

The Museum of Modern Art

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CHARLES EAMES; BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Charles Eames was born in St. Louis in 1907; developed an interest in engineering and architecture while working for a steel company during his high school years; and gained a scholarship in architecture at Washington University. Leaving the university at the end of his second year, he opened his first architectural office in St. Louis in 1930, the first year of the depression; later, after a journey into Mexico, he resumed practice, this time with Robert P. Walsh, and working with Emil Frei designed and produced furniture, fixtures, rugs, sculpture and painting along with the architecture.

In 1936 Eliel Saarinen offered him a fellowship and later a teaching post at the Cranbrook Academy of Art; among his colleagues there were Florence Knoll (then Schust), Ed Bacon, Harry Bertoia, Harry Weese, Ralph Rapson, Eero Saarinen.

As an extension of their architectural work, Charles and Eero, with the help of Ray Kaiser (who had studied painting with Hans Hoffman) prepared a set of designs for the Museum of Modern Art's Organic Furniture Competition; the designs took the two first prizes, but because they involved nonstandard methods (plywood molding of complex curves; bonding of wood to rubber and to metal) and war was imminent, production was halted.

Charles and Ray married in 1941 and moved to Southern California, where Charles designed motion picture sets for M.G.M. and they worked at developing low cost techniques for wood lamination and molding; this research grew into an independent research laboratory, which during the war was commissioned by the Navy Department to produce molded plywood splints and stretchers, and later, experimental glider shells. At the same time, the Eames were giving more attention to the uses of photography, as record and as communication, and began to use the fast-slide technique to illustrate lectures and present ideas.

In 1946 the molded plywood techniques and models were completed. The Museum of Modern Art put on an unprecedented, one-man furniture show of Eames designs; and soon Herman Miller, Inc., began to produce the group of plywood chairs, using tools developed in the Eames' Venice workshop. The next furniture development was the first use of reinforced plastic in a consumer product - the fiberglass shell chairs; these and a group of wire-based furniture were added to the collection.

With furniture production under way, a group of architectural projects followed (including the Eames' own house) - all seeking to provide undogmatic spaces for pleasurable and informative juxtapositions of

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things - the sort of juxtapositions that characterize the Eames' films, which begin in this same period: "Parade," "Blacktop" and "Communications Primer" were part of the very beginning of the film underground.

Then in 1952 appeared the first production in multimedia - multiple images complete with sound and cued smells; the title was "A Rough Sketch of a Sample Lesson for a Hypothetical Course" and the subject of the lesson was communications. Communications techniques, from this stage on, are an important part of the Eames Office productions; subsequent multiple image shows include "The Information Machine" done for IBM at the Brussels World's Fair in 1958; the huge seven screen show done for the U. S. State Department at Moscow in 1959; the multi-image introduction to the U. S. Science Exhibition in Seattle in 1962; and the IBM Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, 1964-65.

Special exhibitions were by now part of the office product:

the first of the Museum of Modern Art's "Good Design" exhibitions in 1950;

"Nehru, his life and his India" made at the request of the Indian government, which was shown in five national capitals (Charles and Ray made their first visit to India in 1958 and prepared a report to the government on problems of design and environmental quality in India, which was instrumental in the setting-up of the National Design Institute in Ahmedabad);

the first of the "Mathematica" exhibitions for IBM in 1961;

"Photography and the City" at the Smithsonian Institution in 1968;

"What is Design?" at the Musee des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, in 1969.

By 1956 the Lounge Chair and Ottoman began to replace the molded plywood as the "classic" Eames Chair. The series of airport seating started with O'Hare and Dulles in 1962. Recent designs: the executive chaise, 1968; the soft pad aluminum group, 1969.

From 1967 to 1971 the Eames Office worked on the program for the proposed National Aquarium in Washington, in association with the architectural firm of Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo (successors to the office of Eero Saarinen).

In 1970 Charles Eames was appointed to the National Council on the Arts for a six year term. He held the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship of Poetry at Harvard for the academic year of 1970-71.

Work in communications continues with IBM; the historical exhibition "A Computer Perspective" opened at IBM's exhibit center in New York in 1971 and is documented in a book of the same name to be published in 1973. Other exhibits at the center include a celebration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Nicholas Copernicus.

1930-36 - Opened his own architectural office in St. Louis, extending the practice to include furniture, fixtures, rugs, stained glass, mosaics, sculpture, paintings and various W.P.A. projects.

1936 - Accepted a fellowship to work with Eliel Saarinen at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, and later headed the Cranbrook Department of Design.

1940 - Collaborated on designs for the Museum of Modern Art's Organic Furniture Competition with Eero Saarinen and Ray Kaiser, a painter, winning the two first prizes.

1941 - Married Ray Kaiser and moved to Southern California, designing motion picture sets for MGM; with Ray, developed low cost techniques for laminating and molding wood. This begins the continuing Eames collaboration.

1941-46 - Commissioned by the U.S. Navy during WWII to produce molded plywood splints and stretchers; began using photography and fast-slide techniques to present ideas; unprecedented one-man furniture show presented by the Museum of Modern Art; Herman Miller, Inc. began production of molded plywood and fiberglass chairs.

1948-49 - Worked on various architectural projects, including the Eames' own Santa Monica house.

1950 - Began work on films, over the next years winning awards in Edinburgh, Melbourne, San Francisco, Mannheim, Montreal and London film festivals. First "Good Design" show designed for the Museum of Modern Art and the Merchandise Mart in Chicago.

1952 - "House of Cards" toy designed.

1953 - Presented the first multi-media production, "A Rough Sketch for a Sample Lesson for a Hypothetical Course" in collaboration with George Nelson and Alexander Girard at the University of Georgia and at U. C. L. A.

1956 - Herman Miller began production of Lounge Chair.

1958 - Made the film, "The Information Machine," for IBM at the Brussels World's Fair; made first design recommendations to the government of India, later resulting in the National Design Institute in Ahmedabad.

1959 - Multi-screen film "Glimpses of the USA" made as the introduction to the American Exhibition in Moscow.

1960 - Made film sequences for "The Fabulous Fifties," CBS TV special, winning Emmy for rapid cutting experimentation.

1961 - First "Mathematica" exhibition done for IBM.

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1962 - Made "The House of Science," multi-screen introduction to the U. S. Science Exhibit at the Seattle World's Fair, and "The Good Years," CBS TV special.

1964-65 - Designed the IBM Pavilion for the New York World's Fair.

1965-66 - Designed the exhibition "Nehru: His Life and His India" for the Indian government.

1967 - Began work on the proposed National Aquarium and Fisheries Center for the U. S. Department of Interior.

1968 - Designed the exhibition "Photography and the City" for the Smithsonian Institution.

1969 - Exhibition at the Louvre, "What is Design?" - one of five designers invited by the Musee des Arts Decoratifs.

1970 - Charles appointed to the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship of Poetry, Harvard University, for the academic year 1970-71, ^{and} to the National Council on the Arts.

1971 - Exhibition, "A Computer Perspective," done for IBM.

Work has continued on furniture and films. Awards received for design have included the American Institute of Architects' 100th Anniversary Gold Medal for Craftsmanship, the First Annual Kaufmann International Design Award, the First Domus Obelisk Award, the A.I.A. Industrial Arts Medal. Appointments have included the Benjamin Franklin Fellowship of the Royal Society of the Arts and membership on the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's steering committee, the M.I.T. Visiting Committee on the Arts.

present and my future work
past or future