

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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What is Modern Interior Design?

Edgar Kaufmann, Jr.; Museum of Modern Art; distributed by Simon & Schuster; \$1.25; 32 pp.; 57 black and white plates; color frontispiece; bibliography; publication date November 1.

A new book on modern rooms called WHAT IS MODERN INTERIOR DESIGN? will be published by the Museum of Modern Art on November 1. Written by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., Director of the Museum's well-known "Good Design" exhibitions of home furnishings and author of "What is Modern Design?" and "Taliesen Drawings," the 32-page book is the latest in the popular series of introductory books on the modern arts for laymen.

The book, with 58 illustrations of rooms by famous designers from all over the world, surveys the development of modern interior design from 1850 to 1950. Mr. Kaufmann discusses and gives examples of four main traits of modern rooms - comfort, quality, lightness and harmony. The influence of the Industrial Revolution and the use of new materials and new technological processes in home furnishings is shown as well as the more recent integration of nature and science in the modern interiors of today. A final section of the book is devoted to regional examples of modern interior designs in various sections of the U.S.

French rooms of the 18th and 19th centuries and a Saul Steinberg drawing of 1953 illustrate the development of our present day concept of comfort, along with photographs of interiors by the great 19th century English designer, William Morris, father of the famous "Morris chair" and by America's Frank Lloyd Wright.

Quality, which Mr. Kaufmann defines as not only meaning top-grade but also the design or material which best reveals the "characteristic constitution, the grain and nature of a thing" is shown in rooms designed by George Nelson and Edward D. Stone as well as Morris and Wright. Light tones, which Mr. Kaufmann says came to modern rooms first in the 1870s through James A. McNeill Whistler, the famous American painter who lived in London, are illustrated by a painting of an interior by Whistler and a drawing from a popular book on Japanese houses. A living room in Glasgow in 1901 and a dining room in Berlin in 1930 show how the modern concept of lightness was developed by designers in many countries.

Harmony, the last dominant trait of modern rooms which Mr. Kaufmann selects for comment, is treated at length with examples ranging from exhibition rooms in Norway and Detroit to interiors by Frank Lloyd Wright and Alexander Girard. Historical antecedents are shown in rooms by Bruce Talbert in England in 1869, H.H. Richardson in Washington, D.C. in 1885, Frank Lloyd Wright's 1899 dining room in Illinois, Horta's entrance hall for a house in Brussels in 1893, a house by Gaudi in Barcelona in 1907 and a drawing room in a castle in Scotland in 1899.

The influence of the Industrial Revolution and the historical development of the Machine Style is shown in photographs of interiors by Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Le Corbusier and Jeanneret. Naturalism, which Mr. Kaufmann calls an inherited trait of modern interiors, is illustrated by 19th century examples of household accessories, furniture by Bruno Mathsson, Aino and Alvar Aalto, and a display of molded plywood furniture designed by Charles Eames and shown at the Museum of Modern Art in 1946.

The concluding section of the book shows how the modern tradition in interior design has influenced the rooms that people live in today in different sections of the United States, where climate, terrain and communications have combined to give differing accents to the homes of each region. Design in New York City, with its moderate climate and immoderate land values, is shown in rooms by Russell Wright and William Lescaze. Houses in New England by Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer are illustrated. From California, where gardens are an important part of architecture and oriental design was a source of inspiration, interiors by Richard Neutra, Harwell Hamilton Harris and Gardner A. Dally are shown. The Middle West, which has developed a strong regional design tradition, is represented by houses by Schweikher and Elting, Alden Dow, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Note: Review copies may be obtained by writing the Publicity Department, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York City.

Photographs of illustrations from the book are available on request.