Living In A Modern Way in *The Moon is Blue* (1953, Otto Preminger): mid-century modern architecture, interiors, and furniture

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Abstract:
This article focuses on *The Moon is Blue* (1953, Otto Preminger), a light-hearted romantic comedy starring Maggie McNamara as an aspiring young actor, Patty O'Neill, and William Holden as architect Donald Gresham. The first Hollywood movie largely set inside a high-end Mid-Century Modern domestic interior, it features some top-quality machine mass-produced furniture by leading U.S. designers and manufacturers. After considering the design production team, I discuss the ways in which the film promotes the furniture and the performance of modern ways of living. I also discuss how the film uses the interiors in a neighboring apartment as a counterpoint to that of Gresham.

Key words: *The Moon is Blue* (1953, Otto Preminger); set design; Nicholai Remisoff; Edward G. Boyle; promoting modern living; furniture and interiors; loans from Charles and Ray Eames; Eero Saarinen.

The Moon is Blue (1953), directed and produced by Otto Preminger for Preminger-Herbert Productions and distributed by United Artists (UA), was the first Hollywood feature film set largely inside a high-end Mid-Century Modern domestic interior that included top-quality machine mass-produced furniture, most of it by leading U.S. designers and manufacturers. No one, however, has written about it from this point of view. The interior in question is the living/dining area in the apartment of an architect, Donald (Don) Greaham, who lives in a two-bedroom apartment on New York's Upper East Side; on 79th Street between Park

Avenue and Madison Avenue. **[Figure 1**] After some contextual discussion and general comments about what was understood as modern architecture and design at the time and about the film, I introduce the main people responsible for its visual look and consider the environments that they envisioned this thirty-year-old modern architect living and working in. I concentrate on the sets for Gresham's apartment and office but also examine sets for a neighboring apartment that serve as a counterpoint to them. I consider the ways in which the film promotes certain items of furniture and introduces viewers to, and shows them how to perform, post-war modern ways of living. My focus is on the film but, where relevant, I make comparisons with the eponymous Broadway play (1951–3) on which the film is closely based; F. Hugh Herbert wrote the scripts for both.

About the film

The light-hearted romantic comedy The *Moon is Blue*, starring William Holden as Gresham and with Maggie McNamara as Patty O'Neill, a young aspiring actor, was a huge box office success. Despite one contemporary reviewer commenting that "the theme of this confection is as moral as a Sunday school book" (Crowther 1953), it is best known today for defying the U.S. film industry's censorship code. The eponymous play on which the film is based had run for two years in various venues without any objections being raised, and the language in the film was the same as in the play, mostly word-for-word (Preminger 1977, 109) but, nonetheless, the Production Code Authority (PCA) withheld approval on the grounds of the script's "light and gay treatment" of illicit

sex, seduction, and virginity (Gary 2015, 2; Fujiwara 2009, 143–4; Preminger 1977, 114–15). Co-producers Preminger and Herbert made the film and after the PCA again refused approval they took a risk and released it without approval after positive previews. The light-hearted treatment that the censors objected to is entirely verbal. With the exception of a couple of chaste kisses, the couple barely touch each other.

Much of the humor in this fast-paced comedy resides in quick-fire one-liners and the frank manner (for the time) in which Patty uses words such as sex, seduction, and mistress. Her frankness, however, is offset by her making clear early in the film her intention to retain her virginity until marriage. For all that it amused and titillated audiences, the film never seriously challenged the *status quo*. A catchy tune and "fun" lettering for the opening title and credits establish the light-hearted mood of this tale set in 1953 in Manhattan over a twenty-four-hour period. The extremely thin plot is based around attempts by both the handsome Gresham and his forty-one-year-old playboy neighbor David Slater (played by David Niven) to seduce twenty-two-year-old Patty, who proves to be more than a match for both men. The film proper opens with her and Gresham meeting in a shopping area inside the Empire State Building. Their potential romantic coupling is flagged as they stand by a jewelry shop display featuring a large version of the "bride and groom" ornament of the type then often used on wedding cakes. He follows her to the building's famous observation deck and, as she comments later, they "sort of picked each other up." As per generic

expectations, misunderstandings are overcome before the happy ending when, a day later, Gresham proposes to Patty at the same observation deck.

Perky, self-assured Patty lives in Brooklyn where she was brought up. Of Irish stock, we learn that her father is a policeman. She room-shares with another young woman, has very little money, and is a "sort of struggling" actor. Ever honest, she confesses to Gresham: "I'd just as soon get married, I think. Who am I kidding? I'm just dying to get married." Adamant that she is not looking for romance, she tells Gresham she is choosey and plans to marry "a nice middle-aged man with gobs of dough," preferably one who has "been married before and had a perfectly bad time." She rules out Gresham as too young and potentially too romantic. They agree—he reluctantly and not very seriously—to "affection but no passion." In a taxicab *en route* to the Stork Club (a gathering place for actors), Gresham uses a missing button on his suit jacket as an excuse to stop off at his apartment. He asks Patty if she is happy to have a drink there and she asks him if he is planning to attempt to seduce her. Stunned by her forthrightness, he finally says "Probably," whereupon she informs him that while there are "enough girls who don't mind being seduced" she is not one of them. She adds, however, that she does not object to kissing.

Inside his apartment, Patty happily sews a button onto Gresham's jacket, thus marking her suitability as a wife. **[Figure 2]** She confesses to being aware of his ruse to get her there and the realization that this wide-eyed ingénue is more knowing than she first appears is one of the pleasures of the film. The apartment is another. Patty admires it, calling the living/dining area "darling" and the kitchen

"divine." She tells Gresham she is a "sensational" cook and offers to prepare dinner. While Gresham is out buying provisions, Slater stops by. We learn that he is hungover from the night before, has no principles, and has never done a day's work. His age and wealth fit Patty's template for a husband and, although a match between them seems unlikely, neither Gresham nor Slater know what to make of her mix of virginal purity, determination to retain her virginity until marriage, pragmatic approach to marriage, and frank comments about seduction and sex. The rivalry between Gresham and Slater for her attention provides laughs and helps along the narrative of Gresham eventually realizing he has fallen in love with Patty when he thinks she is interested in Slater.

Slater's spoiled daughter Cynthia (played by Dawn Addams) was until the previous evening Gresham's "sort of" fiancée, and is now plotting to win him back. She calls Patty a "professional virgin," and when Gresham asks Patty why she is preoccupied with sex, she replies, "Isn't it better for a girl to be *pre*occupied with sex, rather than occupied with it?" This was not an unreasonable position in 1953 when the birth control pill was only in the research stage and illegitimacy and single-motherhood stigmatized. Although the *Kinsey Reports* of 1948 and 1953 revealed greater diversity of sexual orientations, practices, and desires in the United States than was commonly acknowledged, and film producers were beginning to bring more "adult" themes to the big screen, social norms were slow to change. Indeed, almost a decade later, when she was almost forty years old, Doris Day was still playing the professional virgin on screen. In *That Touch of Mink* (1962, Delbert Mann) Cary Grant plays a

suave, wealthy, older man out to seduce Day, who plays a young working woman holding out for marriage before sex, and succeeds, with some women in the audience cheering her on (Kirkham and Cohen 2017, 120–8).

Set design team

Preminger directed and produced both the Broadway and film versions of *The Moon is Blue*. There were only two sets in the play: the living area of Gresham's apartment and the Empire State Building's observation tower. Additional sets for the film include three in the Empire State Building (Gresham's office, a shopping area, and the ticket office for the Observation deck) and two main sets for Slater's apartment. As in the play, the bulk of the performance takes place in Gresham's apartment. "Settings and Lighting" for the Broadway production were designed by Stewart Chaney, a leading stage set designer, with the furniture for Gresham's smart apartment supplied by Parzinger Originals (Playbill 1951). The latter was owned by designer Tommi Parzinger, a "Vogue Modernist" (Hamilton 1999) well known for his work in the "Hollywood Regency" or *Regence Moderne* style. Quite different sets were created for the film.

Given that the director has ultimate responsibility for the overall "look" of the film and Preminger had a reputation for trying to control every aspect of a production, he probably made the decision to have completely new sets. Passionately interested in modern design, in the early-to-mid-1960s the living room of his own home, complete with furniture by famous designers such as Eero Saarinen, George Nelson, Arne Jacobsen and Verner Panton, featured in

an article on home decoration in *McCall's* magazine (Rogers 1963, 121). He knew a great deal about design, more so, in the opinion of designer and filmmaker Saul Bass (who worked closely with him on several film projects from 1953 onwards) than Alfred Hitchcock and Billy Wilder, directors also known for their keen interest in design with whom Bass also worked (Bass and Kirkham 2011, 114–15). The film was expected to be seen across the world and Preminger may have wanted more internationally valent designs.

The art director was Nicholai Remisoff, a Russian American artist and designer with impeccable credentials. Trained at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, in 1917 he moved to Paris where he worked as a set and costume designer for plays, opera, and ballet before finding similar work in the United States in the late 1920s and 1930s (Remisoff Papers). From *Of Mice and Men* (1939, Lewis Milestone) to *Ocean's Eleven* (1960, also Milestone), Remisoff was art director on thirty-one movies, working closely with set decorators. On *The Moon is Blue*, he worked with set decorator Edward G. Boyle, whose work ranged from *Gone with the Wind* (1939, Victor Fleming; George Cukor) to *The Apartment* (1960, Billy Wilder), for which he shared an Academy Award with production designer Alexandre Trauner. Given the highly collaborative nature of filmmaking, the main production design decisions probably were that of the Los Angeles-based designers (and then fledgling filmmakers) Charles and Ray Eames who loaned at least twenty-seven items to the film (Eames Papers A), and an Eames prototype lounge chair and images of an Eames Modernist house feature in the set for Gresham's office.

The extent of the Eameses' involvement is not clear and film director Billy Wilder, a close friend of the Eameses, may also have been involved. Don Albinson, the Eames Office staffer responsible for developing the prototype lounge chair seen in the film, recalled that two or three were made and that one with a metal base was given to Wilder (Albinson 2004: 150). At the very moment that Preminger was preparing to film *The Moon* is *Blue*, Wilder was directing him (and Holden too) in *Stalag 17* and Wilder may have offered to loan Preminger his prototype or suggested that, since Preminger's film was about a young modern architect, he contact the Eameses whose work he held in extremely high regard (Wilder to Kirkham and Bass 1994).

Architecture and design in the film

When Patty asks Gresham if he is famous, he replies, "I'm just a good, modern, run-of-the mill architect," but in 1953 there was no consensus as to what good modern architecture was. With Cold War propaganda and "Red Scare" rhetoric at its height, in the very same year Elizabeth Gordon, editor of *House Beautiful*, attacked International Style modern architecture describing it, and the glass and steel Farnsworth House (1945–1951, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe) in particular, as **"**unlivable," un-American, and "part of a conspiracy to subvert the nation" (Gordon 1953). Among those quick to respond was architect Eero Saarinen, who defended modern architecture in *Architectural Forum* and explained the main stands within it (Saarinen 1953). A recently "discovered" letter in the Eames Papers (cited here for the first time in print) to Ray Eames after Charles's death, recounted how, after showing the film he and Ray made about

their own house (*House After Five Years of Living* 1955) Charles told an audience that he wanted to prove to Elizabeth Gordon that the Eames House "was not a cold house, as she had suggested," presumably referring to Gordon's remarks about modern architecture in general since she did not mention the Eames House by name (Eames Papers B).

It is clear in the film which side of the debate Gresham is on; one of Saarinen's chairs features in Gresham's apartment and three images of a Modernist building strongly influenced by the work of Mies van der Rohe are displayed in his office. After Gresham describes himself as a modern architect, however, there are no other spoken references in the film to modern architecture or design, or to any specific style or practitioners. We learn that Gresham can "build anything from a cathedral to a bomb-shelter" (a reminder of Cold War anxieties) but not what his buildings looked like. The film makes its case for modern design, particularly interiors and furniture, and, to a lesser degree, architecture, and does so visually through the examples on screen and through the ways in which the characters use and interact with the interiors and the objects within them. Key objects are discussed below within the individual sets they feature in, and, with the exception of an Eames prototype chair, most of the furniture in Gresham's apartment and office was available to the design team direct from manufacturers or select retail stores specializing in modern home furnishings, such as Carroll Sagar of Los Angeles and Frank Brothers in nearby Long Beach (Kirkham 2011, 167). In 1953 the Herman Miller Furniture Company and Knoll Associates stood out as leading manufacturers of well-designed and

well-made machine mass-produced furniture both nationally and increasingly internationally, and therefore it is not surprising to find that some key pieces in the film came from those companies.

Gresham's office

We see Gresham's architectural office before his apartment. The space includes an impressive reception area, with a large L-shaped desk, narrow metal file cabinets set into a wall, and a glassed-off area where Gresham works. As Patty and Gresham enter the office, we see two framed images on the wall to one side of the door (one of which is visible in Figure 3). Until now it has not been recognized that these are images of the Wilder House (1949–50), a Mies-influenced Modernist glass and steel structure designed by Charles and Ray Eames for Billy and Audrey Wilder, or, more precisely, 16 x 20-inch photographs of a model made by the Eameses of the house **[Figure 3]**. Had it been built, the Wilder House would have been one of the grandest Modernist residences in the post-war United States (Delong 1983, 75; Miller 1983, 122; Kirkham 1995, 134–5). The film does not claim Gresham as the architect of this house but, at the very least, they mark his taste, since he presumably elected to include them in his office.

Beneath one of the framed Eames images on that wall is a BFK or "Butterfly" chair (1938–9, see Figure 3) that also marks the modernity of Gresham's taste. With its signature leather cover hung over a metal folding frame, the BFK was designed in Brazil by Antonio Bonet, Jorge Ferrari-Hardoy,

and Juan Kurchan (BFK comes from the first letters of their last names). It was widely copied after Knoll Associates began producing it in the United States in 1947, so much so that Knoll took legal action to try and halt the copying, only to admit defeat and cease production in 1951. Many copies came in cheaper materials and poorer finishes; a “knock-off” with a canvas cover sold for as little as seven dollars when the film was made (Kirkham 2011, 161). Another framed image of the Eames House hangs on the wall on the other side of the door while another BFK chair stands nearby. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not the BFK chairs are Knoll versions but, whatever the case, this most ubiquitous of the overtly modern items of furniture available in the U.S. in 1953 (ibid.) helps establish Gresham as someone who appreciated modern design.

As the couple move into Gresham’s workspace, with its glass wall and door facing viewers, we see an Eames experimental lounge chair in molded plywood (Kirkham 2006, 52–4). While not singled out for comment, it is given a prominent position within Gresham’s workspace **[see Figure 4 to the right of William Holden/Donald Gresham)** and at the very least shows his interest in novel forms and new techniques. Patty spots a wooden holder for rolled up plans and blueprints, describes it as “cute,” and likens it to an umbrella stand. She takes one of the blueprints over to a worktop where she unrolls it. Gresham joins her and tells her it is for “the Freeport Civic Center,” a building type that signals him as a socially-engaged designer. She then walks past the camera holding the blueprint which serves as a vehicle for her to express an interest in his work and reveal an understanding of the satisfaction experienced by seeing a building

through from plan to completion. The blueprint probably came from the Eameses, who loaned five sheets of blueprints, one plan, one sketch, and two models of the early “Bridge House” version of the Eames House, three sketches and seven photographs of the Wilder House, three sketches of a showroom (probably the 1950 Herman Miller Los Angeles showroom), and items related to the Eameses’ submission (in consultation with John Entenza, editor of *Arts & Architecture*) for the 1947–8 Jefferson National Expansion Memorial competition (Eames Papers A).

Hideaway cabin

The only design by Gresham discussed in any detail is a “hideaway cabin” that he hopes to build one day. The ever-curious Patty come across a rough sketch of it lying on a shelf in a built-in unit as she checks out his apartment. Viewers catch glimpses of a wooden chalet-like structure set amidst trees. Gresham explains to Patty that he designed the cabin to “fit into the trees” on five acres of land in Maine bought four years earlier, and that it has windows on three sides, a huge fireplace, and a sundeck. He describes what could be a modern building but makes no mention of the pitched roof glimpsed in the sketch. Patty thinks the building “darling.” In the play, by contrast, a framed sketch of the cabin hangs on a wall in the living area and thus is not visible in any detail to audience members who learn from Patty that it is long and flat while Gresham speaks of the “Influence of Frank Lloyd Wright” and a building that is “Modern as hell” with windows on three sides, a huge fireplace, a carport underneath, and “a deck on top” (Herbert 1951, 40). The sketch seen by Patty and cinemagoers in the film,

however, bears no resemblance to Wright, flatness, or “Modern as hell.” With Gresham’s modern design credentials already well-established in the film, Preminger and Herbert probably used the opportunity to indicate (briefly) other aspects of Gresham’s approach to architecture and design, namely a reverence for nature and a respect for vernacular traditions.

Gresham’s apartment

Patty is as taken with Gresham’s emphatically modern apartment as she is with Gresham himself and, when telephoning her roommate from there, comments that he has “a perfectly darling apartment on East 79th Street … and lovely soft eyes.” The apartment features compact, labor-saving and versatile furniture of types deemed suitable for the smaller homes of the post-war period. The introduction to the catalogue for the [1948] *Low-Cost Furniture* exhibition at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) held in 1950 states that, besides being well designed, adaptable to small apartments and houses, and affordable, items meeting “the needs of modern living, production and merchandizing” should be “comfortable but not bulky” and “easily moved, stored and cared for” (d’Haroncourt, 1950, 6). Five chairs meeting these criteria feature prominently in Gresham’s apartment: four Eames Wire Rod chair (1950–1) manufactured by Herman Miller **[Figure 5]**, and a Saarinen “Womb” chair (Model 70, c. 1946–8) **[Figure 2]** manufactured by Knoll Associates. Three of the four Eames chairs featured in the set serve as dining and general purposes chairs while the other stands by the telephone while not used for dining. The chairs only went into

production in 1951 and thus the film was the first time that many cinemagoers encountered these unusual chairs that were made from a material associated with everyday items from dish racks to the newly-patented shopping trolley (Kugler and Cunz 2017, 197). The decision to select stout wooden legs from the options available to the design team may have been to soften the shock of seeing a chair made wholly from thin metal rod, while the two-piece "bikini" covers offered greater comfort than the wire rod shell seats on their own.

By the early 1950s Sarrinen's "Womb" chair featured in many "Mid-Century Modern" interiors (Kirkham 2011, 157, 161). He sought to achieve the psychological comfort associated with the womb through "a great big cup-like shell in which you can curl up your legs, something women especially like to do" (Saarinen 1962, 68). It was a popular pose for women at the time and when Patty removes her shoes and curls up in the Saarinen chair, she does so in this manner **[Figure 2]**. Although the chair is padded under the top cover, the depth of the upholstery is far thinner than on conventionally upholstered seating but by having Patty sit in it to sew the button back onto Gresham's jacket the filmmakers draw attention to its comfort while associating it, and her, with other chairs, such as traditional wooden rockers, in which women have undertaken everyday women's domestic tasks.

In this fast-paced movie, the three main characters move rapidly around the interior, especially among the "Womb" chair and two of the three "modern" but more conventional and amply-upholstered lounge chairs. Patty comments that one of the latter three [see **Figure 1** for Patty sitting in it] "swirls" around and

draws it to the attention of Slater, who at one point gives it a push as if to demonstrate the feature to viewers have not picked up on the novelty. The "Womb" chair and one of the more conventional looking lounge chairs are positioned near a coffee table (1944–7) designed by Japanese-American sculptor/designer Isamu Noguchi. **[Figure 1]** Mass-produced from 1947 by Herman Miller, the "Womb" chair was well known to design cognoscenti by 1953 but less so to the wider public. Less prominently featured in the film are the other two lounge chairs and a pale clean-lined sofa behind another coffee table **[Figure 6]**. Taken together, however, the furniture in the apartment flags that it is no longer chic to sit on a matching sofa and armchairs.

Coffee tables, also known as cocktail tables, symbolized the greater informality of post-war living. One lifestyle journalist described them as "the heart and center of a home" and the piece of furniture a housewife might "splurge" on (Sheppard 1947, 23). The Noguchi coffee table was certainly a "splurge" piece: supported by two identical freestanding biomorphic forms, the circular glass top appears to float in space [see **Figure 1**). The more conventional-looking rectangular-top version in front of the sofa **[see Figure 6]** is a dual-function or combination table that transforms into a dining table. **[Figure 7**] Several people were involved in developing such tables and San Francisco-based designer Gene Tepper's cocktail-dining table with wood top and iron legs was shown at the 1953 *Good Design* exhibitions at Chicago's Merchandise Mart and MoMA (*Good Design* 1953, 3; Stern 2011, 185, 200 n.23). The provenance of the all-wood table in the film is not known; it may even have been made as a prop to

help demonstrate how one might live comfortably in smaller spaces. Gresham could be mistaken for a salesman demonstrating the space-saving benefits of such a table to viewers as he handles with ease the transformation to dining room height and swivels the top round so that people can eat at it without the table itself having to be moved. **[Figure 7]** He carries the lightweight Eames chairs to the table with equal ease **[Figure 5]** and after the meal Patty demonstrates that even someone as petite as she can move the chairs and transform the table back to coffee-table height with ease. Curator and design historian Bill Stern commented that he could not think of another film in which "the everyday function of a piece of furniture is featured as it is in this one" (Stern 2019). This performative mode of relating to furniture on film can be seen also in contemporary newsreel footage about "Good Design" in which MoMA curator Edgar Kaufman Jr. demonstrates the qualities of Eames wire rod chairs to viewers (*News of the World for Women* 1952).

The wall-mounted unit with a wider shelf at desk height, part of which serves as a telephone-table-cum-desk, is also space saving. Besides housing books, magazines, and various decorative objects, it offers a convenient solution to where to place a table-top television, a new piece of technology within the home (Kirkham 2011, 164–5). Another space saver is the cocktail cabinet set into a wall. Two cupboard doors open to reveal a fully-stocked cabinet with glasses, while the fall-down top serves as a counter. **[Figure 1]** A small wall cupboard behind a framed painting is more novel. Gresham casually removes placemats

and flatware from a space that other people might have used as a wall- safe for housing valuables, and casually sets them on the table.

The lack of a designated dining space, let alone a separate dining room, speaks to the greater informality of post-war living, as does the mix of shapes, styles, colors, and materials of the dishes used during the meal. The cups and saucers are octagonal in form, in contrast to the large square plates that, in turn, differ from the smaller circular plates in molded glass that look like they may have belonged to Gresham's grandmother. The vogue for "mix-and-match" pottery, such as designer Eva Zeisel's informal earthenware *Town and Country* line (1947) aimed at younger post-war homemakers (Villane 2013, 74–9) was part of a wider trend for mixing within an interior disparate objects from across diverse cultures and time (Kirkham 1998, 15–29). Among items that flag Gresham's interest in this mode of cross-cultural interior design (besides the deliberately mismatched lounge chairs) are several antique non-Western hand-carved sculptures and figurines (or what are meant to look like them), including a wood sculpture that hangs on one of the walls of the apartment, three Japanese paper lanterns hanging from the apartment ceiling **[Figure 8]**, and a Chinese horse sculpture in his office. Part of an "East Meets West" trend (Hoffman 1953, 10), "oriental" touches were popular at the time the film was made. The Japanese lanterns indicate that, while the design team selected Noguchi's coffee table, they opted *not* to feature his contemporary lighting that drew inspiration from traditional Japanese paper lampshades, opting instead for the bold, colorful, and emphatically new standing lamp with three arms and different-colored shades

designed by the Castiglioni brothers, manufactured by Arredoluce, and shown to considerable acclaim at the 1951 Milan Triennale exposition (*Nova Triennale di Milano* 1951, 144–6). A standout feature, when we first see it in the film it is dramatically set against its own shadow. **[Figure 6]**

The kitchen

Patty falls in love with the kitchen before admitting to falling for Gresham. **[Figure 9]** Kitchens were the most single emphatic site of modernity in the postwar U.S. home, and viewers see what appears to be an all-white kitchen fitted out with modular units, continuous counters and built-in appliances, with the exception of the highly-desirable large free-standing refrigerator (Kirkham 2011, 157). Patty pronounces the kitchen "divine" and singles out "the lovely icebox and stove" and the garbage disposal. After Gresham admits he has never used the latter and rarely uses the kitchen, she states that just thinking about "the lovely garbage disposal with nobody to use it" makes her want to cry. She also states that her roommate "says she'd marry any man, sight-unseen, if he'd offer her a kitchen with a garbage disposal." Such items ranked high on the wish-list of couples setting up home in the 1950s (*Sunset* 1956, 78); little wonder Patty loves Gresham's kitchen.

Slater's apartment

The interior of the main living area in Slater's apartment is a fairly conventional example of the type of "period modern" décor associated with

Manhattan's wealthy. The main drawing-room-style space mixes modern comfort, including a square-shaped lounge chair in pale upholstery with matching ottoman and a comfortable but somewhat chunky dark modern sofa, with antiques and pieces with strong historicist references, especially to eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France and Britain. Expensive materials and techniques with historical references are featured, for example silk brocades, gilding, and marble. The main palette is pale with darker accents, including an antique *Chinoiserie* cabinet on a stand. The most out-of-place item is the shiny, modern metal cart on wheels that Slater (whom the film's trailer describes as someone to whom "every girl looks bewitching through his cocktail glasses, see Youtube), uses as his personal cocktail trolley and moves around with him. **[Figure 10]** Patty neither praises nor condemns this space but, since she readily proclaims her admiration for Gresham's apartment, her *lack* of praise seems to confirm what she has already told Slater, namely that she would not marry him if he were the last man on earth.

Cynthia's boudoir-cum-bedroom within her father's apartment is designed according to prevailing conventions as a "feminine" space, with delicate, soft and softly-draped sheer curtains. **[Figure 11]** It veers towards an excess of trimmings in the sleeping area and, lest viewers do not read the multiple festoons and bows decorating Cynthia's bed as somewhat "OTT," they are repeated on the antique child's cradle in which her pampered pet dog sleeps. The parallel suggested is of pampered pouch and pampered mistress.

The bedroom/boudoir represents Cynthia as a self-indulgent member of the idle rich, and all that rationalist modern architects and designers detested about contemporary interior decoration—a further indication that she is not a suitable match for Gresham. The dark trimmings at the edge of the bed and on the edges of some of the drapes hint at a dark edge to Cynthia. She wears dark couture-style outfits and her vampish side is expressed when she stands looking into the mirror of her vanity dressed only in sheer black lingerie and stockings as she plans to seduce Gresham. She grabs only her coat for cover as she sets out to accomplish her mission.

The ways in which Cynthia and Patty occupy the bathroom in Slater's apartment mark them as two very different people. The privileged Cynthia luxuriates in a marble bath and uses a white telephone while doing so. When she forgets to turn off the taps in her rush to seduce Gresham, it is Patty who is left to mop up the overflow. Patty was chatting with Slater in Gresham's apartment when water drips through the ceiling from the apartment above. Both rush upstairs to investigate. Only Patty is prepared to undertake the physical labor necessary to save more damage. Slater looks on, having made it clear he has no intention of helping, even though it is his apartment. Thus Patty, the working-class woman, is cleaning up after the person who caused the mess, the privileged daughter of a lazy privileged man who stands idly by. We never see Patty's own living space but she cooks in Gresham's and cleans in Slater's. We learn that she has lived independently from her family since the age of eighteen, thus marking her more "modern" and morally superior to Cynthia, who lives at

home and off her father's money. We do not need to see the room Patty shares with another young woman in Brooklyn. This is a romantic comedy and she will soon be living in Gresham's apartment, or an even bigger and better one.

Conclusion and postscript

When I spotted the Eames prototype lounge chair in *The Moon is Blue* in 2000 when investigating possible links between Preminger and Saul Bass, I had no idea that, almost two decades later, I would write about the sets in this quirky comedy, or that a film that many people dismiss as "fluff" would offer such a rich commentary on postwar architecture, interiors, furniture, and modern living. This article has paid particular attention to the furniture within the sets and shown that many of the items featured were first manufactured no more than six years earlier, and several much more recently, thus indicating that most of the millions of viewers who saw the film in the 1950s were coming into contact with such pieces for the first time. Furthermore, some of the pieces were demonstrated on screen as if in a furniture showroom. This was not product placement in the sense of a formal tie-in with manufacturers but the camera constantly moves over a range of objects that were recently designed and made in the United States and/or featured in high-end "Mid-Century Modern" interiors in that country. After its release in the United States in July 1953, *The Moon is Blue* was seen in many countries, including Western Europe, parts of Scandinavia, Greece, Turkey, Brazil, Australia, and Japan ("*The Moon is Blue,"* IMDB.com; Japanese brochure for *The Moon is Blue*, Kirkham Archive). Thus, millions of people who

had never heard of Eero Saarinen, Charles and Ray Eames, Isamu Noguchi, or the Herman Miller and Knoll companies were brought into contact with examples of recent U.S. interior design and furniture and furnishings for the first time, along with the new, more informal ways of living as performed on screen. In this sense, the films served in much the same way as the postwar exhibitions organized by U.S. government cultural diplomacy agencies such as the United States Information Agency (USIA) that was established to promote U.S. goods and ideology abroad in the very same year that *The Moon is Blue* was released.

In the film, the furniture and furnishings introduced to audiences were shown as comfortable and appropriate for living in more informal ways in relatively small spaces. Equally important was the fact that they were shown as appropriate for "ordinary" people. This was done, in large part, through Patty, the young working-class woman who retained many traditional values, finding them desirable and stating so in a manner as frank as that with which she discussed other matters. Patty approved of everything in Gresham's apartment with one exception—a framed abstract print that for most of the film hangs on the wall above the sofa. There is no such item in the play, indicating that the lines about it were written specifically for the film version. After Gresham tells Patty that it is a Picasso lithograph, he asks if she likes it. She replies, "Frankly, I think it is awful" and goes on to say that she adores his apartment but, if it was hers, she would get rid of the print. "Why don't you hang it in your bedroom." she suggests, whereupon he replies that he likes it and likes it where it is. "And that is where it's going to stay" is his final comment before she moves on to explore the kitchen.

Patty's untutored dislike of abstract art must surely have struck a chord with millions of cinemagoers around the world in the 1950s (and later, too). Such are the generic expectations of a Pygmalion-style scene like this, however, that one expects the well-educated professional older male to "educate" the young lesser-educated woman. But Preminger and Herbert introduced a double twist that goes against generic expectations at the very end of the film that allows viewers to retain happily any ambivalence toward, or dislike of, abstract art.

After a disagreement with Patty, Gresham takes the print from the wall, as if to make the space more fully to her liking—as if to make it a place where she could live too. Anxious to make up with her, he is now prepared to compromise over an object he admires greatly. Before he decides where to put it, however, he is interrupted and places the print against a wall. A contrite Patty returns briefly but leaves before they can resolve their disagreement and the print remains in "no-man's land." The second twist comes in the final scene at the top of the Empire State Building when the couple reunite. Gresham proposes, she accepts, and love seems to conquer all. Then, thinking to please her, Gresham says, "I'll hang the Picasso in the bedroom," only to hear her reply, "Not in my bedroom you won't!" These are the very last words in the film. Clearly, Patty will not be a wife who bows to her husband's every wish. Viewers are left feeling that, as in the now classic Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy "battle of the sexes" films, such as *Adam's Rib* (1949) and *Pat and Mike* (1952), there will always be a degree of contestation within the relationship. Patty may not change the interior design of his apartment (at least in the immediate future) and they will likely enjoy

the cabin in Maine that he will build for them and their family, but the film seems to be saying that you do not need to like abstract art in order to like and enjoy the type of interiors and furnishings displayed in the film. This message probably resonated with many viewers around the world who watched the film in the 1950s but that is another story, and another research project.