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Mid-Century Modern Design

A Complete Sourcebook

Dominic Bradbury

The ultimate survey of mid-century modern
design and architecture

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544pp

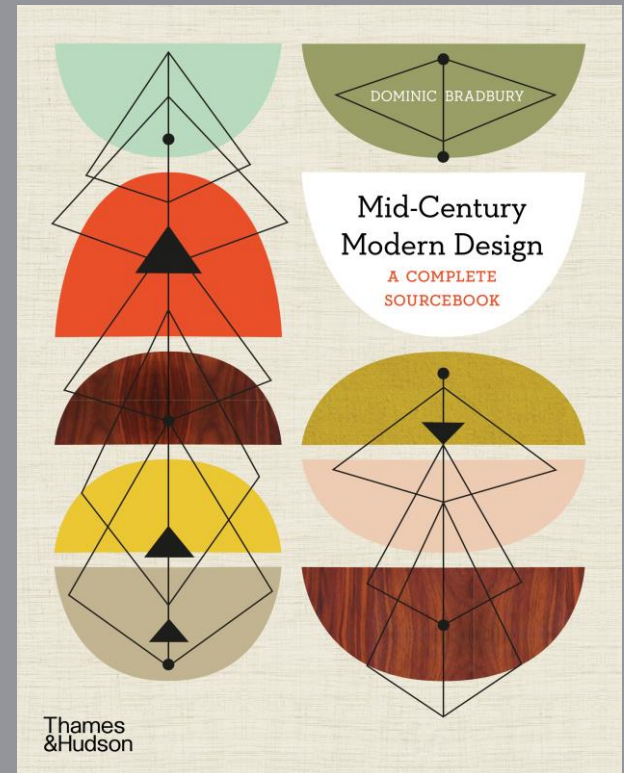
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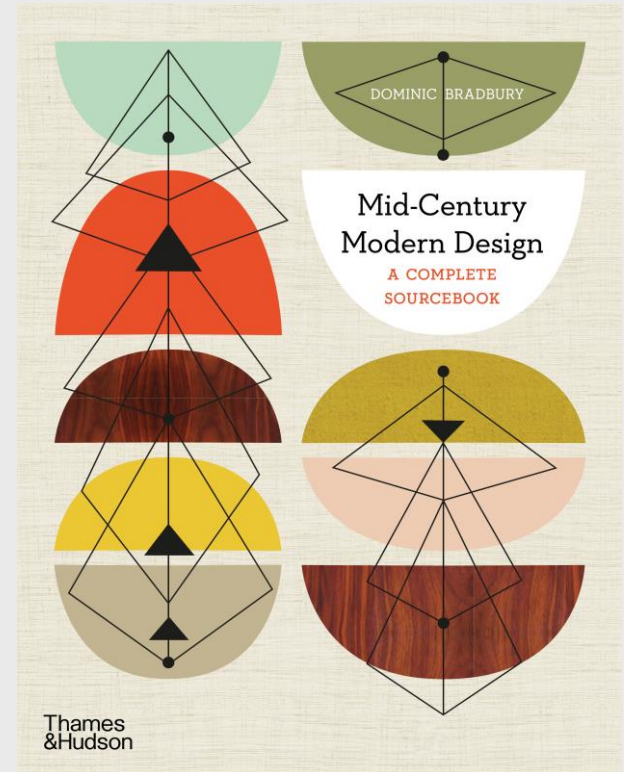
Book

Praise for *Mid-Century Modern Design*

‘The ultimate compendium for fans of the aesthetic’
The Times

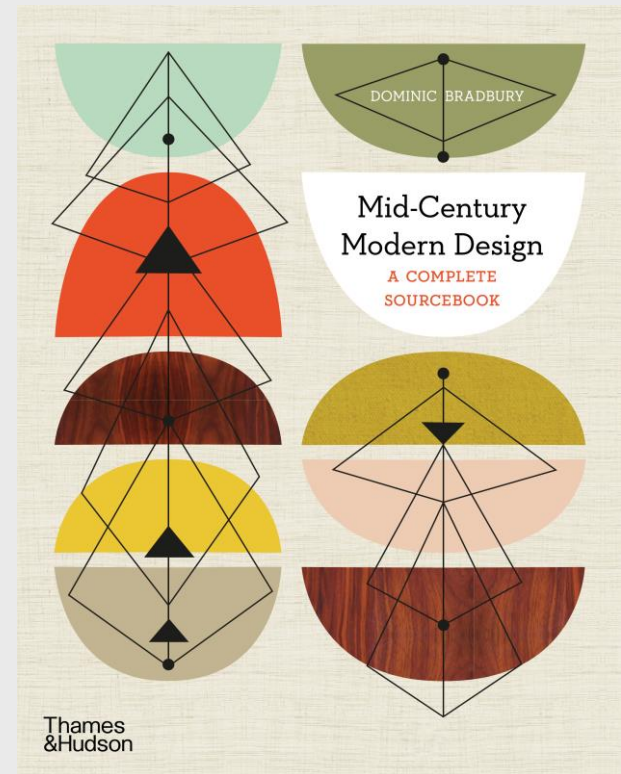
‘Encyclopaedic ... a comprehensive portrait of every
aspect of post-war production ... Fascinating’
*Wallpaper**

‘Ambitious and superbly produced ... comprehensive
and stunning’
Antiques Diary



Key Sales Points

- Includes the work of such icons as Saul Bass, Robin Day, Charles and Ray Eames, Marimekko, Isamu Noguchi, Dieter Rams, Lucie Rie and Paolo Venini, as well as architects Alvar Aalto, Philip Johnson, Richard Neutra and Oscar Niemeyer.
- Stylish layout, packed with over 1,000 mainly colour illustrations, that showcases both classic designs and mass-produced items as well as little-seen rarities and unusual objets d'art.
- An additional illustrated dictionary features hundreds more key mid-century designers and manufacturers as well as important organizations, schools and movements.



TO NOAH

PAGE 1 A selection of mid-century lighting fixtures by Le Klint.

PAGE 2 Forest pattern gift wrap, with graphic design by Charley Harper for Associated American Artists of New York, 1955.

OPPOSITE Side chairs designed by Harry Bertoia for Knoll, USA, 1952.

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Damaris Bradbury

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NOTE TO THE READER

Names that appear in CAPITAL LETTERS indicate cross-references to main entries in the book (pp. 36–50).

Names that appear with asterisks* indicate cross-references to entries in the A–Z section (pp. 504–534).

CONTENTS

Introduction 6

I. MEDIA AND MASTERS 12

FURNITURE 14

'Collecting Mid-Century Design' by Richard Wright 18

'Scandinavian Furniture: Mid-Century Phenomenon'

by Judith Gura 22

Eero Aarnio 26

Harry Bertoia 30

Joe Colombo 36

Robin Day 40

Charles & Ray Eames 44

Arne Jacobsen 52

Poul Kjærholm 58

Carlo Molino 62

George Nakashima 66

George Nelson 72

Verner Panton 76

Pierre Paulin 84

Warren Platner 88

Gio Ponti 92

Jean Prouvé 98

Ernest Race 102

Jens Risom 104

Sergio Rodrigues 106

Eero Saarinen 108

Joaquim Tenreiro 112

Hans Wegner 114

Edward Wormley 120

LIGHTING 124

'Lighting Design in Italy' by Alberto Bassi 128

Achille & Pier Giacomo Castiglioni 132

Poul Henningsen 136

Le Klint 140

Vico Magistretti 146

Serge Mouille 150

Isamu Noguchi 154

Jean Royère 158

Gino Sarfatti 162

GLASS AND CERAMICS 166

'Glass Design: Post-1945 Transatlantic Aesthetics' by Joy McCall 170

'Mid-Century Ceramics' by Alun Graves 174

Hans Coper 178

Kaj Franck 182

Gustavsberg Pottery (Wilhelm Kåge, Stig Lindberg

& Berndt Friberg) 186

Vicke Lindstrand 194

Gertrud & Otto Natzler 198

Lucie Rie 202

Axel Salto 206

Timo Sarpaneva 210

Paolo Venini 214

Russel Wright 220

TEXTILES 224

'Utility to Contemporary: Textiles in the Mid-Century Home'

by Daniel Heath 228

'Artist-Designed Textiles: 1945–1970' by Sue Prichard 232

Florence Broadhurst 236

Lucienne Day 240

Josef Frank 246

Alexander Girard 250

David Hicks 256

Jack Lenor Larsen 262

Martimekko 266

PRODUCT AND INDUSTRIAL DESIGN 270

'From Computers to Corporate Identity: Cold War-Era Design'

by Jana Scholze 274

'Mid-Century Product Design in Germany'

by Klaus Klemp 278

Corradino d'Ascanio 284

Kenneth Grange 286

Alec Issigonis 290

Jacob Jensen 294

Raymond Loewy 298

David Mellor 302

Marcello Nizzoli 306

Dieter Rams 308

Richard Sapper & Marco Zanuso 312

Ettore Sottsass 314

GRAPHICS AND POSTERS 318

'Mid-Century Confluences: Type, Design and Technology'

by Steven Heller 322

'The Travel Poster in the Mid-Century' by Sophie Churcher 328

Saul Bass 332

Max Bill & Ott Aicher 336

Wim Crouwel 340

Alan Fletcher 342

Adrian Frutiger 346

Abraam Games 350

Charley Harper 354

Jock Kinner & Margaret Calvert 360

Herbert Matter 362

Max Miedinger 366

Paul Rand 368

II. HOUSES AND INTERIORS 374

'Collecting the Mid-Century Home' by Matt Gibberd 380

'On Restoring Modernism: The Purist and The Pragmatist'

by Michael Boyd 384

Alvar Aalto: Maison Louis Carré, France 388

Lina Bo Bardi: Glass House, Brazil 394

Antonio Bonet: La Ricarda, Spain 400

Marcel Breuer: Stillman House II, USA 406

Charles Deaton: Sculptured House, USA 410

Craig Ellwood: Palevsky House, USA 416

Andrew Geller: Frank House, USA 422

Jakob Halldor Gunnleggsson: Gunnleggsson House, Denmark 428

Charles Gwathmey: Gwathmey House & Studio, USA 434

Philip Johnson: Glass House, USA 440

John Lautner: Elrod House, USA 446

Paulo Mendes da Rocha: Millán House, Brazil 452

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: Farnsworth House, USA 458

Richard Neutra: Kaufmann Desert House, USA 464

Oscar Niemeyer: Strick House, USA 470

Bruce Rickard: Marshall House, Australia 476

Harry Seidler: Rose Seidler House, Australia 482

Alison & Peter Smithson: Upper Lawn Pavilion, UK 488

Basil Spence: Spence House, UK 492

Arthur Withroff: Withroff House, USA 496

III. A-Z OF DESIGNERS AND MAKERS 502

Contributors' Biographies 535

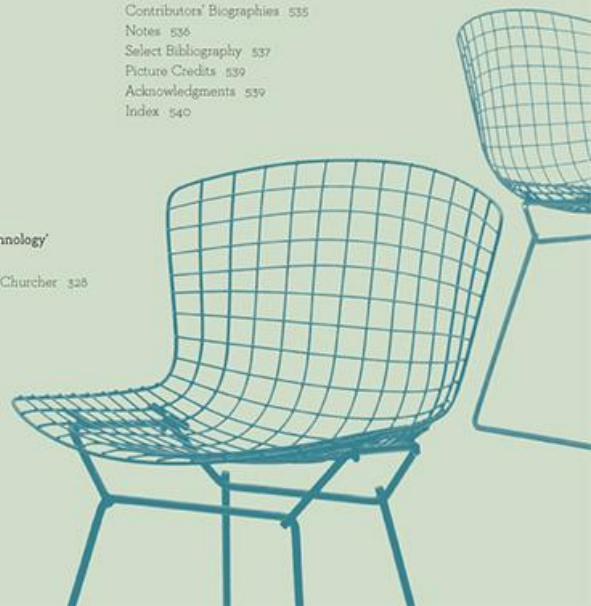
Notes 536

Select Bibliography 537

Picture Credits 539

Acknowledgments 539

Index 540



INTRODUCTION

The mid-century period was an age of dreams and optimism. In the post-war years, after all the chaos and crisis of a global conflict, the world began to rebuild and rethink itself. It was an era of hope, when many asserted their claims to freedom and gave voice to their ambitions, looking for new beginnings and possibilities. The 1950s and '60s were all about 'making it new', about laying claim to the future. For designers and architects, especially, it was an extraordinary time to be at work, and the opportunities for creativity and originality were widespread and welcome.

The twin fuels of rapid growth, particularly in the West, were the vast reconstruction effort underway in Europe - underwritten by the American Marshall Plan - and the vast spending power of the American people. These gave rise to an unprecedented consumer age, a sustained era of golden growth that spurred demand for a whole new spectrum of goods, products and services, which the world of design was happy to provide. In many respects, the patterns and expectations of American and Western consumers in the mid-century period laid down the template for modern living itself and formed a foundation for our own lifestyles in the 21st century.

In Europe, countries such as Britain, France, Germany and Russia had paid a terrible price during the war years in every respect. The post-war years saw the unravelling of the European colonial support network, as dependent countries sought their independence, and large swathes of many European cities - from Coventry to Caen to Cologne - had suffered appalling damage, not to mention the human cost. It would take many years for these countries to emerge from austerity, and in Britain the rationing of some foods and materials continued right up until 1954. But after the horrors and upheaval of the war years, the sense of relief in 1945 cannot be underestimated.

Reconstruction, in itself, offered a chance for a fresh start and a significant spur to European economies, as well as to their designers and architects. The efficient wartime production lines of Europe and America could now be adapted to make cars and bicycles, tractors and trains, toasters and kettles. The gradual rebuilding of London, Berlin and other towns and cities was an enormous undertaking and brought work and employment to thousands. Coventry Cathedral - famously devastated in a 1940 firestorm and rebuilt from 1956 to 1962 - became a post-war symbol of regeneration within a design by architect BASIL SPENCE that preserved the ruins of the original building while creating a bold, new structure that rose out of the ashes.

The revitalization of the German and Japanese economies in the post-war period was, in particular, an extraordinary success story. Having learnt the lessons of a humiliating German surrender and its ultimate consequences back in 1918, and wanting to boost Germany and Japan as stable bulwarks against the might of the USSR as the Cold War got underway, the Allies - especially the Americans - were eager to rebuild the two countries as effectively as they could. Aid and support programmes helped jump-start the design and manufacturing industries in both countries, to the point that German car manufacturing soon became hugely successful, while the Japanese economy was growing at just over 10% a year by the 1960s and by the early 1970s was the third largest economy in the world.

It was in America, however, that the consumer revolution really gathered pace in the post-war years. America had also paid a heavy price during the war years, but - for the most part - the war had not been fought on American soil. Its manufacturing base was not just intact but finely tuned after its wartime footing of maximum capacity. The US design and manufacturing industry was ready to take advantage of all kinds of innovations developed or perfected during the war years, from plywood through to jet engines.

Most importantly, the American consumer had never had it so good. They had money in their pockets, even after the war years, and those pockets began to bulge in the boom times of the 1950s and '60s, when America was busily exporting its products and expertise

BELOW Coventry Cathedral under reconstruction, to a design by Basil Spence, 1962.



ABOVE Screenprint from an advertisement of 1955, showing a Pan American Airways pilot greeting a mother and her three children as they board an international flight.

around the globe. With the Americans, more than any of the other Allies, it really was a case of 'to the victor the spoils', as the American public unleashed an almost insatiable demand for everything from dinnerware to international travel.

The American consumer offered the catalyst for a massive expansion in the world of design. This not only took the form of houses, interiors, textiles and home products but also 'big ticket' items like refrigerators and automobiles. Designers and manufacturers eagerly answered the call of the consumer to 'make it new'. The car industry famously developed the notion of the 'annual upgrade' - adding new styling and trims to what was often, essentially, the very same car so as to encourage another trade-in purchase.

A whole new sector of design really came into its own in the 1950s, working alongside some key partners. This was graphic design, which began producing the logos, branding and advertising posters for a fast-growing corporate culture. The first Burger King opened in 1954, and McDonald's a year later. They - and their counterparts in fields such as the hotel sector or airline industry - needed instantly recognizable logos and a strong corporate identity. The graphics departments worked with the advertising gurus and the marketing men... and women. The whole world of marketing took off, along with consumer culture, the throw-away society, big business and global corporations. Issues of image, identity

COLLECTING MID-CENTURY DESIGN

RICHARD WRIGHT



Design at mid-century represents a Golden Age. It marks a beginning where the possibilities of design go beyond the utopian dreams of earlier periods to become a mass movement encompassing optimism and opportunities for the future. Mid-century marks the start of the broad dissemination of design - a process still actively playing out today as design touches every facet of our lives. Mid-century design is a great field for collecting, as it is historically important, well documented and still widely accessible. First-rate examples of iconic designs are still being introduced to the market and new discoveries within the field are still being made.

When collecting mid-century design, it is important to buy what you love. Great collections exhibit the passion of their collectors. There is no reason to buy things you do not love (even if they are by an important designer). Furthermore, by buying items you are passionate about you can ensure satisfaction with your purchases. Make educated acquisitions by learning before you buy. This is my best advice: 'The more I know, the more I see.' When you educate your eye, you really do see things differently and appreciate the work more. So study the period and the materials. This will guide you in making better choices and will add to the overall experience of collecting. Finally, buy the best that you can afford. While quirky, unsung oddities from the past may appeal, the bulk of any collection should be focused on the best quality examples that you can find. I try to collect only in areas where I can afford to buy the best. For me this means collecting works by CHARLES & RAY EAMES and not JEAN PROUVÉ, but there are many levels in between.

Begin by working with the top professionals in the field of design. Auction houses, dealers, museums and artist foundations are all resources that can help you make informed

OPPOSITE PAGE *Nuage*
Bibliothèque, designed by
Charlotte Perriand, c. 1956,
made by Ateliers Jean Prouvé
for Galerie Steph Simon,
in ash, enamelled steel and
aluminium.

BELOW LEFT A 1957 Marcoule
banquette from the Centre
de Réadaptation Fonctionnelle,
Nancy, by Jean Prouvé, in
enamelled steel and leather.

BELOW RIGHT Frenchman's
Cove table by George
Nakashima, c. 1968, in Persian
walnut and rosewood.

decisions. Remember to ask questions - seemingly basic advice but too often ignored, as new collectors may not wish to appear to be novices, or some collectors may think they already know the answers.

Auction houses are an under-utilized resource. They have handled thousands of items and are familiar with the nuances of many designs as well as the variations within a designer's body of work. In addition, the top auction houses sell works with a guarantee: they have market specialists and researchers who vet the items on offer and ensure their authenticity. Often auction houses have specific information to share and more details than they publish in their catalogues. It is well worth asking about aspects including condition, provenance and the auctioneer's estimation of a work before you bid at auction.

Dealers are the backbone of the design industry, and working with the top dealers in the field is a great place to start a collection. These experts tend to have a more focused interest in designers and genres, and their business relies on sharing their knowledge and experience. Working with the best dealers will not only provide you with information but can also save you money, as costly mistakes can be prevented. Dealers make it their business to know where to find outstanding, fresh pieces. Again, ask lots of questions: it is always the best way to learn.

Museums are the gatekeepers of culture and often decide what will become the defining pieces of an era. They have the responsibility of choosing well and preserving the evolving history of design. Visit museums, attend exhibitions and reference publications to get a better picture of the period in which you are collecting. Understanding the context for the works you choose to collect can help you understand the processes and materials used.

Refer to artist foundations and archives whenever possible. These are dedicated to the works of specific designers and often have primary resource materials, such as sketches, invoices or notes from the designer at their disposal. You may find that an organization, such as the Isamu Noguchi Foundation, has access to a catalogue raisonné. If you contact its researchers regarding a specific work, they can probably tell you about related works and may also be able to provide exhibition history or additional provenance details. Some organizations, such as the George Nakashima Foundation, also keep original hand-written order cards for commissioned designs, which can help determine the date or collection from which a work comes. Not all foundations or archives are free of charge, but their fees are a small price to pay for the information and assurance they can provide.



GEORGE NELSON 1908-1986

AMERICAN MODERNIST
AND CREATIVE POLYMATH
RENOUNDED FOR HIS
COLOURFUL, PLAYFUL DESIGNS

George Nelson was a creative polymath who helped give shape to the mid-century modern world through his writings, ideas and collaborations with others as much as through his own furniture designs. He is credited with concepts as varied as the modern shopping mall, built-in storage wall, family room and modular furniture system.

As director of design at Herman Miller* from 1945 through to 1972, he became a midwife to designers such as CHARLES EAMES, ALEXANDER GIRARD (see under 'Textiles') and ISAMU NOGUCHI (see under 'Lighting'). But Herman Miller also became the producer of some of Nelson's own most famous designs, including the Coconut chair of 1955, with a sculpted seat in the shape of a coconut segment made from an upholstered steel shell resting on a triptych of steel legs (see pp. 14-15), and the Marshmallow sofa of 1956, originally produced in a hand-made edition of just two hundred. These were pieces of startling geometrical purity, but at the same time they were visually appealing and playful.

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Nelson studied architecture at Yale before periods in Washington and Rome. While in Europe,

he began interviewing pioneering architects and designers, and submitted his pieces to a magazine called *Pencil Points*. In 1935 he became an editor at *Architectural Forum* magazine and formed working relationships with many key American innovators, a number of whom - such as Buckminster Fuller* and Isamu Noguchi - became good friends.

Through his writings and books, Nelson's ideas began to circulate, and in 1945 D. J. DePree, Herman Miller's chairman, invited him to be director of design at the company. It was an arrangement that allowed Nelson a great deal of creative freedom, both to commission and design for Herman Miller and also to pursue outside interests. The security of his contract gave him the opportunity to launch his own design studio two years later, which became George Nelson Associates, Inc.

Among Nelson's earliest Herman Miller designs was the MAA chair of 1958, which used an innovative ball and socket design with moulded fibreglass to create an office chair with an adjustable back - a highly influential design that helped to shape the evolution of the modern office chair. There was also his Modular seating system of 1956, with a range



RIGHT A George Nelson & Associates DAF chair, 1958, produced by Herman Miller, in fibreglass, chrome-plated steel and aluminium.



LEFT AND BELOW Model 5670 Marshmallow sofas in white and yellow, 1956, manufactured by Herman Miller, with a framework of enamelled and chrome-plated steel and with upholstery pads coated in naugahyde.



GERTRUD NATZLER
1908-1971
& **OTTO NATZLER**
1908-2007

AUSTRIAN POTTER AND GLAZER
PARTNERSHIP, WORKING IN
CLOSE SYNERGY TO CREATE
HARMONIOUS, WIDELY ADMIRER
CERAMICS

The revered ceramicists Gertrud and Otto Natzler always followed their instincts and set their own direction. Their work was not influenced by fashion, artistic movements or the philosophies of others, but stood alone and independent. They remained focused, limiting their social circle and perfecting their work within a prolific output.

Gertrud Natzler was the potter, creating vases, bowls and plates on the potter's wheel. Her work fell into two distinct camps: paper-thin constructions characterized by their great sense of delicacy and more 'monumental' pieces, including vases on a larger scale with a more solid appearance. Her husband, Otto, was a glaze master, developing around 2,000 recipes and experimenting with firing techniques. His approach was scientific, but he was not afraid to fail through trial and error.

One of Otto Natzler's fascinations was with reduction firing, whereby organic materials such as wood shavings and leaves are added to the kiln so that as they burn they reduce the amount of oxygen available, affecting the glaze colours while sometimes marking and scarring the pots themselves. Natzler recorded the results in great detail and kept records for around 25,000 different pieces. There were many variations of colour and texture, but Natzler is best known for surfaces with a rugged, volcanic quality - finishes that are pitted and worn, battered and uneven, rather than polished and crisp, as well as variegated glaze patterns full of depth.

Otto Natzler was born in Vienna, where his father was a dentist. He studied textile design at a young age and then worked in a necktie company, developing colour schemes, but lost his job when the Jewish-owned firm was boycotted by German retailers. In 1933 he met Gertrud Amon and divorced his first wife the following year. Gertrud was working as a secretary, but was already interested in art and ceramics. They established a studio together and Otto soon recognized his partner's talents, abandoning his own work as a sculptor to begin his experiments in glazing. Both were largely self-taught, with Otto's initial attempts at firing ending in disaster.

Yet the Natzlers' work evolved quickly and by 1937 they had won a silver medal at the Austrian Pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition. That same day, the German army moved into Austria. The couple packed up their possessions - including their potter's wheel, kiln and early pots - and moved to Los Angeles. In America, their work evolved significantly. Just two years after arriving, they mounted their first solo exhibition and began earning praise from commentators.



RIGHT Wheel-thrown, glazed earthenware footed vase by Gertrud & Otto Natzler, 1942.

FAR RIGHT Closed form vase in wheel thrown and glazed earthenware, c. 1940, by Gertrud & Otto Natzler.

OPPOSITE Split disc composition, solo work by Otto Natzler in glazed stoneware, 1981.





OPPOSITE A collection of
Inacio bottles and stoppers
in sommaro glass with a
wheel-carved surface, c. 1956.

BELOW A set of four glass
Clessidre sand timers, c. 1946.



FLORENCE BROADHURST 1899-1977

HIGHLY ORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN
DESIGNER FAMOUS FOR HER
COLOURFUL, BOLD,
FREE-SPIRITED DESIGNS

Florence Broadhurst had an extraordinary talent for reinvention. A singer, fashion designer, painter and art teacher, she was an eccentric character who achieved international fame with her textile and wallpaper designs, which were just as bold as their creator.

Born on a cattle station in Queensland, Australia, Broadhurst could not be contained by the outback for long. As a singer in the 1920s, she travelled widely in South East Asia and China, her experiences ultimately helping to shape her later designs. She established a singing and dancing school in Shanghai before moving to London in the early 1930s, where she ran her own dress shop, Madame Pellier. After the war, she returned to Australia, where she worked and exhibited as a landscape and portrait painter.

In 1950, she moved in another new direction and founded her wallpaper and textile company, Florence Broadhurst Wallpapers. The spirit of Jazz Age Shanghai influenced many of her early papers and fabrics, which featured oversized peacocks and leathers, as well as cranes and egrets. The papers were hand-printed in vibrant colours, carefully selected by Broadhurst, and she also experimented with metallic finishes that reinforced the Deco flavour of a certain strand of her output. She also prided herself on tailoring colour choices to her clients' needs.

Other patterns have a more modernist, mid-century feel, with abstract fans repeated in her Kabuki fabric, while her distinctive Japanese Floral pattern transformed the flowers into oversized ethereal plumes. These prints featured startling images that gradually became more graphic in character.

By the 1960s, Broadhurst's work was more geometric, sharing some of the qualities found in the pattern designs of DAVID HICKS. Her Honeycomb pattern, in particular, had a powerful Op Art flavour, as did Pagoda, which seemed to splice touches of Vasarely and elements of Moorish tile design. Her Curly Swirls and Waterswirls designs showed a decidedly psychedelic aspect, along with her Solar wallpaper. Patterns would emerge from her mind at 'all hours of the day', she once said.

Broadhurst's innately glamorous designs made her a household name in Australia and were being exported internationally by the 1970s. Her success came to an abrupt halt in 1977, when she was murdered in her studio in Sydney. One of Australia's most original design voices was silenced in mysterious circumstances and the killer was never found.

Signature Prints in Australia has reissued many of Broadhurst's designs, while a range of Broadhurst carpets has also been put into production. American designer Kate Spade is also among those who have adopted Broadhurst patterns in their own work.

LEFT Japanese Bamboo
pattern, reissued by Signature
Prints, Australia.

OPPOSITE Japanese Floral
pattern, reissued by Signature
Prints, Australia.





ABOVE Braun Station T1000
CD World Receiver radio, 1995.



ABOVE 600 Universal
Shelving for Vitsoe, 1960.

LEFT Braun TG60 tape
recorder, 1955.

