

make choices, it was first necessary to understand how people in organizations make decisions.

In the 1950s, academia began again to study human-centered work. At the Harvard Business School, the work of Malcolm P. McNair led to the development of organizational behavior as a new area of study. Conceived as a backlash against prewar concepts of human relations and the rigid systems analysis of the postwar years, organizational behavior was descriptive instead of prescriptive: it studied how organizations and workers actually behave, instead of recommending how they ought to behave.

Late in the decade, following the model of the Knoll Planning Unit, the larger furniture manufacturers established entities devoted to practical research. The Steelcase Corporate Development Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, became a proving ground for the company's own designs. In 1958, another furniture manufacturer, Herman Miller, Inc., formed a research division to study the workplace. Herman Miller retained artist-designer Robert Probst to direct the division and to convert his findings into design ideas. The result was Herman Miller's "Action Office," a system of free-standing panels, countertops, and file pedestals that were flexible and easy to configure, whatever the constraints or freedom of the interior space. This new "systems furniture" complemented Simon's theories and also echoed those of the prewar humanists who rejected the assembly line in favor of worker autonomy and flexibility. The modular elements of the Action Office could adapt to workers' changing needs and perform independently of a building's architecture.

Also in the late 1940s and 1950s, the husband-and-wife team of Charles and Ray Eames introduced their "recognition of need" philosophy of design, which insisted that interiors should be constructed primarily for the people who inhabited them and using the furniture and tools they needed to do their work effectively and efficiently. The Eameses believed that furniture should be appropriate, informal, egalitarian, ethical, and socially conscious. They used their talents to create furniture that was aesthetically pleasing; and by first studying human beings at work, they created furniture that actually improved the work process.

All of the Eameses' work, from furniture to films, produced a deep, substantive reflection of America's technical ingenuity and particularly its postwar optimism. Their modular shelving and storage units, produced by Herman Miller, were the first products to combine the efficiency of mass production

with integrity in design and materials. Previously, if corporate managers wanted custom furniture, the only sources were dealers who specialized in high-end furniture, or the architects of their buildings. The Eameses greatly influenced the product design industry, from furniture to lighting to general office equipment.

The Eameses' work was the genesis of the furniture and product design industry as it is known at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Their example, and their success, encouraged many designers and furniture manufacturers to establish productive, long-standing working relationships. Architects Mies van der Rohe and Eero Saarinen and designers Isamu Noguchi and Harry Bertoia produced chairs, tables, and lamps for Knoll International. In addition to producing work by Charles and Ray Eames, Herman Miller, Inc. produced designs by Isamu Noguchi and Alexander Girard, as well as the Comprehensive Storage System created by its design director, George Nelson.

CORPORATE INTERIOR DESIGN FINDS ITS IDENTITY: 1960 TO 1970

The 1960s in America saw widespread questioning and experimentation at all levels of society, from the personal to the institutional. Student protesters storming a university president's office and putting their feet up on his desk became one of the decade's many indelible visual metaphors. In a time that saw a U.S. President and other political leaders assassinated, civil rights marches proceeding peacefully alongside cities on fire, and the Vietnam war back-to-back with TV commercials for toothpaste, the hierarchy was on shaky ground. Once the dust settled, it was clear that values had shifted and the time had come for the rigid hierarchy to relax and make room for individual talent and entrepreneurship.

The 1960s introduced the contract interior design profession as we know it today. While in the 1950s architecture firms had begun to offer interior design services, the 1960s saw these interiors studios mature and develop into large, independent design firms that offered comprehensive interior design services.