

report and ruminations on furniture midwest

in the showrooms

Business Week, a publication frankly indifferent to design for its own sake, devoted the "Marketing" section of its February 21st issue to a comparison between the American house of 1950 and its 1940 counterpart, casting a cold commercial eye on what the changes in architecture, in building costs, and in the habits of the population were doing to the furniture being bought for the inside of today's house.

To *Interiors'* readers, who are specialists in this field, the information set forth by BW is hardly news. You know all about the smaller space, the lighter-scaled, more delicate, and more versatile furniture designed and finished so as to be usable in rooms where the open plan and the glass facade have left very few solid walls to back up against. But the most intriguing data came from a housewives' poll taken by what we judge to be a disinterested agent, the F. & M. Schaefer Brewing Company. The ladies were asked not only whether their furniture was traditional or modern, but which they would buy now if they had a chance to start all over again. The answer to that one was modern, 46% to 32% (the rest divided between genuine antiques and early American).

That, therefore, is the prevailing taste in the mass market, the accepted style, the terminus of trends that have been several years on the road. *Interiors'* readers, on

CAL-MODE FURNITURE COMPANY's living, dining, and bedroom furniture is simple, inexpensive, but distinguished, thanks to subtleties of proportion and line contributed by designer Klipp Stewart. Sofa comes with several kinds of cushion compartmentalizing. Line features prima vera wood, brass room dividers, white lacquer. 5959 South Western Street, L. A.



the other hand, are occupied with trends just starting out in life—so young, indeed, that they could still be nipped in the bud. (Your concern with individual creations apart from trends is of course outside the scope of a market report.) In view of the decided preference for what the general public calls "modern," it is interesting to realize after a tour of the midwest marts that the new offerings in the "class" or *avant-garde* showrooms make the use of such labels as "modern" or "traditional" entirely misleading, if not false. Before getting into the solid reportorial core of this review—be assured that we soon shall—we must set down an observation that seems to us obvious: many of the expensive, well made, and well designed modern lines have much more in common with their traditional equivalents than with "modern" furniture of different price and workmanship. There are certain kinds of elegance that characterize specific modern and traditional types alike, and certain kinds of vulgarity that spoil both modern and traditional products.

The method of manufacture is no criterion, since much modern furniture is made by hand with ancient methods, while lots of traditional furniture is turned out on factory assembly lines.

That old debating weapon—function—has also lost (Continued on Page 178)



M. SINGER & SONS is steadily increasing its collection of Bertha Schaefer designs. The off-the-floor armchair at left offers capacious seating, foam-rubber comfort, and a look of solid financial standing without wasting an inch of space or ounce of weight, thanks to the sparseness of the frame, recessing and tapering of the walnut legs. 32-38 East 19th Street, New York, and Merchandise Mart, Chicago.

M. SINGER & SONS' Italian designed pieces include this slim new sofa by Carlo De Carli, with walnut and foam rubber resting securely on a steel-web base. The travertine-topped walnut bench table is by Bertha Schaefer, also comes five feet long or in special sizes to order.

GRAND RAPIDS BOOKCASE & CHAIR COMPANY has added to the Hastings Square Collection by William Pahlmann: a walnut dining group in mellow "Beeswax" finish, a pandanus-fronted breakfast usable in either living or dining room, a leather-cushioned, large square stool, a spindle-back sofa and broad, deep companion cocktail chair, and lots more. Hastings, Michigan; and Waters Building, Grand Rapids.



HARVEY PROBER, INC., showing in Chicago Merchandise Mart for the first time, presents for retail an adaptable, sectional, upholstered "Tailored Room Group"; and for the designer market a "Shinto Bedroom" of birch lacquered in a wide choice of colors. Off-white rice paper drawer-front inserts keep the trim but ample and luxurious pieces from looking heavy. 136 Fifth Avenue, New York.



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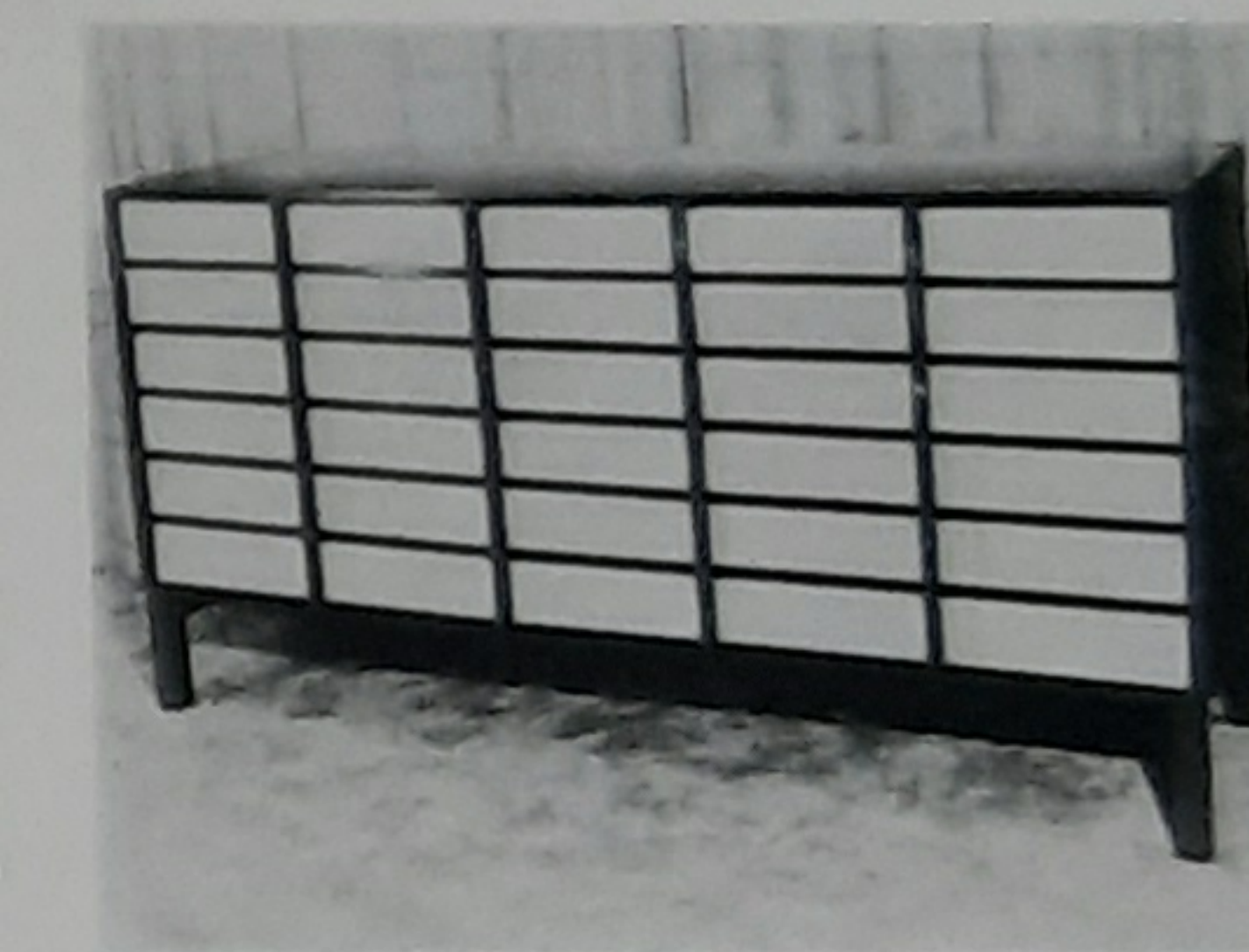
That old debating weapon—function—has also lost (Continued on Page 178)

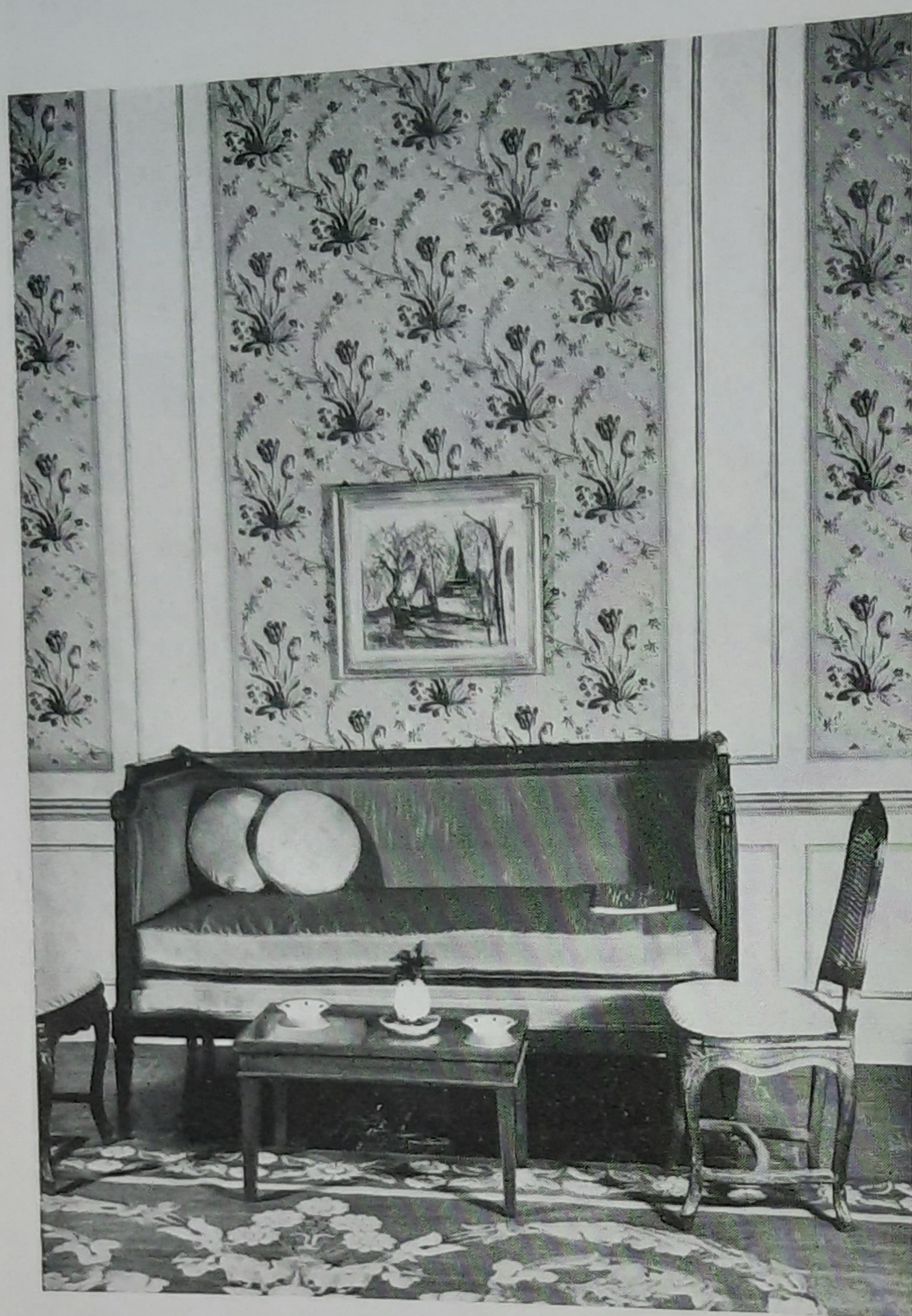


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Report on furniture

(Continued from Page 135)

its meaning. Aside from the fact that the furniture of certain periods was as easy to clean, serviceable, and gadgety as modern furniture, we must also face the results of the constant adaptation of traditional "reproductions" to modern conditions—by rescaling, by the re-fitting of storage facilities, and other manipulations. Some of these are recent, but not all—take the Louis XVI cocktail table that made a very successful debut in the twenties despite the unquestioned absence of cocktails from Louis XVI's court. Such adaptations vary enormously in taste and skill, but one would have to be a fanatic to deny that some of them come off quite well.

The success of several modern groups with early American overtones (and it was an immediate success, when the first of them, Paul McCobb's Directional Modern, appeared) is another indication of the basic fallacy inherent in a judgment of design quality founded on the arbitrary pasting of a "modern" or "traditional" label. The arts and sciences of designing an environment—and its component objects—are too complicated for such easy definitions, and anyone who insists on calling modern black and traditional white (or vice versa) is not only ignoring grays and ombres but a million mingled colors.

Today's furniture market is full of designs of different period affiliations which go well together because of inherent similarities. Pale-wooded, unpretentious provincial styles go easily with pale-wooded, unpretentious modern, for example.

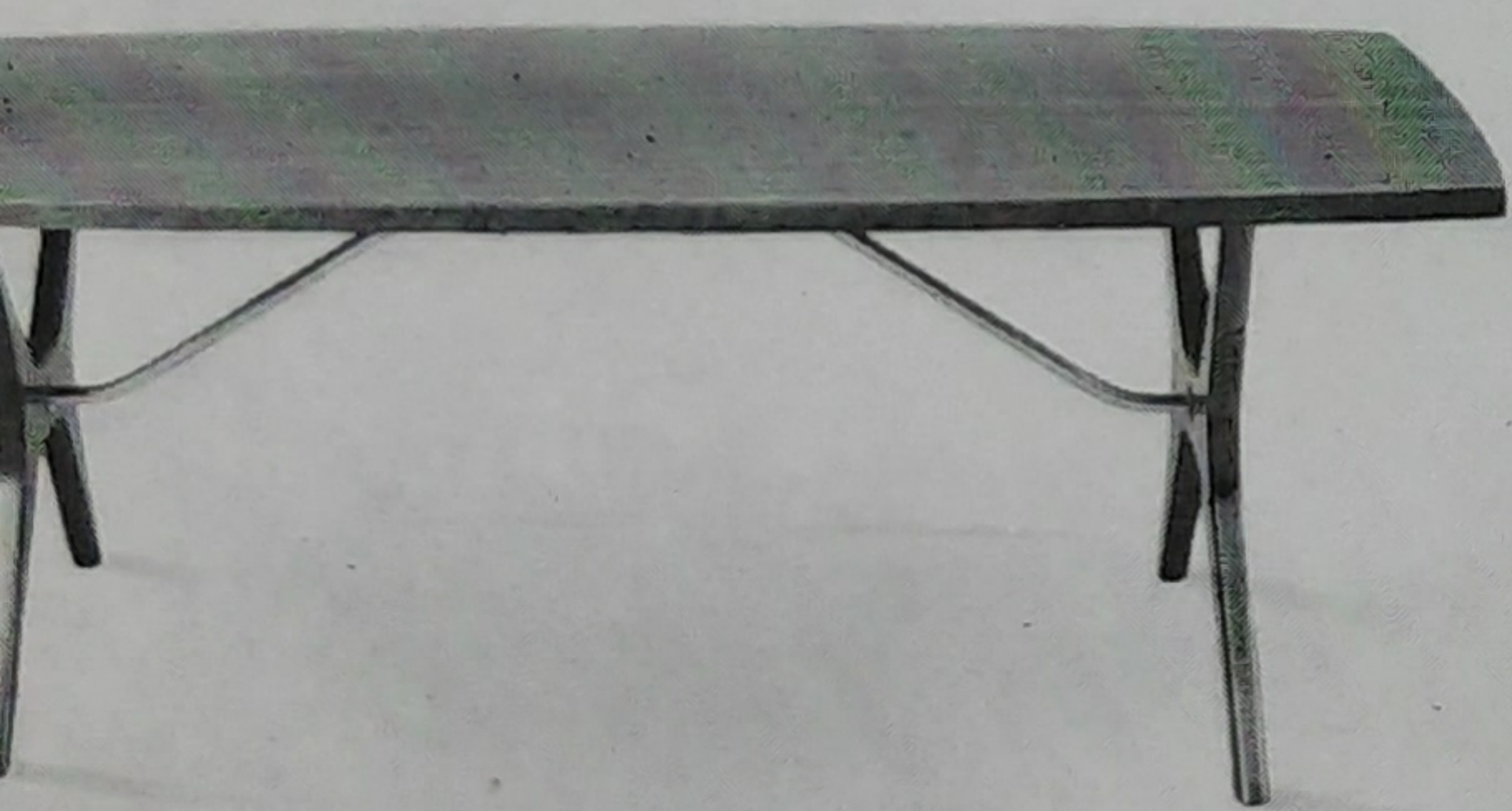
Another attitude about how to design an interior which keeps up interest in antiques and faithful reproductions



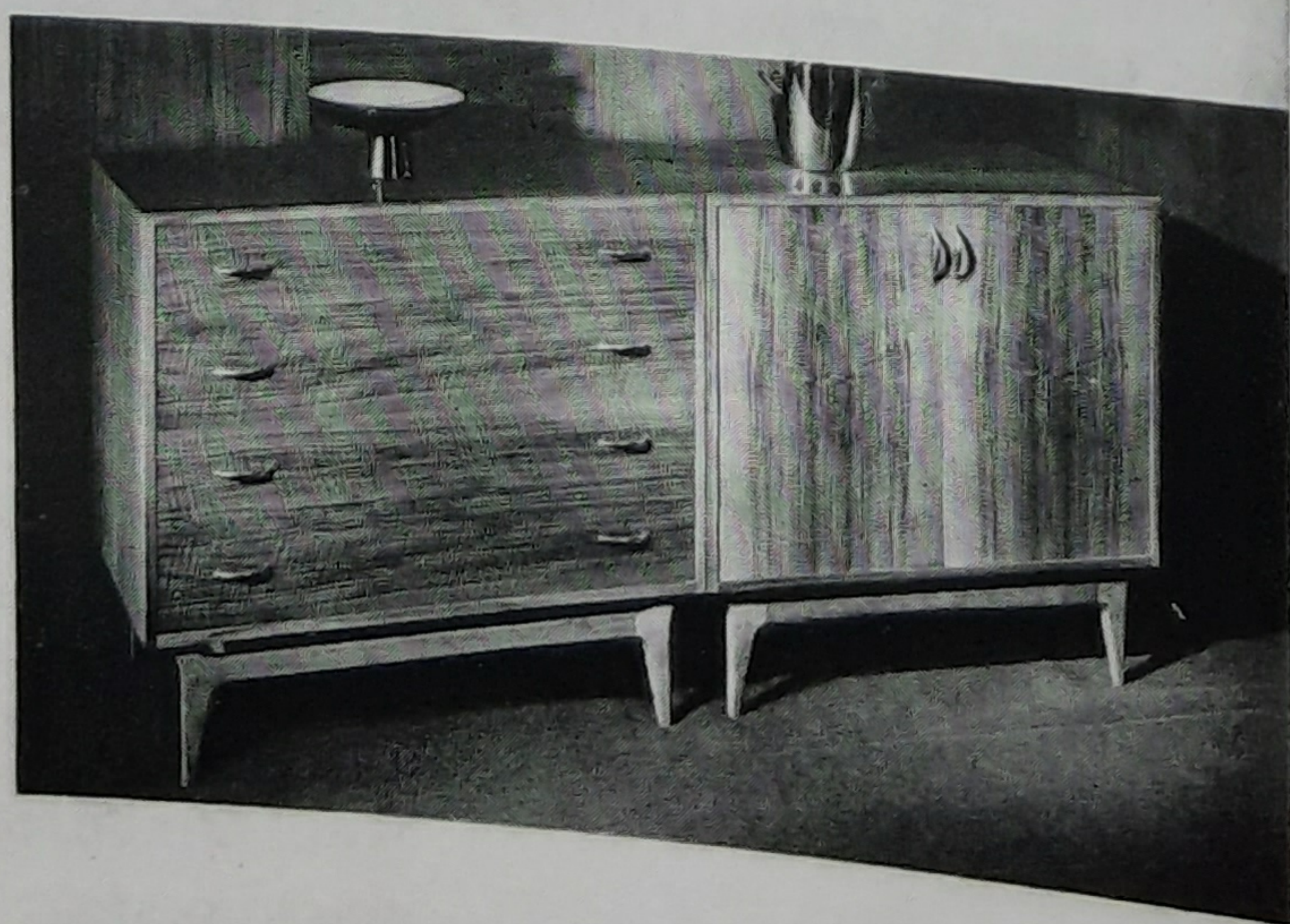
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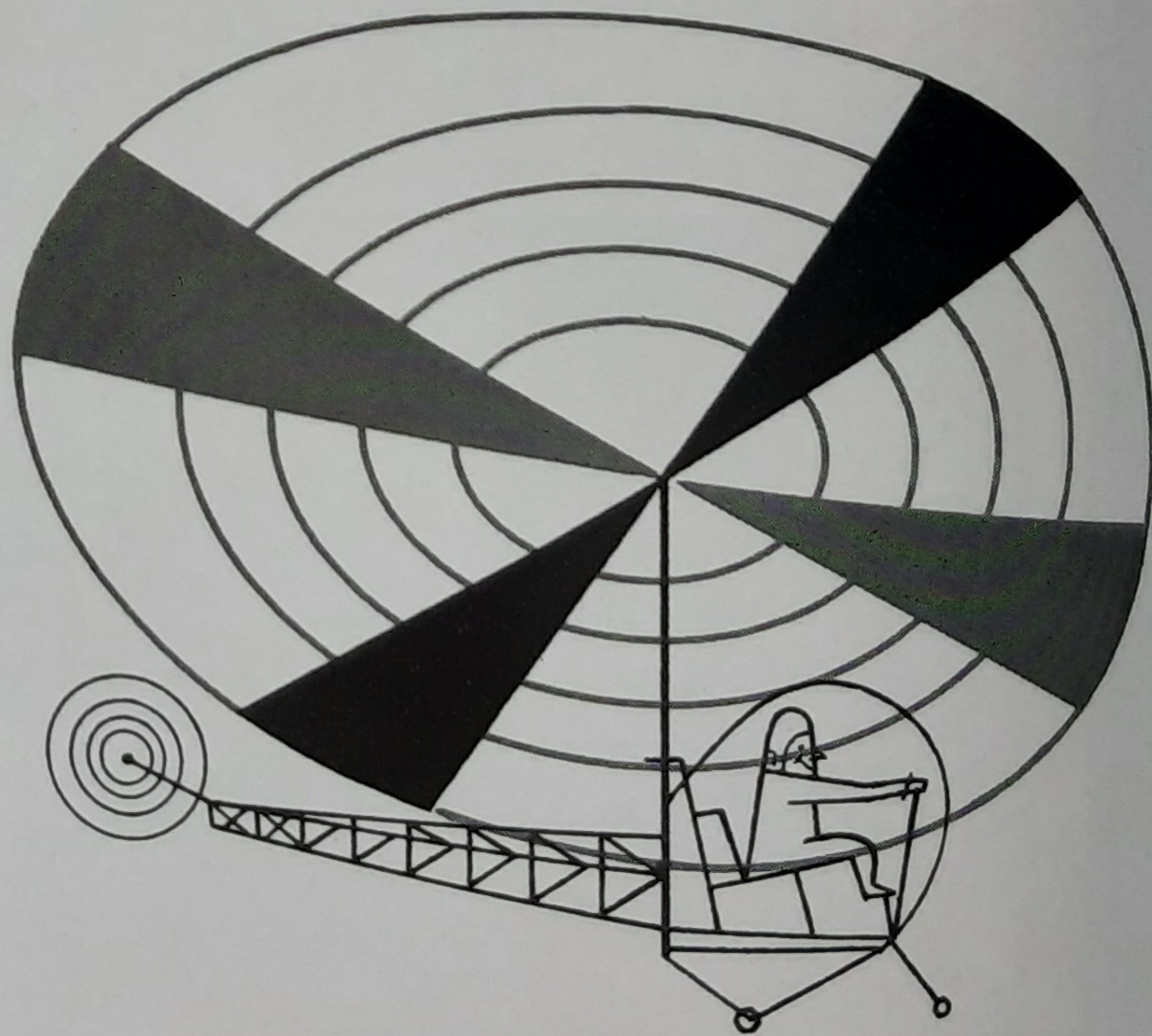
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works in just the opposite way: this is the method of *contrast*, the insertion of an extremely elaborate period piece in a modern interior—its function being that of an ornament or point of interest like the jewel on the lapel of a tailored suit. The modern Italian school is fond of this device.

So in the end we are forced to fall back on those eternal criteria: line, proportion, appropriateness, comfort, weight, sturdiness. These are difficult guides, perhaps too difficult for the public, but certainly they are the only ones a professional interior designer should seriously consider. This is not to imply that an interior "done" consistently in one period is necessarily a bad job of design. It is the slavish and literal copy which is offensive. This is true not only of the imitation 18th century room but of the copies of the latest avant-garde showroom that turn up by the score soon after that particular showroom has made its well-publicized debut. The worst thing about this kind of slavish imitation is that it is usually accurate in every detail except the one that counts. The pseudo 18th century room will be stuffed with authentic pieces even unto the champagne cooler—but the designer will have ignored the fact that being in an expensive modern apartment, the room has an absurdly low ceiling for the period and for the highboy too. In cases where an unimaginative designer copies a slick modern showroom, carefully furnishing it with all the original's furniture and accessories—and even approved paintings and sculpture, one is apt to find that the only thing that was *not* borrowed from the original was the nicety of proportion, the sensitivity in handling space relationships and lighting which probably had as much to do with the beauty of the original as the specific objects in it.

Reflections on this order were unavoidable at the winter markets, as one saw group after group of modern furniture that was as delicately sculpted as its period counterpart was delicately carved. Even in the Merchandise



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Mart's Good Design exhibition there were a number of new designs that were indistinguishable in all but minor details from traditional ones—notably pieces from William Pahlmann's Hastings Square Collection for the Grand Rapids Bookcase and Chair Company and from Edward Wormley's Dunbar collection.

The Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Decorators, incidentally, was responsible for a Merchandise Mart display intended to reassure some of the tenants specializing in period furniture and to make them feel that they too, were in step with the march of progress. *Today in Tradition* is what the effort was called, and specifically it consisted of 34 small interior settings on display at some convenient glassed corridor area at the front of each of the showrooms involved. The piece to be featured in each was selected by an official Board of Review consisting of Meyric Rogers, Curator of Decorative Arts of the Art Institute of Chicago; Wallace L. Crawford, vice president of John A. Colby and Sons; and H. Clifford Burroughes, national A.I.D. president. Mabel Schamberg, Marc T. Nielsen, Jessica Treat, Marion Hower, Edward Kershaw, Frank Guse, J. W. Briggs, and Marian Quinlan were among the decorators. Companies included Kittinger, Morganton, Lee L. Woodard, Weiman, Meyer-Gunther-Martini, Erwin-Lambeth, S. J. Campbell, and Arrow Upholstery.

Many of the settings were charming, as well as quite proper for an up-to-date home, but because the display areas were not ideal for visibility from the corridors, they suffered from a general tendency to be lost in the shuffle of sights competing for the attention of a busy buyer hurrying from showroom to showroom. This may have been caused by the haste with which the whole idea was initiated and executed. Indeed, without the devotion and

Fairhurst

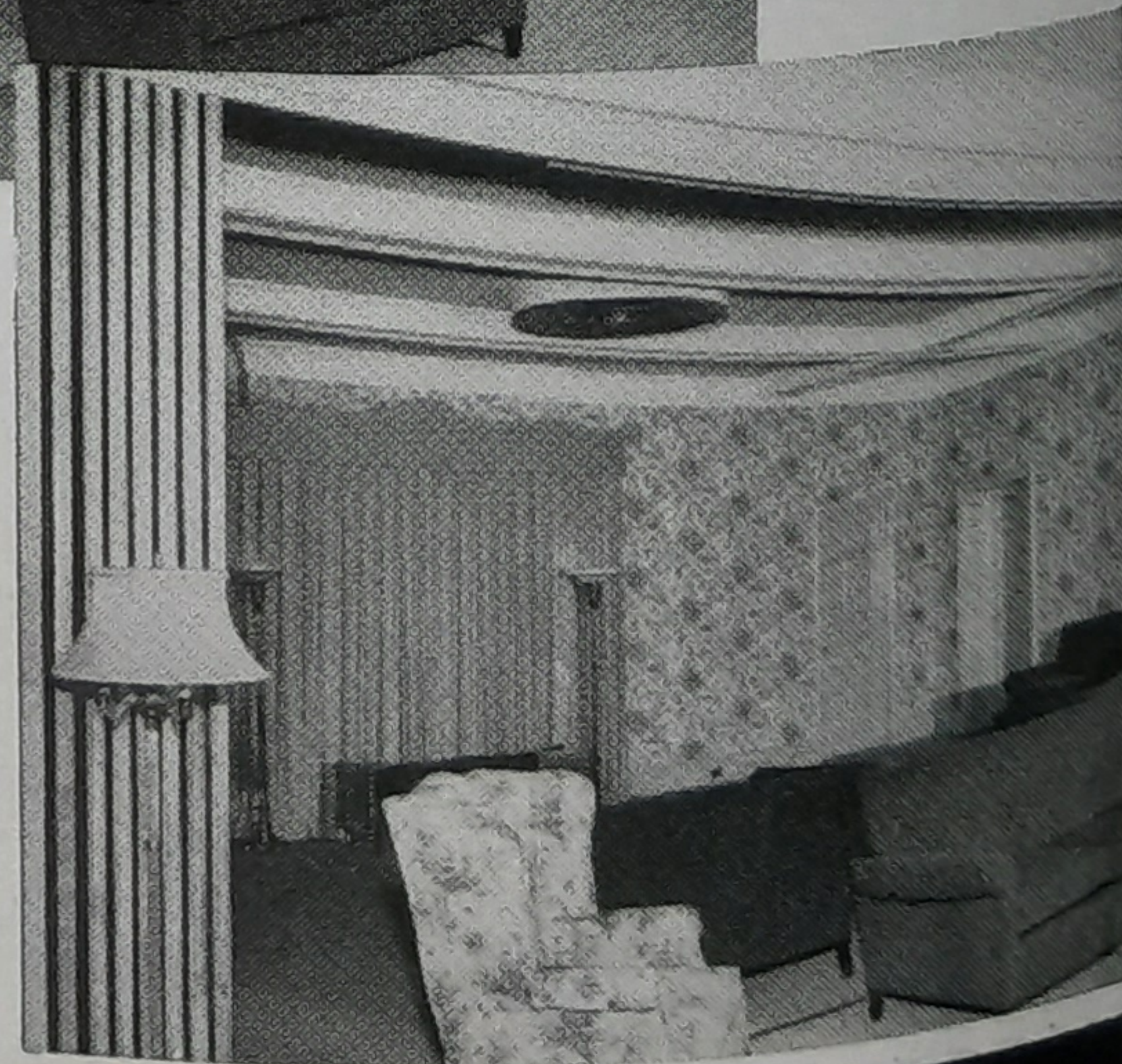
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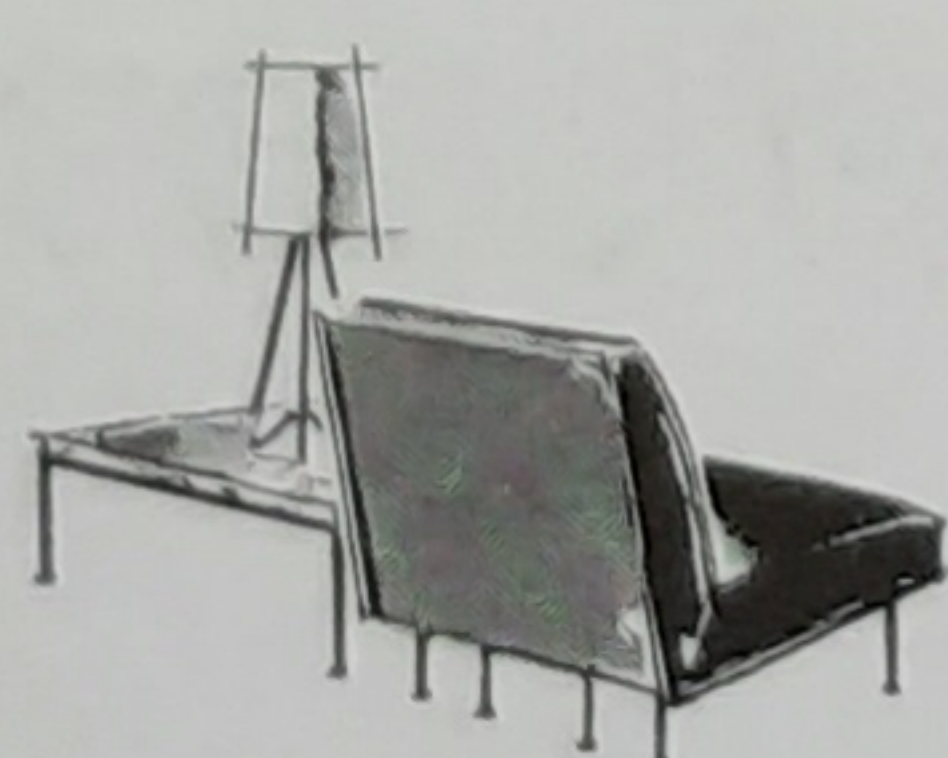
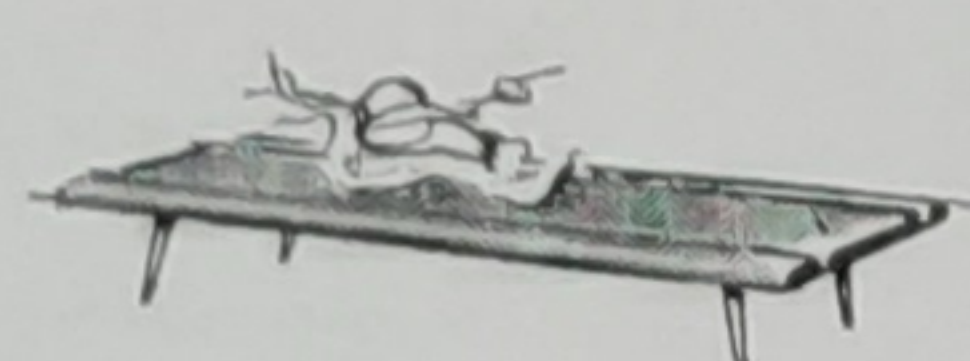
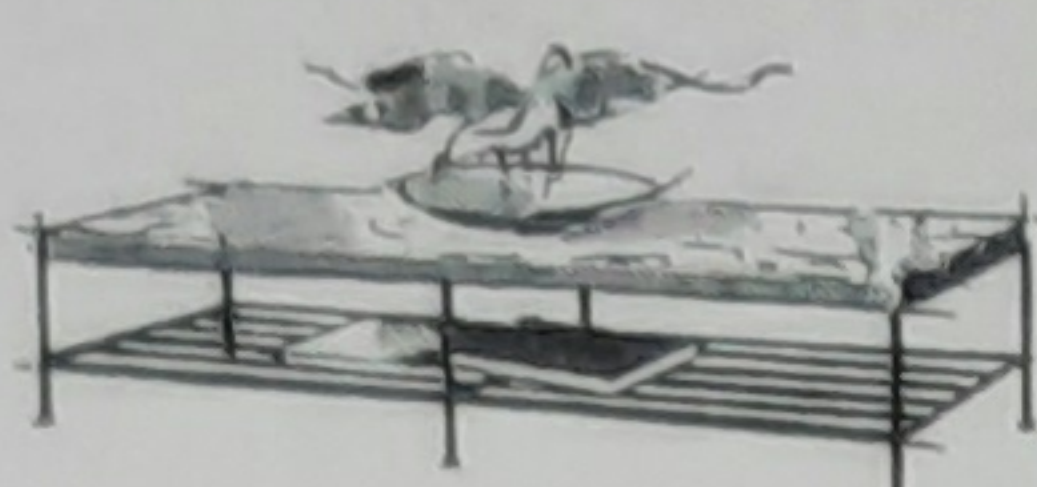
The attractive wall shown above is a Unitfold Folding Wall. Solid, rigid, its use makes two rooms out of one in the modern Funeral Chapel of R. Stutzmann & Son, Inc., Queens Village, N.Y. Same view at right shows how wall sections can be quickly folded back to compact, stacked positions . . . making available a single large room. Unitfold walls permit more economical use of space . . . maximum privacy for individual chapel rooms.



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energy of one or two A.I.D.ers like Mabel Schamberg, who kept things moving night and day before the deadline, the whole effort might have fallen through. As it is, it cannot be said that anything was proved except that the interior design profession are interested in what the manufacturers are doing and that lots of thinking people in the field are confused by that old modern vs. traditional controversy. Our illustrated pages—134-141, attempt to cover most of the important groups of interest either for the residential interior or the contract job, but a few of the manufacturers have varied their lines to such a degree that some important items cannot be hinted at even in the captions.

Tasteful eclecticism at Dunbar

One such is the Dunbar collection designed by Edward Wormley. It is of course not illustrated in our furniture section at all but appears incidentally in our four-page account of the new Dunbar showrooms in the Mart (pages 126-129). Wormley has added several new pieces to the Centennial Series (named in honor of the 100th anniversary of the settling of Dunbar's factory-site town, Berne, Indiana).

Centennial Series pieces have no common theme except their name. In addition to a capacious but delicately modeled arm chair with a leather seat and a well-separated, leather back pad, which is of obvious Finn Juhl inspiration, there are some very massive sofas and coffee tables, one with a free-form glass top and three thick wood legs tapering to a narrow waist and tied together by a ribbon-like strip of brass. A sectional group of sofas with individual units that curve ever so slightly have sturdy wooden legs, loose rubber seat cushions, a row of buttons marching

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steadily along the upper part of the back, and good, solid proportions. There is also a huge sofa with Japanese legs heavier at the base and a powerful mahogany cradle that holds the back up and away from the seat. Among occasional pieces is a small "Mr. and Mrs." magazine table, wedge-shaped at the top, with the corners rounding into semi-circles, and two deeply curving, flap-like wooden portfolios for the happy couple's respective periodicals. In all his new designs, varied though they are, Wormley is resisting the Italian fever that has seized so many other American designers, is holding to the twin themes of early American simplicity very much refined—on the one hand, and the Japanese look—on the other, that he has been concentrating on for the last few years. He is using pin-knotty walnut, baked, lacquered, square tubular steel frames in a peat-brown satin-finish, and mahogany—both pinstriped and flat-cut and figured—with a blush-pink undertoned finish called "Malabar."

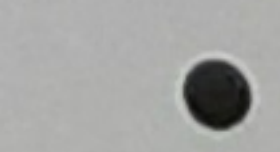
Kittinger's Malabar

"Malabar" also happens to be the name not of a finish but of a whole new bedroom collection launched by the Kittinger Company. It couldn't be less like Dunbar's furniture except in its superb quality. Described as of Biedermeier inspiration, it is really a squarish but not at all boxy modern design, its period associations developed by decorative touches and details. The wood is natural teak finished to a subtle, extremely mellow glow. The banding, though simple, has been designed to suggest Biedermeier or Palladian architectural structure. Some pieces have black, diamond-shaped inlays of ebony, and ebony feet with a neat projecting anklet.

In line with its established habit of introducing a few occasional modern pieces by a popular decorating team, Kittinger has added a group of modern tables by Kenneth Voltz with John Gerald and Katherine Kinnane. They consist of two square or rectangular tiers, one at coffee height and one two inches off the floor, supported at each corner (where there is a small curved indentation) by a round brass tube whose round head projects above the table. The tiers come in either mahogany or glass, and the tables are on casters. There is also a three-tiered end table. This is the kind of modern which blends very well with traditional decor.

Additions to Kittinger's superb 18th century collection include a tiny round wine table with a silver-plated tray, a Directoire wall console with a verde antique marble top, an enormous (104" to 176"), yew-banded mahogany dining table on three Duncan-Phyfe leg trees, and a square

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mahogany end table with four semi-circular drop leaves at the corners which can convert it into a card table.

Big architectural names at Baker

Another big collection which was not possible to illustrate adequately in this issue is the Baker Furniture Company's. In addition to a butler's table of great simplicity but manorial elegance designed by the Italian architect, Cesare Lacca, Baker has added a group of chairs and tables which probably represent the acme of perfection for both proportion and workmanship that can be obtained in the uncompromisingly square idiom, designed by the architect Philip Johnson. The low, square coffee table can be had with a marble top, and there is a very small, narrow dining-height table, end tables, and side chairs similar to those in the Rockefeller guest house, with flat, leather covered, wood-framed seat and back. The wood is walnut, and in the tables the legs and top edging are of exactly the same width. Mitreing of the corners is flawless. Another architectural personality represented in Baker's showrooms is I. M. Pei, designer of the famous, round William Zeckendorf office. He has done a small dining table and upholstered dining chairs with arms—all very upright—using square brass tubing. And last, but most important, there is a new Finn Juhl dining group, the chairs small and with horizontal oval back rests. These will be illustrated in our May issue.—O.G.

Interiors' baedeker

(Continued from Page 114)

houses, and floor coverings are nicely taken care of by William Gold, L. Jones, Manuel Feldman (in a new showroom), De Quintal, and Ernest Treganowan. Furniture specialists

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