrant, Hans Knoll, began the production of simple modern furniture for residential use. His simple designs were used in military facilities and with their continued production through the war, Knoll secured a strong foothold in the modern furniture industry.

After the war many technological discoveries led to changes in the nature of interior spaces. Plastics could be made to simulate natural materials.

Many mid-century houses utilized the then-groundbreaking post and beam



This Frank Lloyd Wright designed desk (left) was built for the Johnson Wax headquarters in Wisconsin in 1939, and is on display in the Art Institute of Chicago.

Mies van der Rohe designed the Barcelona armchair (below) that is arguably one of the most well-known pieces in modern furniture.

These photos courtesy of Genibee via flickr.

architectural design that eliminated bulky support walls in favor of walls seemingly made of glass. This creating spaces with ample windows and open floor-plans.

Sleek simplicity was the hallmark of mid-century Modernism, reflecting the confident optimism of the postwar decades. Simple silhouettes and smooth surfaces are likewise celebrated in the furniture of the Modern era, in which a meticulous attention to form and detail creates comfortable, functional pieces that are also clean-lined works of art. Homes in the 50's and early sixties looked very... comfortable, and easy on the eyes. But then, about the mid 60's into the 70's, a lot of bold experimentation started, with wild colors and crazy patterns. Sometimes the results were shocking.

Ubiquitous in fashion as well as bathrooms and kitchens, "Mamie Pink" graced the floors and walls of many 50's homes. The mid-century trend to pink seems to have come directly and irrefutably from First Lady, Mamie Eisenhower. She wore a pink gown with 2,000 pink rhinestones to Ike's inauguration. Ike sent her pink flowers every morning. Her bathroom in Gettysburg was pink down to the cotton balls. The color also seems to have been known as "First Lady Pink." It also was a color trend right in line with the exuberance of the time.



As the years carried on, the colors became more flamboyant and the patterns more audacious. For example, kitchens and bathrooms were frequently the most colorful rooms in the house using harvest gold, olive green, fuchsia, orange, and periwinkle in appliances and materials such as Formica. Furniture that used to blend with the interior was designed to stand out and compliment the interior spaces. Modern interiors are still prevalent today but are being replaced at an alarming rate because people do not understand their significance or the materials have deteriorated. However, the sleek minimalism of interiors is eye catching and just as much a piece of preservation as the building itself.

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