

the head of architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Other “Bauhausers” soon joined him, forming the “new” Bauhaus that ultimately led the United States into the forefront of modern design.

Before World War II, the professionals who planned and designed office environments—known today as contract interior designers—were not identified with a discrete area of professional expertise. A doctor, lawyer, or corporation that wanted assistance arranging an office interior space was referred to a furniture dealer, who provided desks, chairs, and credenzas and sources for lighting, floor and wallcoverings, and office equipment. The selection of office furniture was primarily the domain of manufacturers’ representatives, who were also responsible for delivery, installation, and customer service. There were exceptions to the rule, however, most notably Frank Lloyd Wright. In his 1937 project for the Johnson Wax Company in Racine, Wisconsin, he designed not only the building but the interiors and furnishings as well.

Beginning in the 1930s, and especially with the prosperity that followed World War II, North Americans became open to hiring professionals to design their residences, especially with the growing celebrity and social cachet of decorators including John Fowler, Terence Herbert Robsjohn-Gibbings, and Billy Baldwin. By definition, these residential interior decorators dealt with surface treatments, and their services were generally understood and valued. Films and popular magazines brought the idea of fine residential interiors to a broad audience. Eventually, women’s magazines and particularly shelter magazines showed their audiences that, with the help of a professional, it was possible to turn the idea of a finely decorated residence into reality. Corporate clients, however, saw no need to call in a professional to design an office interior. In the business world, this service simply was not understood or, if it was, it was considered to be the same as serious residential interior decoration—expensive and elitist.

In 1932, in connection with an exhibit at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, Philip Johnson and John Russell Hitchcock published *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*, which clearly defined Mies van der Rohe’s New Building as a distinctive style. The International style had an immediate influence on corporate buildings, and later influenced residential architecture and interiors as well. Buildings in the International style have steel skeletons and eschew decoration. Their glass skins make them interactive, with the glass mediating between the interior and exterior, between the buildings’ users and the world outside.

These sleek new corporate buildings required interiors that were compatible with their exterior architecture. Recognizing the need for an innovative approach to the office environment, Florence and Hans Knoll established Knoll Associates in 1946 to design and manufacture furniture in the Bauhaus style. Florence Knoll, an architect who had trained under Eliel Saarinen and Mies van der Rohe, established the Knoll Planning Unit, a design studio that provided Knoll's furniture clients with interior architectural and planning services. The unit, which became a laboratory for interior spaces, experimented with the design, scale, and configuration of task-related furniture. One of Knoll's hallmarks was to insist on standardization of all of an office's design elements, with everything from furniture to stationery part of a coherent, seamless system. Although some corporate clients and their employees chafed at the Knoll approach and considered it too constricting, its rigor helped American businesses establish their identities firmly in the American mind. The Knoll approach was a precursor to the contemporary concept of branding.

DESIGNERS LEARN TO STUDY HOW ORGANIZATIONS BEHAVE: 1950 TO 1960

In the early 1950s
In the early 1950s, the New York office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) became one of the first major architecture and engineering firms to offer interior design as a professional service. SOM eventually became established as the world's leader in contract interiors, providing design services for such major corporations as Pepsi Cola, Chase Manhattan Bank, and Union Carbide. Under the direction of architect Davis Allen, SOM established its signature modern style.

By this time, Mies van der Rohe was established in America at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago. One of his colleagues at IIT was Herbert A. Simon, professor and head of the Department of Political and Social Sciences and a future Nobel laureate in economics. Simon's academic interest was the nature of organizations, which he viewed as not abstract and one-dimensional but concrete and complex, reflecting the individuals who comprised them. Simon maintained that, to understand how organizations